

*Submission to help inform the
Australian Human Rights Commission
of an example of best practice
when working with young parenting people.*

CCCares @ Canberra College – Our place Our Space Our Story

CCCares @ Canberra College supports 140 pregnant and parenting students from the ACT and surrounding districts. Canberra College is a government school for students in Years 11 and 12.

CCCares is an autonomous program operating under the auspices of the Canberra College.

The program caters for students whose needs are very different from the mainstream clientele. However, their dreams and aspirations for the future are very similar to any other student in any college in the ACT.

CCCares students are aged between 14 and 28 and have varying needs, life experiences, attendance patterns and levels of proficiency in all areas.

We welcome babies and children into our environment. Everyone at CCCares shares the care of our children, but the parents retain the responsibility for their child.

We are not just a school, not just day care, not just a clinic not just a vocational learning centre.

We are all these things.

All of these things operate in concert. The CCCares community; teacher, trainer, parent and child move between spaces throughout the day.

Spaces are community spaces. They are designed with a specific purpose but used for many things.

All spaces are used at all times. CCCares staff move throughout the facility taking on differing roles dependent on the activity of the space.

The approach we use to prepare CCCares young parents for their future is unique. It has to be, because CCCares young parents are many and varied. Some are natural parents, some have child protection services in their lives; some move forward each and every day, some struggle with substance abuse and domestic violence; some have supportive extended families, some come from war torn nations as refugees; some work part-time and manage a well-equipped home, some struggle to pay the bills and put food on the table. But they all have a common goal – to be working when their children are at school.

At CCCares, students can study a variety of course options, including an ACT Year 12 Certificate. However we recognise that although gaining a Year 12 Certificate is an excellent achievement, it does not necessarily guarantee employment for our young parents.

We give our students access to industry specific courses and the provision of appropriate pathways and qualifications to allow them to develop the necessary skills and personal strengths they need to become marketable and employable and move towards financial independence in the future.

In partnership with External Registered Training Organisations, Employment Agencies, and a multitude of government and non-government collaborative partners, CCCares assists students to plan their training pathways and career opportunities to best support themselves and their young families. The program has grown and thrived over the years due to links with community organisations; pivotal to the holistic provision of “clearing students for learning” to enhance the personal development, wellbeing and growth of the young people and their children.

It is believed this cohort represents the largest group of pregnant and parenting students engaged with one educational setting in Australia. We have taken steps to create a one-stop-shop environment, removing many of the barriers marginalised students, particularly young parents face. The onsite support from health, welfare, training and education specialists have collaboratively facilitated significant improvements in student participation with our secondary educational institution. This unique approach has seen a range of positive outcomes for all students who attend CCCares including enhanced levels of engagement, a sense of belonging, increased awareness and knowledge of employability and life skills, recognised qualifications and pathways to further education, training and employment.

We were aware that our students are able to access courses at the main campus of the college, itself an RTO, or can attend other institutions in their own time. However, issues of transport, childcare and financial constraints made this almost impossible for the students of CCCares.

We needed to create "enablers", and developed a strategy that combines learning, training and parenting.

The only way to make industry specific course materials and experience available to the students of CCCares was to have them delivered during the day on site; the first enabler. This meant that transport, childcare and time could all be managed by CCCares. Issues still to be resolved were the cost of the delivery of courses and finding qualified teachers and trainers to deliver them in a flexible manner.

We looked for partners who would acknowledge the need for individualised, self-paced flexible delivery of competencies for CCCares students. They needed to recognise that conventional delivery styles with a teacher centred approach, assessment items with set dates and defined unit start and end periods would not allow CCCares students to succeed. All of our partners support the CCCares approach to competency based training and reflect a flexible style of delivery.

Trainers are timetabled to come to CCCares Discovery suite, our Vocational Education and Training facility. Discovery houses a cafe, industrial kitchen, hair salon and business administration area. Trainers deliver theory components of courses and mark off competencies. Students continue to work with CCCares trainers at other times. We have a Hairdresser and a Chef working at CCCares who continue to work with students in Hair and Hospitality through the week. Our use of External Training Organisations, blended with the teaching and training staff of CCCares, allows students to train and be assessed at their own pace. Short courses are offered on-site and off-site on a regular basis across a variety of packages, again negotiated with training providers to maximise student outcomes. The variety of courses on offer and the flexibility within the delivery of each has enabled students to gain certification.

We made a decision to cover all course costs, the final "enabler" for CCCares students.

When CCCares students enrol, it is with the understanding that they can enrol in competency based training courses alongside the ACT Year 12 Certificate. As we do not operate with the usual timetabled approach to learning at CCCares, students are able to design and maintain a healthy balance between their competency based training courses and their other studies. Our flexible approach also accommodates student's individual needs regarding parenting and life issues.

Those students who chose to focus on particular VET courses are able to fast track within the confines of individual packages. These students, who are usually aiming to find employment quickly, opt to complete Certificate II's and III's rather than an ACT Year 12 Certificate. Traineeships, ASBA's and Work Placements are sought for these students if desired.

Students are assessed when they are competent, not when the timetable requires assessment.

We have introduced "paid work" in the form of ASBA's within CCCares in partnership with MEGT and the Australian Training Company. Workplace hours are credited to students when they work on site in Discovery Cafe or Discovery Hair. Students are paid an hourly rate by CCCares, the host employer, to work in Discovery. Course costs, wages, goods and services are all financed through the money that comes into Discovery via Salon and Cafe.

CCCares encourages young parents to choose the pathway in which they feel they will have the most success in their future. We provide real workplace experience and equip our students to transfer skills learned at CCCares out into industry in the future.

Although our delivery style and daily routines are vastly different from other schools, our certification requirements are exactly the same. As different as we are in our approach to meeting student needs, we are proud to say that we maintain the rigorous assessment and reporting processes upheld by both the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies and Australian Qualifications Framework.

CCCares has aligned itself with the Australian Qualifications Framework. We are working towards to embed one of the framework's key objectives to "support individuals; lifelong learning goals by providing the basis for individuals to progress through education and training and gain recognition for their prior learning and experiences"

We have made our Discovery Training Environment more "authentic", by offering training, work placement and ASBA positions to non-CCCares students. This has allowed us to extend our hours of business in Cafe and Salon, and has required CCCares students to work alongside people with different experiences, capabilities and responsibilities.

CCCare's Hospitality operates a cafe daily. Hot and cold food and drinks are sold over the counter, giving our students' customer service and barista experience. Main meals are prepared to order during the morning and sold at lunchtime. Catering Services are offered to individuals and groups, day time and night time, to functions held on or off site. Students experience both front and back of house responsibilities during catering services. Students working in Hospitality are in uniform at all times.

CCCare's Salon has 8 chairs, 2 hair washing stations, a nail centre and a massage table for eyebrow threading. Clients book in for a variety of procedures performed by students under the guidance of the CCCare's Stylist.

Students are involved in aspects of ordering, maintaining and the use and replenishment of resources in Discovery. Our Student Events Manager ASBA, is responsible for marketing, bookings, invoicing and the management of our Discovery Centre.

By creating an environment where students have rosters, job descriptions, responsibilities and are working for an hourly rate we are improving the job readiness of our young parents.

CCCare's has created flexible relaxed learning environments where students can build self-esteem and improve literacy, numeracy and technology skills across all of the vocational areas.

Due to the flexible nature of the delivery of competencies within each unit, students can focus on significant life issues when the need arises knowing that they can continue with their course of study when practicable.

The delivery of some course materials has been re-designed to co-deliver competencies to reduce duplication in the traditional linear mode of delivery. Trainers also devise group activities observing students' abilities to respect others' opinions, build confidence through speaking and also foster growth in active listening, all necessary skills in the workplace. Teachers and trainers endeavour to make the competencies being introduced relevant to the everyday lives of the students.

Completing work experience and work placement, has proved invaluable to our students, and has led to increased engagement with their school work; competency based training courses and a focus on achieving certification and transitioning to further study or employment. It has also had the added benefit of giving students who are struggling in their personal lives, a new direction and an overall sense of hope.

CCCare's feels that it is important to give the students guidance and practical assistance in personal presentation and attire, as many of them do not have positive role models who are able to do this for them. CCCare's has a space set aside for our "Dress for Success" Program. We have business attire, as well as protective clothing, hard hats and appropriate footwear for any students wishing to pursue trade based employment, work experience, further training or work placement.

The dress for success strategy relies on community support and goodwill. It is one of many important steps in leading our students, many of whom are disadvantaged, toward self-sufficiency and promoting economic independence.

The choice to focus on competency based training alone has also been given to students. This has been particularly successful for students who do not wish to follow the traditional schooling pathway, but aspire to be working as soon as is possible. Students who have had little success at school in the past, and have felt marginalised by their experiences are "driven" to achieve in Discovery. Being paid as they work and train; understanding that you must give a "fair days' work for a fair days pay" is real and meaningful.

Our young parents have physical, psychological, environmental and personal challenges which, at times, distract them from their learning, and has an impact on their abilities to find work and remain gainfully employed.

It is the joint provision of holistic health and wellbeing wrap-around service, with education and training certification that works.

Some of the agencies we currently work collaboratively with include:

- ACT Health who provide onsite medical and health services to parent and child;
- Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT;
- Canberra Institute of Technology, delivering competency training on site;
- Access Training, delivering competency training on site;
- TEMPlar Recruitment Agency, assisting with work placements;
- Quest Training
- Australian Training Company, placing students in Traineeships;
- MEGT – Training and Employment Solutions
- Advance Personnel Management, assisting students with jobs and placements, the application process and interview skills;
- Legal Aid who provide personalised legal support and advice to our families;
- A Personal Trainer who offer fitness training and relaxation techniques to our students;
- SIDs & Kids, supporting our students through their grief and anxieties;
- Pandsi, who work with parents who suffer from post-natal depression;
- NAB, creating budgets and financial plans with students, interview techniques and personal presentation for interviews;
- Volunteers in Schools; senior citizens who work in our adjunct care model giving parents the time to engage in training programs.

Our training program receives support from a variety of sources. One level of in-kind support is demonstrated by our relationship with Oz Harvest. Food is delivered by a "Yellow Van" every Wednesday. Our Hospitality students create a menu with our chef using the food provided. On Thursday's, Oz Harvest volunteers and our students cook and pack meals to be distributed by the Yellow Van to the Canberra needy. This relationship not only supports Oz Harvest's endeavours, but gives our students meaningful kitchen and food handling experiences which differ to those which they experience in CCCares Cafe.

Our relationship with ACT Health, ACT Education, the Smith Family and NAB to name a few, extends past the support services they provide onsite. Our Student Events Manager makes bookings and manages their conferences and meetings which are held in Discovery @ CCCares and our Hospitality students cater and provide service. These events are run alongside the daily operations of Salon and Cafe.

Our ASBA students have a choice to work within the CCCares environment or in industry. Some choose placements exclusively in industry or at CCCares, whilst some blend the two. We have tremendous support from our community for these placements, which include schools, government departments, and private commercial entities. They too value our client group, our training methods and our positive outcomes.

As CCCares prides itself on meeting the needs of the individual rather than a "student fits in with us" approach, we are constantly expanding our partnerships and offerings.

CCCares is a program which supports pregnant and parenting young people by providing holistic health, welfare and educational wrap around services. It aims to provide connections for young people and their children to mainstream society and support services and to provide equitable access to year 12 certification and transition programs.

It is the provision of personal health and wellbeing supports; advocacy and support services; goal oriented learning packages, on-line learning and employability skills, transport and childcare available all on the same site that works for us.

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