



# Tomorrow:Today Foundation - Education Benalla Program

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## Innovation

The Education Benalla Program is a large-scale community initiative that works with Benalla and district families, all schools in Benalla, public sector agencies including local government, small and large community groups and businesses. Now in its fifth year of a planned 10-year implementation period, the desired outcome is that by 2030 the education and training completion rates for Benalla 17-24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian State average.

Within the program are a number of specific sub-programs focussed on four specific areas:

- ▶ School readiness and early years (0 to 8 years sub-program
- ▶ Wellbeing of students (focus on teenagers) sub-program
- ▶ Transition to tertiary education sub-program
- ▶ Community Grants (small grants to community groups for projects that help address identified local issues).

The Tomorrow:Today Foundation has commissioned a team from the University of Melbourne to evaluate the program. This evaluation seeks to report on the achievement of the program's desired long-term outcomes, aims and objectives and the implementation of identified sub-programs.

For the purpose of the LLEAP Guide, three of these sub-programs have been selected for the purpose of exploring examples of evidence used to help report on improvements. These are presented below.

**the desired outcome is that by 2030 the education and training completion rates for Benalla 17-24 year olds will equal or exceed the Victorian State average**



# Early Years Programs

## Innovation

The PEEP (Parents Early Education Partnership) program and playgroups encourage parents to interact with their children through, songs, rhymes, stories and play. These programs and playgroups also assist parents/carers in increasing their parenting skills and confidence. Whole of community collaboration across agencies is also promoted through a combined early years plan.

## Outcomes

As part of the objectives of the overall Education Benalla Program, the key outcome is to address the fact that over 30% of Benalla children who start school each year are identified as vulnerable on one or more domains by the Australian Early Development Census.

## Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through... Evidence and approaches, such as
<p><b>Student engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data</li> <li>• Number of children starting school who have attended pre-school</li> <li>• Increased library membership for children aged 0 to 6</li> <li>• Numbers of absences recorded for children registered at pre-school to assist in identifying barriers to attendance</li> <li>• A staff observation form for each child details engagement with activities; interaction with other children; ability to listen, cooperate and follow instructions; communication with others; level of independence; levels of aggression.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Family engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of families participating in early years activities across the municipality</li> <li>• Number and frequency of parents reading to their children as recorded in a community wide reading program</li> <li>• Increase in the breast feeding rates for the municipality</li> <li>• Staff observation form for each parent/carer details engagement with child; participation in activities; sharing books with child; confidence in parenting role and knowledge; management of child's behaviour; support for child's independence (form attached)</li> <li>• Parent self-reporting observations re themselves and child</li> </ul>





# Reading Buddies

## Innovation

This sub-program represents a partnership with local primary schools to improve literacy by providing volunteers to work 1:1 with Prep, Grade 1 and 2 students identified as not meeting reading and writing levels. The Tomorrow:Today Foundation finds, trains (including literacy training) and supports volunteers. Schools coordinate the classroom and child connection and complete evaluation forms.

## Outcomes

As part of the objectives of the overall Education Benalla Program, the key outcome is to address the fact that Benalla students are well below the state average for NAPLAN results in reading, writing and numeracy. Other projects and activities in the Education Benalla Program are focussed on improving community-wide NAPLAN measures; whereas Reading Buddies specifically targets children who are significantly behind in their literacy levels.

## Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through... Evidence and approaches, such as
<p><b>Student engagement</b></p> <p><b>Student attendance</b></p> <p><b>Student behaviour</b></p> <p><b>Student capabilities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An evaluation form is completed by teachers for each student recording details of evident improvement in such areas as writing output, level of academic confidence, use of interesting language, current reading level, current spelling level, attendance at school, attendance on reading Buddy days, punctuality, other valid information.</li> <li>A simple student feedback from using emoticons to assess how they feel about being in the program.</li> <li>NAPLAN results.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parent / Family engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of families attending thankyou celebrations for Reading Buddies.</li> <li>Number of families attending thankyou celebration for Reading Buddies who have not previously attended a school function.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community engagement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading buddy volunteers are surveyed to determine level of satisfaction with role.</li> </ul>



# Connect9 mentoring program



## Innovation

This community mentoring program is run for a one term duration, twice a year. Approximately twenty Year 9 students are matched to volunteer mentors. The program is designed to connect them to the Benalla community to learn new skills, explore local opportunities, and learn more about careers.

## Outcomes

As part of the objectives of the overall Education Benalla Program, the key outcome is to address the fact that Benalla teenagers generally report low levels of wellbeing, compared to state-wide averages as documented in the Student Attitudes to School Survey. In addition, family and community members have low expectations for students to go on to tertiary education or training.

## Examples include

Improving	What might help you notice whether improvements are being made? Through... Evidence and approaches, such as
<b>Social and emotional wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Health and Wellbeing survey is administered at beginning and end of program</li> </ul>
<b>Student engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of students assisted to join other clubs or organisations in the Benalla community</li> </ul>
<b>Student capabilities</b> personal social competence, confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Connect9 students who undertake training offered for After School Part-time Work program</li> <li>• Number of Connect9 students who take up an after school part-time job</li> <li>• Number of students who visit a workplace or do career research during the program</li> <li>• Anecdotal evidence from mentors re increase in mentee confidence, aspiration.</li> </ul>
<b>Community engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of new memberships to organisations participating in the program, mentees and mentors (e.g. Benalla Library, Benalla Aquatic Centre, numerous clubs – Bushwalking, Camera Club, Scouts, Yoga, Archery)</li> </ul>



## Lessons learned

We know that evaluating what we do is critical to broadening our understanding, improving our effectiveness and communicating our successes. Some learnings we have gained over time:

**External evaluation:** An external evaluation is really valuable to continual improvement, if you can afford it. Our external evaluators were invited to design the evaluation at the very start of the Education Benalla Program, and they understand what we are seeking to achieve:

- ▶ Establishing baseline data and control groups are important in gauging effectiveness of programs
- ▶ If you are unable to access data at a local level, you may have to set up your own data collection methods or change existing practices to provide the information you need
- ▶ Exit surveys may not show marked improvement compared to intake surveys because participants appear to overrate their initial knowledge and skills when self-reporting. We tend not to collect subjective data in intake surveys.
- ▶ Ensure your partners are aware of your goals and your evaluation measures and have the same understanding of them.
- ▶ Data specific to your local situation, such as the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results are valuable in gaining consensus across collaborating organisations about where effort should be concentrated (e.g. Benalla's worst results were in the areas of social competence and emotional maturity.)
- ▶ We have always stuck to a belief that our efforts should not be diluted in an attempt to reach more participants. The 'dosage' is often the most important feature of whether you will be successful or not.

**Collaborate:** Work with your evaluators to make sure the data you are collecting and the measures you are using are relevant and informative for you both.