

## Executive Summary

### The Program

The Skyline VCE Bursary program has been developed to assist talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds realise their full potential whilst achieving the successful completion of years 11 and 12 at school. The program is based on the premise that talented disadvantaged students require both financial and personal support to consistently improve their chances of success.

### The Impact

The Skyline VCE Bursary Program demonstrates positive outcomes with an extremely high percentage of participants transitioning to university associated with a subsequent lower than normal rate of drop out from their first year university courses.

83% of surveyed recipients indicated that the Skyline VCE Bursary had provided a positive impact on the outcomes they achieved in the VCE, with more than half indicating that it had provided significant impact.

In addition to facilitating positive transition outcomes to university, the program also results in high levels of access to further post-secondary scholarships and subsidies, which are attributed by students to the support of Skyline Program managers.

### The Important Factors

Participants were asked to provide examples of the factors that had contributed to the positive outcomes, and indicate how these had helped them. The main contributing factors identified by these current and former Bursary recipients were:

- relief from financial and personal stress
- coping and self-knowledge resulting from personal development
- individual support provided by the Skyline Program Coordinator/Manager<sup>1</sup> and Workshop Presenters who could be accessed between sessions; and
- networking with students from other schools

Participants consistently report that the personal development program embedded within the VCE Bursary is an important factor in the success of their post-secondary education, as well as for their VCE.

Personal development provided opportunities to reflect on behaviour that helped students to establish balance, routine and a positive attitude. Key techniques and skills relating to scheduling and prioritising workload enabled students to become "smarter" about studying and improving organisational and coping skills. Learning about personal strengths and weaknesses helped individuals develop self-understanding and improve their communications skills. The personal development sessions also helped some students with greater motivation with a resulting positive impact on their studies, as they realised the value of learning and the opportunities it could provide.

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<sup>1</sup> John S Cheetham founded and managed the program from inception to January 2009. He employed a Program Coordinator to administer the program; in 2010, this position was renamed Program Manager with a similar role and responsibilities.

Direct reimbursement of costs for sampled students from 2006-07 and 2007-08 ranged from \$1,128.66 to \$1,237.27 each year (or \$2,257.32 to \$2,474.54 over the two years) of their VCE. However, the reimbursements do not include the costs associated with the personal development program delivered through the two residential camps and the four one-day workshops attended by each participant over the two years. It also does not include the cost of the Program Coordinator/Manager. Costs per student for these additional costs related to support and development are estimated at \$4,500 per student for each of their VCE years.

However, coordination and delivery of the personal development component of the program appear to provide significant benefit to Bursary recipients.

Schools are an important partner in the process of identifying and selecting candidates, and therefore they help to contribute to the overall success of the program. However, the support of teachers in the program does not emerge as a strong ingredient from a student perspective.

Support from sources external to their school is an important aspect of the program. This is achieved through both the support provided by the Skyline Program Coordinator / Manager, and by the network of students established through the personal development activities. A strength of the Bursary is the creation of a support structure external to the school community in which each individual student operates. This provides an alternative to the social structures operating within the school, and the effects of any negative perceptions on the Bursary recipient's capacity or the disadvantage they experience.

### **Suggestions for continuous improvement**

Networking of students provides value for participants, and an additional source of support outside their school community. Networking could be further developed through formalising arrangements to create an alumni of former Skyline Bursary recipients. It would also facilitate their capacity to systematically contribute to the personal development workshops for current participants.

A major source of evidence of the impact of the content of the Bursary is the level of success students attain subsequent to their completion of VCE. Indicative data from participants suggests higher than normal levels of tertiary engagement. Systematic tracking of the subsequent achievements of all Bursary graduates should be undertaken to consolidate documenting the impact of the Skyline VCE Bursary program.

Much of the Skyline support for students is provided on-line. Whether or not there is capacity to provide additional personal development workshops, students request more networking opportunities during their Bursary years.