

Volume

1

OPERATION NEWSTART NORTHERN

Organisational Manual



VOL
1

Organisation

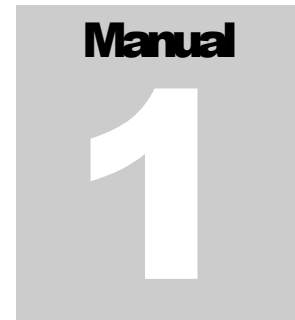
OPERATION NEWSTART NORTHERN

Organisational Manual

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Organisational Manual

1. The Role of this Manual in Operation Newstart Northern.

This manual describes the history, theory and outline of the Operation Newstart Northern program and its philosophy of intervention for education and therapy. In addition, it seeks to locate the program in the broader context of its strategic partners and to provide the necessary detail of the day to day running of the program for those already associated with the program and for future employees of the same. This is to ensure that all legal liabilities of the program are understood and that line of succession in the program is more easily affected. Whilst the current staff will have placed their own stamp on the program and new management would bring a certain change of style, it is also important that the core philosophy of the program remains the same. Similarly, while it is understood that each new context brings with it its own peculiarities, if the program is to expand to other contexts, it is important that the core philosophy is maintained to build on the outcomes that have already been achieved. This manual is an attempt to assist in that continuity of practice.

It is understood that all staff employed in the program would need to be familiar with this manual. In addition, the management committee should familiarise themselves thoroughly with it to ensure that in the case of misadventure all responsibilities and liabilities are understood. Student placements and police cadets working in the program should be familiar with the general content of the Organisational Manual but they should be completely familiar with the Field Manual, with descriptions and logistics of each activity undertaken.

The manual can also be used as a starting point for the spread of the program to other sites and contexts. If other similar programs wish to adopt this manual with minor changes to their context a copyright fee should be negotiated and changes effected should be discussed with the authors.

Brief Program Description

Operation Newstart Northern is an innovative outdoors/adventure based intervention program working with students deemed to be at “significant educational risk”. This refers to and includes students who have failed to attend school regularly over a significant period of time and/or who are at risk of school expulsion, and/or at risk of not successfully completing their secondary education. The program is targeted at young people aged between 14 to 18 years of age who reside within the Northern Metropolitan Region.

**BACKGROUND
AND
PHILOSOPHY**

Operation Newstart Northern functions as an Alternative Settings Program and is a collaborative partnership between the Department of Education and Training (DE&T – Collingwood College), Victoria Police and the Royal Children’s Hospital - Mental Health Service’s Community Group Program (MHSKY). Additional staffing and resources have been generously provided by a variety of other government and non-government agencies, as well as individuals and organisations within the public and private sectors (see acknowledgements section).

The group work program provides a multi-layered intervention, which focuses on the young person’s relationship with self, family, school, broader systems and community. Activities are used to creatively engage the young person in a process of change and include; outdoor/adventure based activities, work place and trade school visits, problem-solving skills-based activities, and therapeutic group work with parent involvement. All these various activities are set in the broader context of Family and Narrative Therapy.

The program runs for a full school term with the students attending Operation Newstart Northern four days each week, and returning to their base school for the fifth day. Eight students enter the program and work with a teacher/coordinator, a police officer and facilitators from the Community Group Program. Student/parent workshops are an integral part of the program, with student/parent follow-up occurring over a two-year period after completion.

History

Operation Newstart Northern was originally based on a similar program running in the Southern Metropolitan Region and has since been replicated in the Western and South Eastern Region. It began in term 1 2001 after the current ONN facilitators worked together to present the concept to their respective regional management (Joe Corbett, Victoria Triggs, Inspector Gerry Zammit and Assistant Commissioner Gary Jamieson). Their common belief (that if a student is not engaged or attending school then the community at large is affected) formed the basis of an important collaboration where two

government departments are taking responsibility and responding in a proactive way.

The four programs (Western, Northern, Southern and South Eastern) are working closely to expand the expertise, resources and opportunities available to the students who enter Operation Newstart.

Theory

Operation Newstart Northern utilises an activity and journey-based program with the understanding that in these experiences it is possible to construct a different interpretation of reality for the clients involved. This understanding is based on the recognition that language plays a central role in the formation and structuring of self and identity. In order to understand ourselves and others we need to explore



the ‘meaning systems’ and ‘structures’ of meaning that make up our minds and our worlds. (Polkinghorne: 1). Through the conversations that occur, prompted by the activities undertaken and the group work in which they engage over the life of the program, students are constantly encouraged to evaluate their meaning making light of these new experiences and conversations.

The program, in all its many facets, compliments the understanding that everything experienced by human beings is made meaningful, understood and interpreted in relation to the primary dimension of ‘activity’...(Crossley: 10). The activities and conversations in informal and formal contexts assist the students to begin an interpretative journey that is different to their normal modus operandi. The activities, conversations and experiences assist them in gradually developing an alternate story about themselves, themselves in relation to others and to the systems within which they relate. It is the unique combination of activity, informal and formal meaning making and reinterpretation that allows the students to gradually begin the construction of a new story for themselves that will form the basis of new behaviours and new self-understanding.

This development of new meaning making in the program through the various activities and group work can be seen from a social constructionist and narrative perspective. Vivien Burr in attempting to provide a definition of Social Constructionism suggests there are four key elements:

1. A critical stance taken towards taken-for-granted knowledge.
2. Historical and cultural specificity.
3. Knowledge is sustained by social process.
4. Knowledge and social action go together (pp3-5).

If these elements are pieced together the process of intervention becomes characterised by a developmental change process. In reference to the clients and their families, it means that what is taken for granted in their life stories by most people is not the determining factor in the intervention. Rather, what the student (client) and their family take from (construct from) the experience is of greater importance. Likewise the experience of the student and their family and their relationships with others has a cultural and historical specificity that can be changed by the program process. The students and families are clearly empowered to relate in new and different ways. In the social interactions of the students in the program with each other and the program staff, new understandings of self and the world are developed and these new understandings lead to new ways of acting and relating with themselves, others and their wider relational systems.

In relating this broad constructionist canvas to intervention Freedman and Coombs offer ten summary points:

1. The validity of multiple realities, multiple perceptions, and multiple constructions is recognized and utilized as a primary way of opening space for the experience of new and different possibilities.
2. The narrative metaphor (people make sense of their lives by situating them in stories) is often utilized. Intervention becomes a context in which people can re-author their own lives by highlighting different events and making new meanings. New stories tend to lead to new futures.
3. Facilitators offer ideas based in non-pathologising and non-normative thinking, and participants rather than facilitators evaluate problems and solutions.
4. Clients and facilitators define problems together in interaction, based on what is problematic in the clients' experience, rather than therapists defining problems based on hypotheses or theories.
5. Facilitators come from a position of multi-affiliation with family members.
6. There is a shift to focusing on meaning more than behaviour.
7. Facilitators and team members strive for non-hierarchical relationships with family members and with each other.
8. When facilitators offer their ideas, they situate them in personal experience.
9. Facilitators intend for their conversations with families to be non-instructive and nondirective.

10. For many facilitators, it becomes important to be open about their personal political stands, such as a feminist position or drug use, and to use them in the context of intervention.

In the context of the client base that Operation Newstart Northern services, the implications of the above for constructivist and narrative process indicate that:

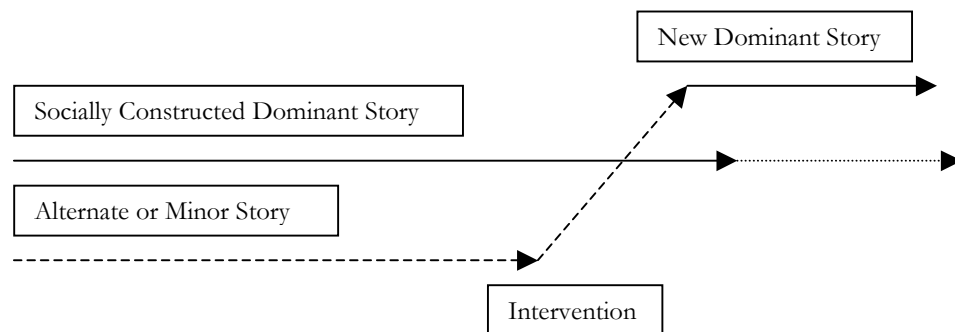
- School/home problems are best viewed in terms of interactional patterns, inadvertently maintained by attempts to find solutions. It is unhelpful, often counterproductive, to apportion fault to student, parents, teachers etc. Unwittingly, people behave in a way that perpetuates the problem. The interaction keeps the problem alive.
- Such problems do not necessarily reflect any type of individual (psychological) or familial deficiency.
- It is most useful to look at developing a solution to the problem(s) rather than searching for the "cause" - a fruitless task since problems are a reflection of factors within and outside the person. Often past events (death/separation of parents, birth of sibling, change of schools) act as "trigger". What is important is how people are making sense of things now (storying) that leads them not to see different ways of acting.
- People's behaviour is governed by the operation of restraints, or "ways of seeing or communicating", that provide constructed limits to the options available to them. They become "stuck" in interactional patterns ("vicious cycles"), that reflect their way of making sense of the situation, and the problem may become overwhelming and "take on a life of its own".
- School/home problems have a tendency to escalate into "vicious cycles".
- "Vicious" cycles" overshadow information, which does not fit with beliefs about the problem. Consider the irresponsible child, who acts responsibly for two weeks. Parents/teachers may notice, yet perceive that "he hasn't changed deep down".
- Change is the process of responding to new information. Thinking differently and behaving differently are part of the process
- "Ripple effect" - changes in one part of the "system" inevitably have implications for other aspects of the "system".
- "Snowball effect" - small change can lead to bigger and bigger change.

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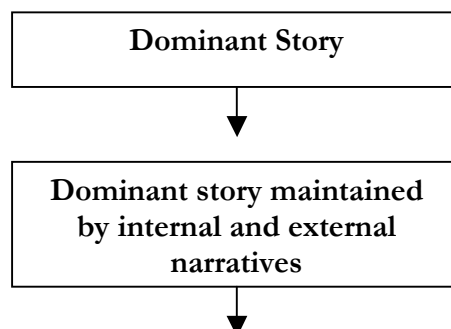
- Complex problems don't necessarily demand complex solutions.
- Intervention can be effective even when the facilitator cannot always describe what the problem is or when there is disagreement on the definition of the problem. Even when a facilitator has a hunch from where the problem may stem it is often more useful to adopt a position of unknowing so that they student/client may be able to discover it for themselves and to address it in a way that is effective for them in their context. It is often more useful to know what will be different when the problem is solved.

In summary it can be said that Operation Newstart Program works with the understanding that the processes of social enculturation are socially constructed and maintained. Alternate constructions of meaning can be negotiated and imbedded with the client and their families through this new construction of meaning. The activity-based part of the program seeks to construct a marriage between activity and the understanding of self and others. Through the group work, which is conducted in a way that honours each individual and also places importance on the group interrelation, students are encouraged to begin the journey of reinterpretation of their story, identity and self-understanding. The four tiers of relational interaction (honesty, trust, respect and responsibility) are honoured in this process to construct a narrative for each client appropriate to their needs.

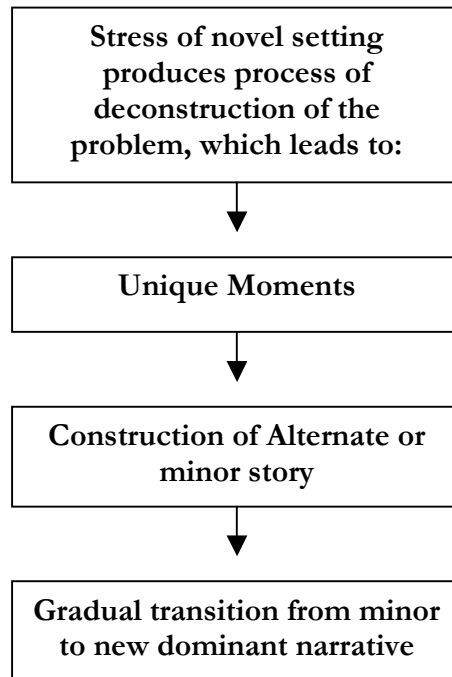
Placed in diagrammatic form the process appears thus:



Another way of representing this narrative change can be represented thus:



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Program Mission and Aims

Mission Statement

Operation Newstart Northern seeks to address the needs of students at risk in the middle years of the State Secondary School system. Using a combination of experiential learning, wilderness therapy, family group work, mediation, counselling and development of community interconnectedness it seeks to prevent students at risk disengaging prematurely from their families and education, and to provide pathways to further education and employment.

AIMS

AND

OBJECTIVES

- To remove the barriers that prevents at-risk students from reaching their full educational, psychological, emotional and social potential.
- To provide students with unique learning opportunities in a range of environments which will creatively challenge and motivate them.
- To assist participants in developing tangible skills which promote their sense of individual achievement, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- To develop healthy life skills and engage in positive social interactions within a safe and supportive team environment.
- To build positive connections between the young person and their family, school and community.
- To assist participants in developing long term goals – which include attending school, further education or employment.

Program Outline

A teacher/coordinator and police officer primarily facilitate Operation Newstart Northern, with the therapeutic group work sessions for the students and parents run by the Community Group Program staff of the Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service and Music Therapy sessions run by a music therapist.

This unique combination of several services combining together to deliver an intervention ensures the variety of styles of intervention caters for all types of

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needs within the group of students. This multi-faceted approach also provides the opportunity for best possible outcome for students in the program.

The Victorian Police Department provides a salaried officer as one of the facilitators of the program. The police department understands the wisdom of early intervention through this program, not only for the prevention of crime in later years of the clients' lives, but also in the development of responsible citizens who have a respect for the police force and the officers who represent it. The police officer/program facilitator is skilled in relating to young people and has counselling skills relevant to the program's aims and objectives.

The Department Education and Training, through the Northern Region, contributes the other salaried staff member, since the clients are taken from state secondary schools in the Northern Region. There is an understanding by the Northern Region that it is important to address the needs of the whole person when teaching staff are confronted with behavioural difficulties that could lead to early school leaving and failure of students to progress to their desired field of education or employment.

The Royal Children's Hospital Child Mental Health Service provides a psychologist to assist in running the group sessions that are conducted for the clients and their families.

**REFERRAL
AND CLIENT
GROUP**

Students are referred to the program by School Welfare Coordinators (SWC's), Student Services Support Officers (SSSO's) and teachers, mental health case managers, local community agencies, the Department of Human Services and parents. Any student enrolled in the Department of Education and Training northern metropolitan region, aged between 14 to 18 years of age, who is deemed to be at "educational risk", can be referred into the program.

Once a referral is received, interview times are arranged for the student and their family and/or support worker. These interviews determine the level of commitment of the student and family to the program and the appropriateness of the mix of young people that have been referred.

Should the number of referrals received exceed the number of places available, students can be placed on a waiting list for the following term or may be referred to other services depending on the issues involved.

**GOAL
OF
PROGRAM**

The goal of the program is to move the students to a level of skill and decision making by the end of the program whereby they can work effectively as a team and complete a challenging outdoor expedition over a five-day period. This expedition is led by the students

themselves, with facilitators available only to offer backup support if absolutely required.

Activities are sequentially structured throughout the term to assist in the change process. This change process involves various levels of processing to enable students to draw parallels from these activities to skills pertinent to their daily lives. The capacity to successfully problem-solve within these novel settings contributes to a sense of accomplishment, which can be used as “stored experiences”. Stored experiences of such accomplishments can be utilised and transferred into other settings, most notably their home, school or employment.

Outdoor/adventure activities undertaken by clients in the program include horse riding, mountain bike riding, canoeing, surfing, rock climbing, abseiling, rafting, bush walking, skiing, caving, cross country skiing, downhill skiing and high and low ropes courses. These are undertaken with the intent of creating unique moments that will contribute towards the development of a new narrative for the client.

Workplace visits to such places such as: the Australian Defence Forces, Country Fire Authority, National Parks, Victoria University and Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology campuses constitute part of the applied learning of the program.

Life skills, such as problem solving, communication skills, identification of individual coping strategies, building better relationships through student/parent workshops are also taught in the program. In addition fitness testing, diet, nutrition, cooking, fire awareness, first aid, team building, and community volunteer work are also potentially acquired through this applied learning program.

One of the most significant components in Operation Newstart Northern is the concluding graduation ceremony. This is a formal occasion celebrating the student’s successful completion of the program. family, friends and support workers attend. Students are presented with their graduation certificates and a portfolio of training certificates awarded throughout the term.

Those in attendance are dressed in full uniform or formal dress. The attendance of senior officials from the police, the education department and Mental Health, as well as other the organisations that contribute, demonstrates the huge level of support for the students participating in the program.

PARENTS PARTICIPATION Parents are initially expected to participate in the student’s assessment interview. During this interview it is fully explained that for Operation Newstart to be important to the student, it needs to be important to

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their family. Four times during the term, parents are invited to attend evening sessions held at Collingwood Alternative School. Two of these sessions are joint parent/student sessions and involve creative therapeutic activities aimed at strengthening and enhancing their communication and relationships.

These sessions build on the therapeutic work already undertaken by the students during the course of the program.

In addition, Operation Newstart staff are available to consult with parents throughout the term, attend crisis meetings, link families to other services and assist with some basic family mediation when required. These additional meetings generally take place at the student's base school or at Collingwood Alternative School.

UNIQUE ASPECT OF PROGRAM The collaborative partnership that forms the basis of Operation Newstart also includes other vital players including the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), the Country Fire Authority, local TAFE colleges, universities, community service providers and sponsors from the private sector. This team of professionals represents the institutions the young people, who are referred into the program, so often rebel against. Through working closely together, the students have an opportunity to experience staff from these institutions in a radically different and positive way.

Note
The program seeks to create positive "life changing or unique" moments for the students within the program which build on their existing strengths and competencies and set down a 'newstart' for their future.

Those who contribute to the running of Operation Newstart also provide these young people with a 'secure emotional and psychological base' through the quality of the experience they have and the relationships they form with the students. The program facilitators reinforce at every opportunity the principles of fairness, firmness and consistency, setting appropriate boundaries whilst supporting a sense of fun in learning and an enjoyment of life. The depth and intensity of these connections are formed experientially through an amazing array of outdoor/adventures and therapeutic challenges that promote problem-solving abilities, tolerance of self and others, as well as team building and self-esteem.

Integral to this program is the inclusion of parents and carers who are engaged in less energetic but equally challenging parallel sessions that encourage them to reflect on their own parenting styles as well as build bridges of communication with their adolescents through creative, fun and thoughtful mediums.

The program is designed to gradually build up a tapestry of unique moments that contribute to a reconnection of the clients with their abilities and strengths. Over time these unique moments join with other memories to build a new narrative for the client that eventually it is hoped will form the kernel of a developing and dominant story of achievement and success and ultimately facilitate the young person's return to school, further education or employment.

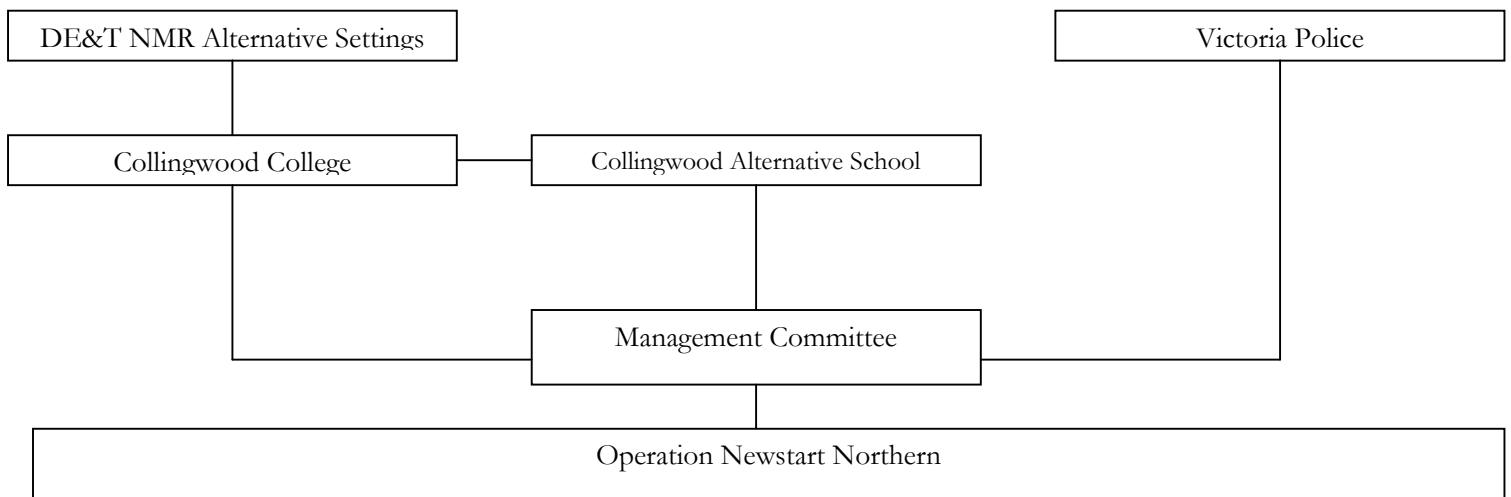
**YOUTH
PATHWAYS
ASSISTANCE**

All students on the Operation Newstart Northern program are assisted intensively by the Youth Pathways in the North. They have an assigned case manager who oversees their connection with their return to school and enables smooth transitions into TAFE or employment if or when required. Other agencies such as Apprenticeships Plus and NMIT have active contributions on the program.

Organisational Structure and Governance

A committee of management oversees the facilitators of Operation Newstart Northern. Once a term the committee meets to review the progress and future directions of Operation Newstart. The committee consists of representatives from Victoria Police, the Department of Education and Training (DET), and the two core facilitators. Members of the committee are actively involved in promoting the program, following up on the progress of graduates of the program, and fundraising.

Diagram of Operation Newstart Management Structure and Governance



Code Of Ethics

Since Operation Newstart is located within the Collingwood Alternative School and is an initiative of the Department of Employment and Training, the staff Code of Ethics of the School also applies to staff employed by Operation Newstart..

The staff code of practice for Collingwood Alternative School applies to the professional behaviour of the school staff in the performance of their duties.

All staff, both teaching and non-teaching, will demonstrate commitment to the Collingwood Alternative School by:

- Being committed to the educational and social values outlined in the school profile.
- Successfully implementing and achieving the school charter goals and priorities.
- Treating all members of the school community with empathy and respect.
- Behaving and dressing in an appropriate professional manner.
- Demonstrating the ability to manage and adapt to change.
- Contributing to whole school activities and taking an active role in the school community.
- Presenting a positive role model.

Teachers and other staff at the school are part of a team responsible for providing high quality programs that ensure success for all children within a safe and secure environment. In addition to specific role statements, Operation Newstart Northern staff will:

- Maximise effective learning time within the program.
- Recognise that all students have the capacity to learn and be taught.
- Have an understanding of how students develop and learn.
- Recognise and cater for individual students' differences, backgrounds, abilities and learning styles.
- Promote high but achievable expectations for all students.
- Monitor and assess students continuously, using a variety of techniques within the program's assessment policy.
- Report to students and parents in a meaningful, clear and accurate manner in accordance with school council policy and practice
- Manage student behaviour and welfare in strict accordance within the school's stated policy and practice
- Ensure that the classroom, school and other environments utilised are safe, caring and purposeful.

**COMMUNITY
VALUES**

Collingwood Alternative School provides a high quality educational program for each student. The school seeks to:

- Develop and implement educational programs that are relevant, challenging and purposeful for students.
- Access local support for school programs.
- Provide an appropriate curriculum for students.
- Access work experience placements.
- Strengthen community identity by participating in and contributing to the local community.
- Recognise cultural and social diversity in the community.

Community involvement, support and assistance in the school is actively encouraged through:

- Student placements, work experience and community group support.

The community is kept informed of the school's activities and achievements through:

- School newsletters and in the case of Operation Newstart by its Regional Annual Report.
- Displays of student work.
- Contributions to and reports in the internal and external media.
- The principal and other staff speaking to community groups.
- The publication and distribution of the annual report.

At the same time, the school will facilitate community response through:

- School Council.
- Operation Newstart Management Committee.
- Parent opinion surveys.

Protocols:

- The school will assess potential sponsorship to ensure that it contributes to the educational aims and values of the school and Operation Newstart.

**STUDENT CODES
OF PRACTICE**

The Student Code of Practice for young people in Collingwood Alternative School must take account of the following:

- Our students come from diverse social and cultural groups, families and schools. They will each have values and expectations of behaviour.
- The young people who attend Collingwood Alternative School or Operation Newstart have significant problems of an emotional, social, behavioural nature, which are serious enough to warrant admission to the centre or program. These young people are expected to take responsibility for their behaviour and to respect others and their environment.
- Teachers or facilitators need to manage students with a wide variety of behaviours, attitudes to school, motivations, distractions and degrees of distress.

Guiding Principles:

- Everyone has the right to work, learn and play in a safe environment.
- Everyone is expected to examine his/her own behaviour and to take responsibility for it.
- It is everyone's responsibility to work towards building an environment in which everyone feels safe and has a sense of belonging.
- All members of the school community will be expected to be supportive and considerate of others.

Expectations:

- Young people will behave in a safe and respectful manner and use appropriate language.
- Young people will be encouraged to take physical care of themselves by maintaining good personal hygiene, not causing harm to themselves, not using unprescribed drugs or alcohol, and not smoking in buildings.
- Young people will be encouraged to co-operate to conform to reasonable requests, to participate in programs, and to be where they are supposed to be.
- Young people will be expected to take care of their surroundings by keeping areas tidy, sharing duties, and by not damaging property.

Teachers Will Reinforce This Code of Practice By:

- Being positive, supportive and caring, to enhance relationships with students.
- Modelling appropriate behaviours.

- Communicating clear expectations of appropriate behaviour and giving consequences of inappropriate behaviour to the young people.
- Maintaining consistency and fairness in all dealings with young people.
- Creating learning opportunities to encourage the optimum amount of individual profitable activity for each young person or group.

Employing strategies that:

- Improve self-concept.
- Encourage friendship.
- Develop, respect and acknowledge difference.
- Encourage sharing, tolerance and compassion.

Responses to Unacceptable Behaviour:

Responses to unacceptable behaviour will reflect age and clinical presentation of the young people.

All staff involved in the care and management of the young people will communicate with the wider team regarding conduct issues.

In most situations inappropriate behaviour will lead to:

- Natural consequences.
- Logical consequences.
- Seeking explanation of behaviour.
- Discussion with peers, case manager, team or panel.
- Discussion of behaviour with child, with consequences being outlined.
- Time out.
- Reparation or performing a community service.
- Cleaning up or repairing damage.
- Written and/or verbal apologies.
- Individual contracts.
- Involvement of parents/caregivers.
- Contact with police.
- A period of suspension or expulsion from program.

In cases where there is physical risk to a student or others, staff will use physical removal or restraint within the accepted policy of RCHMHS.

It is not acceptable for teachers to use consequences, which incorporate physical punishment, humiliation or additional schoolwork.

Specific Operation Newstart Northern Activities

Operation Newstart conducts activities and expeditions outside of the normal school environment. Whilst the above applies to these activities additional practice includes:

- Recognition of prior ownership of lands used by indigenous Australians.
- Where possible a seeking of permission from those indigenous owners for use of the land for the activity undertaken.
- Seeking permission for use of land from the appropriate government department.
- Ensuring that good environmental practice is observed in National and State Parks and private property.

Insurance and Legal Measures

Whenever a student-teacher relationship exists, the teacher has a special duty of care. This is defined as follows:

‘A teacher/facilitator is to take such measures as are reasonable in the circumstances to protect a student under the teachers/facilitators charge from risks of injury that the teacher should reasonably have foreseen.’

As part of that duty, teachers are required to supervise students adequately. This requires not only protection from known hazards, but also protection from those that could arise (that is those that the teacher could reasonably have foreseen) and against which preventive measures could be taken.

School authorities in breach of the duty of care may be liable for injuries inflicted by one student on another, as well as for injuries sustained by a student

Any outdoor program run by departmental staff requires this same duty of care. Qualifications and experience are taken into account in a court of law when deciding issues of possible failure of duty of care.

It must be said that courts are generally unsympathetic to staff in outdoor programs and hence any staff in such programs must operate with this understanding.

For the sake of staff peace of mind it is important that their experience and qualifications match the activities that they conduct. If staff have done all that is possible to ensure safety it is still likely that a court of law may find against them. However, they will feel more secure in themselves if they know their experience and qualifications were adequate to the activity.

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The diagram below describes the balance between the three factors that influence the safety of an outdoor activity at any one time. It has been demonstrated that in the cases of injury or tragedy one or more of these factors has been out of balance, thus increasing the level of risk. In staff decision making, if it is possible to demonstrate that every attempt was made to maintain this balance between the three factors, the likelihood of a positive outcome from any legal process is increased.

Where Operation Newstart staff are responsible for the particular activity being undertaken, the Department of Education and Training are legally responsible for any litigation that might occur from the conducting of the activity. In the cases where other services are responsible for the conducting of the activity that service or body carries legal responsibility for that activity.

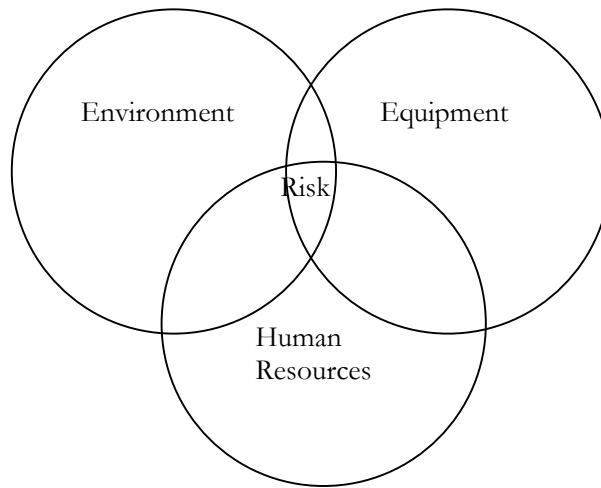
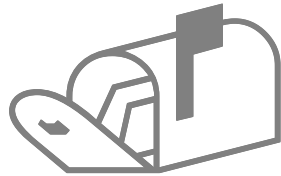


Diagram of factors contributing to safety or risk of outdoor program

Human Resources Management: Employment Practice and Statutory Requirements



- Operation Newstart staff are employed in a unique arrangement by the supervising bodies involved in the program. Staff are either employed by the Victorian Police Department or the Department of Education and Training. Because of this it is inappropriate to include the employing policies, practices and statutory requirements for each of these organisations. Staff employed in the program should refer to their organisations' policies and procedures and familiarise themselves with the policies of the employing organization. This includes:

- Reward and remuneration.
- Industrial Relations.
- Equal Opportunity and Anti-discrimination.

**OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH AND
SAFETY**

In addition to the Occupational Health and Safety Policies of the various organisations, Operation Newstart Northern will ensure:

- That staff working in the field in activities developed and run by Operation Newstart will be provided with the appropriate gear and equipment recognised by industry practice as necessary for the activity.
- That all equipment provided is in good repair and has not exceeded the hours of operation recognised in industry practice (eg climbing/abseiling ropes).
- That there is appropriate logistical support for staff in the field and that all emergency procedures as detailed in the program manual are adhered to.
- That staff are adequately compensated with time in lieu for the time spent on overnight expeditions and camps taking into account the client group, the level of challenge in the program, and the remoteness of the particular activity. This is to ensure the longevity of staff working in the program.

- That staff are not required to drive vehicles beyond the specified Road Traffic Authority length of time without a change of driver or the mandatory rest period.
- That staff are adequately trained/experienced for the activity they may be facilitating or co-facilitating. This includes adequate experience/training with the client group addressed in the activity.
- First aid kits are carried at all times, including in transit, and are appropriately equipped for both staff and clients.

Employment and Recruitment Procedures

Since staff in Operation Newstart Northern are employed under their respective departmental or organisational policies and procedures, it is inappropriate to describe in this manual those policies and procedures for each organisation or government department. These policies and procedures will be adhered to by those organisations when employing additional staff to work with Operation Newstart Northern. However the management committee of Operation Newstart Northern needs to be cognisant of the following when seconding or employing additional staff to work in the program:

- The activities undertaken in the program and the skills required for these activities
- The client group addressed and the skills, experience and/or qualifications required for this client group. These may include qualifications/experience in the particular activities undertaken where Operation Newstart Northern staff are responsible for the organization, supervision and provision of the activity. These include bushwalking, canoeing, and bike riding. In the wider context of the program qualifications/experience include counselling/therapy with individual's families and systems, education, community development, management, and community networking.

Note

It is important that the program maintain a balance in the employed staff between qualifications for the activities undertaken, and the therapeutic/educational outcomes desired

- Staff employed must have an ability and desire to work in the outdoors
- Ratios for number of staff per students for each activity as recommended in the Department of Education and Training are adhered to.

**COORDINATOR
SELECTION**

If and when the coordinator of the program should change, factors that may influence the appointment of another coordinator may include:

- Knowledge and technical competence of activities undertaken in the program
- First aid skills appropriate for the activities undertaken
- Experience/qualifications in the various diverse areas of the program (educational, therapeutic, community liaison)
- Interpersonal maturity, personal and professional organization and creative ability
- Well-developed communication skills appropriate to peers, participants, schools and outside agencies including members of the public.
- The ability to fulfil the program's administrative and support requirements
- Suitable group skills including management, teaching, problem solving, crisis intervention and planning.

**STAFF
QUALIFICATIONS**

Generally, a recognised certification is one that is issued by an organisation or institution that is:

- Accredited or empowered to do so by a statutory authority; or
- Issued by a non-profit association that is set up solely to represent and develop the activity in question, for example Australian Canoeing; or
- Issued by an organisation commonly accepted by safe and reputable experts in the activity in question.

Instructor/staff certification should never be viewed by Operation Newstart Northern as a definitive qualification to conduct a particular activity in the program. It should be regarded as a benchmark from which skills specific to the program should be added by means of ongoing staff training.

At present for most outdoors or adventure activities, recognised instructor/staff certification is not a legal requirement. In most situations where accidents have led to court proceedings, the magistrate has not ruled an operator negligent for not having provided an instructor/staff member with a recognised qualification. Rather, they have looked to see that the operator provided staff capable of performing at a level equivalent to the minimum

standards set down in the recognised qualification. Where no such qualification exists, the magistrate has referred to 'common practice' (example those practices accepted by experts and other safe and reputable operators) to establish whether an organisation or program has provided an instructor with the appropriate level of skill.

Note

With the release of the National Outdoor Recreation Industry Training Package, it is envisaged that in the future, it will become 'common practice for staff to obtain statements of attainment or a qualification in line with the competencies required of them in the field.

The coordinator must therefore ensure, as a minimum, that the staff/instructors they engage have experience, training and qualifications equivalent to either the recognised certification or to a standard acceptable to common practice.

Operation Newstart must not deviate from the above principle unless they can demonstrate a unique circumstance and can adequately demonstrate that staff they engage are capable of addressing all areas of risk associated with the activity.

**STAFF
RATIOS**

Staff to participant ratios must be determined prior to the implementation of any program. Ratios may vary according to a number of factors. Operation Newstart should consider the following before deciding on ratios:

- The experience and competence of staff leading the activity
- The age, experience and skill level of the participants.
- The behavioural difficulty of the participants.
- The difficulty of the activity for participants.
- The degree of inherent danger in the activity.
- The duration of the activity/program (the longer the program, the greater the impact on staff).
- The need for, and logistics of, supervision in the activity.
- Supervision of groups in the case of injury to the lead instructor.
- The ability to supervise participants in times of emergency.
- Other requirements and/or common and suggested practices (example Board of Canoe Education recommendations, Department of Education and Training guidelines).

Note

As a general rule, groups should have fewer participants per staff member as the inherent dangers in the activity increase. As a minimum Operation Newstart Northern should use the Staff/Student ratio guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Training for particular activities. However, the coordinators judgement should be trusted if a change to minimum recommended ratios is made providing that change can be justified taking into account the above considerations. If in any doubt as to the adequacy of proposed staff levels, add another staff member.

It is clearly better to incur the cost of extra staff than to experience the adverse implications of accidents. It is important to remain flexible in the event that conditions might change. In light of this, each group should have at least one staff member and, for most activities, the minimum number of staff per activity should be two. In the event of one staff member being injured, the other will be available to lead the activity, look after the group and/or care for the injured person or persons

**S U C C E S S I O N
P L A N N I N G**

It is important that the management committee keep in mind that from time to time it will be necessary to find replacement facilitators to run the program. While this may not be immanent at the time of writing, it could well occur in the future. Employment of future staff should be born in mind since the skills built up in running a program such as this are extremely difficult to replace. There is one postgraduate degree (Victoria University) and two undergraduate degrees (Latrobe University & Griffith University) in Australia, in broad terms, providing training in wilderness and adventure therapy. However, nothing can replace the skills built up by experience in this type of program. Younger team members who have maturity above their years and a proclivity for the work and identified ability should be considered as a potential replacement facilitator and encouraged to take on greater responsibility as the program matures. The skills and aptitudes required are detailed above in staff qualifications.

**U N D E R G R A D U A T E
S T U D E N T S
A N D
P O L I C E
T R A I N E E S**

Whilst it is important that Operation Newstart provide the experience and infield training for undergraduate students from various universities (particularly Victoria University) and police trainees, to give them experience in this work and perhaps identify future employees, it should be understood by senior staff that they are trainees. This means that they should not at any time be given overall responsibility for management decisions that may affect the safety of the clients or the group as a whole. Gradual increased responsibility as abilities become known is the appropriate process for in-field training for students and cadets. Ultimately, any decisions made by these trainees will be the responsibility of the senior staff and the management committee. An

appropriate program orientation, including occupational health and safety, program theory and client base should all be part of this process.

Staff Training and Development

Staff training and development is a key element in the risk management process. Skilled, qualified and experienced staff are essential for the delivery of safe and quality programs. It should be noted that:

- Training is about obtaining the skills and knowledge to undertake the job requirements.
- Development is about obtaining skills and knowledge beyond the job requirements (as necessary in succession planning) that will not only benefit the individual but the program and how those beyond the immediate program view it.

The Training Program for new staff members should include:

- Familiarisation with this Organisation Manual and the accompanying Field Manual.
- An explanation of the emergency procedures and contacts as described in the Field Manual.
- An explanation of the therapeutic and educational theory and the practice employed in the program.
- Familiarisation with areas used for activities and the potential risks and hazards.
- The unique needs of the client group.
- Program lines of communication for both ordinary and extraordinary situations

Since most outdoor qualifications are relevant for three years it is suggested to Operation Newstart Northern Committee of Management that they negotiate one school term off every three years for staff to update qualifications, review and extend this manual and where necessary produce a triennial progress report and undergo further training and development as identified by the program coordinators and staff. This is the equivalent of 4 days off per school term over three years, which should be regarded as the minimum required for continued training and additional experience.

In addition to this formal professional development, staff development can occur in a number of ways, which should be negotiated between the coordinator and management committee. This development may include:

- Exchange programs (domestic and international) where staff work in other programs to gain experience in alternate styles of intervention and vice versa.
- Monies set aside for further education in relevant fields (therapy training, university degrees, counselling courses, etc.).
- Conference attendance and presentation.
- The writing of journals and articles.
- Observations of other programs and site visits.

LOG BOOKS All staff should maintain log books to demonstrate experience and training in the activities undertaken. Log books become particularly relevant if faced with legal proceedings or an enquiry regarding an incident in the field. Courts of law pay special attention to staff in programs that are able to provide a detailed account of their qualifications and experience. Log books should include:

- Program location and aims.
- Participant details (numbers, age group, and clientele).
- Activities and duration of program.
- Staff roles and responsibilities.
- Training courses attended

Ongoing Evaluation

Operation Newstart believes ongoing evaluation contributes to the continual improvement of the therapeutic, educational and safety quality of the program. This evaluative process has so far occurred in the production of a Progress Report published in 2002 and remains a valuable resource to the program. To continue this high standard of evaluation it is recommended that during the three-year cycle of training program evaluation be conducted during that same term. The evaluation process may include:

- Observation and discussion with staff of the program by an appointed person with expertise in the field.
- An assessment of case studies of both staff and clients by same.

- Assessment of program effectiveness by the above process and evaluation forms for both staff and clients if so desired.
- A written report summarising the findings of the review and any recommendations including risk management and safety procedures, manual updates etc.

Equipment

Operation Newstart provides the specialist equipment required for the activities that they run. These activities include bushwalking, canoeing and bike riding. All other equipment for activities run by outside providers is the responsibility of those providers. Operation Newstart Northern accepts no responsibility for the failure of equipment that is the responsibility of outside providers.

When providing equipment for activities run by ONN it is understood:

- That the size of the equipment will be appropriate for the client using the equipment.
- That the equipment has been checked prior to use and after use to ensure that it is in good repair.
- That the equipment provided is relevant to and provides the industry standard for the activity undertaken.
- That a thorough equipment inspection (in addition to that above) has been conducted at least once per year and repaired or replaced if damaged according to manufactures specifications
- Storage of equipment has been in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations or if there is none that storage is safe and does not compromise the quality of equipment (eg ropes should not be stored with chemicals or clothing and packs stored in such a manner that they might rot).

Food Handling

Victoria has introduced new food handling laws, which took effect in from January 1999. It is important that the organisation or program can prove that it has taken reasonable 'duty of care' towards the clients with whom it works.

Because of this legislation and to enable a safer working environment it is important when handling food and food related articles that some common practices are followed prior to and during an outdoor program. These include:

- Washing hands after using the toilet, after touching mouth, ears, hair, nose or any rashes and cuts.
- Take care of personal hygiene, and ensure clean clothes are worn when engaged in packing and handling food.
- Prior to handling and packing food hands should be washed with an antibacterial hand wash such as Gel-San
- It is not appropriate to dry or wipe hands on personal clothing
- Preparation area should be cleaned prior to packing with an appropriate domestic cleaner that includes disinfectant
- Use only food grade containers. These should be dishwasher safe and cleaned after use in a dishwasher.
- Any meat boards should not be used for preparation of other food stuffs

In the field precautions should include:

- Carrying of liquid soap so clients can wash their hands after toilet and before food handling.
- Carrying of Gel San so clients are able to disinfect hands before handling food.
- Instructions given to clients regarding the necessity of washing hands and using disinfectant before handling food.
- Carrying dishwashing liquid to wash dishes. Dishes should be drip dried in a draining bag or similar after rinsing. Tea towels should not be used for this purpose since they encourage germs and their transmission.
- Group food should be prepared on a light plastic cutting board and washed thoroughly afterwards.
- Students with cuts or abrasions on hands or lower arms should wear detectable Band Aids (blue in colour) and if possible should not be involved with any group food preparation. These should not be left on and must be changed if preparing food again.
- Food carried should be non-deteriorating in any kind of weather. If sealed packs of food, which deteriorates on opening, are opened and not fully consumed they should be discarded at the end of the meal.

Communicable Diseases and Infections

There are many communicable diseases and infections that need to be considered when conducting outdoor and experiential programs. These diseases range from the more common: colds, chicken pox, and measles to the less common; Hepatitis A, B and C Meningococcal and HIV infection. To accommodate people who might be identified through their personal medical forms as having a communicable disease and to prevent the spread to other clients, Operation Newstart Northern staff should undertake recognised standard precautions:

STANDARD PRECAUTIONS

Standard precautions are the primary strategy for successful control of infection.

Standard precautions are recommended for the treatment and care of all patients, regardless of their perceived infectious status, and in the handling of:

- Blood.
- All other body fluids, secretions and excretions (excluding sweat), regardless of whether they contain visible blood.
- Non-intact skin.
- Mucous membranes.
- Dried blood.
- Saliva.

Standard Precautions include:

- Personal hygiene.
- Personal, protective equipment.
- Effective hand washing before and after patient contact.
- The use of protective barriers (this may include gloves, masks, eye shields or goggles, and waterproof dressings if required).
- Appropriate handling and disposal of sharps and other contaminated or infectious waste.
- The use of aseptic techniques.

In addition it is recommended that sharing of drink bottles not be encouraged due to the possibility of spread of infectious diseases. However in some cases the obvious need for water due to group shortage must take precedence over the risk of infection. Where possible, group sharing of water should be done through distribution of water amongst personal drinking containers rather than from a communal source such as a shared bottle or drink camel.

Privacy of Personal Information

Staff on Operation Newstart Northern are required by law to protect the personal and health information the program collects and holds.

The Victorian privacy laws, the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*, provide for the protection of personal and health information.

The privacy laws do not replace any existing obligations Operation Newstart Northern has under other laws. Records of personal details including personal, health and sensitive details of clients are by law required to be kept in a safe place under lock and key for seven years after the enrolment of the client/student in the program.

Definitions

Personal information means information or opinion that is recorded in any form and whether true or not, about an individual whose identity is apparent, or can be reasonably determined from the information or opinion. For example, this includes all paper and electronic records, photographs and video recordings.

Health information is defined as including information or opinion about a person's physical, mental or psychological health, or disability, which is also classified as personal information. This includes information or opinion about a person's health status and medical history, whether recorded or not.

Sensitive information is defined as information relating to a person's racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religion, trade union, or other professional, or trade association membership, sexual preferences, or criminal record that is also classified as personal information about an individual.

In this document *personal information* refers to personal information, health information and sensitive information unless otherwise specified.

Parent in this document in relation to a child, includes stepparent, an adoptive parent, a foster parent, guardian, or a person who has custody or daily care and control of the child.

Staff in this document is defined as someone who carries out a duty on behalf of the program, paid or unpaid, or who is contracted to, or directly employed by the program or the Department of Education and Training (DE&T). Information provided to the program through job applications or is also considered staff information.

Personal information is collected and used by Operation Newstart Northern to:

- Provide services or to carry out the program's functions.
- Assist the program and its staff to fulfil its duty of care to clients/students.
- Plan, resource, monitor and evaluate program services and functions.

- Comply with Department of Education and Training reporting requirements.
- Comply with statutory and or other legal obligations in respect of staff.
- Investigate incidents or defend any legal claims against the Program, its services, or its staff.
- Comply with laws that impose specific obligations regarding the handling of personal information.

Collection of personal information

The Program collects and holds personal information about clients/students, parents and staff.

Use and disclosure of the personal information provided

1. Students and parents

The purposes for which the school uses personal information of students and parents include:

- Keeping parents informed about matters related to their child’s progress in the program.
- Looking after students’ educational, social and health needs.
- Celebrating the efforts and achievements of students.
- Day-to-day administration.
- Satisfying the program’s legal obligations.
- Allowing the program to discharge its duty of care.

2. Staff

The purposes for which the program uses personal information of job applicants, staff members, trainees and contractors include:

- Assessing suitability for employment.
- Administering the individual’s employment or contract.
- For insurance purposes, such as public liability or WorkCover.
- Satisfying the program’s legal requirements.

- Investigating incidents or defending legal claims about the program, its services, or staff.

The program will use and disclose personal information about a student, parent or staff when:

- It is required for general administration duties and statutory functions.
- It relates to the purposes for which it was collected.
- For a purpose that is directly related to the reason the information was collected and the individual would reasonably expect the use and there is no reason to believe they would object to the disclosure.

The Program can disclose personal information for another purpose when:

- The person consents, or
- It is necessary to lessen or prevent a serious or imminent threat to life, health or safety, or
- Is required by law or for law enforcement purposes.

Where consent for the use and disclosure of personal information is required, Operation Newstart Northern will seek consent from the appropriate person. In the case of a client/student's personal information, Operation Newstart Northern will seek the consent from the student and/or parent depending on the circumstances and the student's mental ability and maturity to understand the consequences of the proposed use and disclosure.

Accessing personal information

A parent, student or staff member may seek access to their personal information, provided by them, that is held by the Program

Access to other information maybe restricted according to the requirements of laws that cover the management of program records. These include the Public Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Complaints under privacy

Should the program receive a complaint about personal information privacy this will be investigated in accordance with the Department of Education and Training's privacy complaints handling policy.