



- The use of social media that strengthens peer support activities i.e. the use of Facebook, Twitter and Skype
- Interactive sessions between **parents** of children who feel that their child (and his/her peer group) may wish to work (and even live) in another nation.

### **The Four Pillars**

Like an umbrella, the shape of this four pillar support structure protects and nurtures. Yet within, it is possible to acquire support that gradually empowers an adolescent (13-19) to progress from dependency upon parents and professionals to interdependence with peers, community and family. This is brought about by the creative combination of both strengthening and releasing these four pillars of support. Their combined impact can help a young person to make a successful transition from child to adulthood and promote resilience and well being, whilst also supporting their learning, career development, and their endeavours to explore their own sense of vocation. More specifically, it can assist a young person to move from compulsory schooling to the navigation of satisfying pathways and options of post compulsory work and learning. Like most ideas, the concept of the four pillars is not new. Rather, it simply reflects and frames good practice in career and transition support. It owes much to the traditions of career development, community education and youthwork and development/empowerment.

The invitation is made to any Career and Transition Support structure to chart or matrix their current and emerging developments with a possible connection to each of the four pillars. Through this process, one may clarify whether there are any gaps and possible efficiency gains that could be made through a reallocation of investment for more effective working with both mainstream and/or at risk students.

The pillars are not to be perceived as four separate silos, but rather seen as a potentially flexible combination of transition support that can be tailored to support any given individual or cohort of young people. For example, by further strengthening the capacity of (generally) well performing family and friends, many young people who are travelling well in adolescence can be further assisted in their transition. At the same time, precious professional and specialist support including the time of certain skilled and committed employers and volunteers can be conserved to support those who are considered to be more, or even most at risk. Within a “universal” commitment to provide transition support, there is still a need to dedicate differentiated levels of service to targeted groups. Any given intervention of career and transition support may focus on releasing one particular pillar or employ a combination of all four in its approach, whilst taking a strategic view to invest resource most wisely.

Similarly, interventions and the investment of resource into the well being and resilience of young people in transition by schools, youth services, health/community services and/or partnerships between all three, can be mapped on the four pillars chart. Please refer to Attachment 2 “The Four Pillars Framework for Adolescent Well Being” which offers examples of support, mapped against the

various boxes of the matrix or involvement chart. As the term **transition** is to be defined in a “holistic” manner, the four pillar concept should not be limited to matters relating to career and /or the transition from school to work.

The empowering process within the four pillar structure is gradual and not linear. Even a mature, confident, focussed and enterprising 17 year old requires some professional support eg career counselling and parental/family backing (often financial!). Although most 13-14 year olds are clearly and heavily dependent upon their family and adult care givers, many year 10-12 students are beginning to explore and exploit the support of their peers and community whilst forging their own identity and directions. The structure and strategy of this approach helps to sustain support and encourages progression. The four pillars structure or framework is also open to interpretation and is therefore sensitive to cultural diversity, as it deliberately acknowledges the broader aspect of transition which encompasses the values of family and community. Career and a sense of vocation are concepts that assimilate values and aspirations of an economic, social and moral nature. Fundamentally, career and transition support is about energising the young person to release and reach their potential to contribute to society and to be rewarded. Making such a transition is multi-faceted and demands the support of parents/care givers, professionals, community and employers and young people themselves (peers).

This short paper introduces the concept of the four pillars of Career and Transition Support and the empowerment strategy it encompasses. A brief section on the value of each pillar and also the manifestations of support, and how it can be tapped for young people, follows. An accompanying set of handouts offers more detail, and it is planned to produce a comprehensive resource pack that will be available by the end of 2012.

## **1. Working with Parents and Caregivers**

International research across OECD member nations consistently reveals that secure parent-child relationships and high parental investment are associated with progress in career development and effective decision making by young people. The same research consistently recommends that career educators should develop a richer view of parental involvement in the career development and transition support of young people. The research points out that parents and the informal networks of family and community including other significant adults, can be assisted to become more informed sources of guidance and support. Parents will benefit from more fully understanding the labour market and its dynamic myriad of learning pathways. Often when such networks do not exist, similar attention must be paid to supporting professionals and volunteers who are the key care givers and/or guardians/custodians.

Recent research suggests that a school, youth services or partnership could make a comprehensive and effective investment in parental involvement by implementing four interrelated and reinforcing strategies.

1. Parent as Career Partner Workshops – with an eye to creative marketing and location e.g. the pros and cons of a gap year, the use of community or employer venues as well as schools.
2. Home Based Materials and hotlines – interactive materials that can engage parents/care givers and children together, as well as making relevant websites more “parent friendly”. The UK Connexions hotline has been well used by young people and parents alike.
3. Specialist Support – from a range of professionals including career counsellors and transition brokers/advisers. They are at the very hub of a successful strategy for working with parents and care givers, especially those of “at risk” young people.
4. Parental Involvement in Personal Learning and Transition Plans – raising the profile, and making it easier for parents to contribute to the development of pathway plans and portfolios.

When developing such a strategy, it is helpful to continually place parental support in context with the other three pillars. Whilst the current generation may place great emphasis upon the support of peers (and on occasions they maybe a first port of call for advice and information), they still want the “rock steady” safety net of parental support. Although not always dominant as the young person approaches adulthood, parents are an invaluable source of transition support.

## **2. Working with Professionals**

To start with the obvious; teachers are an important resource with respect to career and transition support. Curriculum and pedagogy across the school can facilitate the career development of the student and encourage their maturation from child to adult as they graduate through the middle and senior years of schooling. Vocational learning activities and programs can be embedded into mainstream curriculum and tap all four pillars of support.

“Just in Time” career counselling that precedes or facilitates critical career decision making is also vital. Research and case studies of good practice highlights the need for independent, unbiased, and up to date advice to young people about learning and work pathways.

In recent times, a range of OECD members have developed support initiatives for those young people who are considered at risk of not making a successful transition. Whether they have been called Transition Brokers, Personal Advisors or a Pathways Mentor; they have dedicated 1:1 targeted support to young people. Through a process of relationship building, needs identification (often regards multiple challenges), counselling/support, referral and signposting to other specialist services and opportunities, plus the monitoring/tracking of progress, these initiatives have offered support to targeted young people through a case management model. In some ways this kind of support reflects key aspects of the approach used by many life-coaches working 1:1 with individuals (who are often potential high flyers in the workplace).

It is important to conserve this important, intensive and relatively high cost method of transition support to those in most need or risk. In order to do so, professionals may need to be supported within a Career and Transition Support structure to

- Exploit the use of technology (e.g. the UK Connexions Direct service can deal with 80% of text/email contacts electronically)
- Build inter and intra-agency collaboration and partnerships that facilitate effective referral, tracking, duplication avoidance and the filling of gaps
- Ensure those partnerships are nurtured and maintained – by not only providing a fulcrum or brokering/mediating force that balances partner agendas and contributions, but also by offering creative mechanisms of multi-faceted accountability (to funders, young people and to partners)
- Cherishing the quality and skills of specialist services and those community members (including employers) who can support the “at risk”.

### 3. Working with Community and Employers

Although employers have a strong vested interest in young people making successful school to work transitions, they are also a part of community who dedicates volunteer time to support young people in a “holistic” manner. A large number of volunteers are willing and able to make a contribution to career and transition support for young people who are travelling “OK”. Yes, they may have a developmental or learning need, but for all intent and purpose, they are “travelling well” and likely to make a successful transition with well targeted interventions – often of a short term character. These able young people may not need a high support placement or a mentor, rather they may only need a short burst/high energy learning opportunity or personal development challenge. Others who are already clear and feeling confident about their career direction, may require a structured pathway of vocational education, training and employment whilst still at school e.g. SBNA/VET. Volunteers with this majority cohort of young people come from

- Employer networks who want to tackle skill shortages, boost recruitment and/or maintain their community reputation as well as seek to support young people
- Adults who simply volunteer their discretionary time to support a young person(s). Perhaps they are a sports coach, family friend, a tertiary student seeking experience, or a parent who recognises that they are a significant adult to one of their child’s friends.

A much smaller number of these volunteers have the capacity, skills and desire to support the **more seriously at risk**; young people who face multiple barriers to learning and transition and who are frequently challenging, or at the very least vocationally confused. The work placement in

the premises of such an employer/supervisor is a most precious resource. Similarly the community mentor who has the skills, and who seeks to work with this target group is special. Both are prepared to make a considerable “up front” investment in building rapport and trust and they are prepared for the longer-haul. A Transition Support structure can support these individuals and places of work by ensuring that they are not overloaded. That may mean not placing young people who are travelling well in their care. Other models of experiencing work can be offered to such young people. This frequently requires that emotional support is provided to the volunteer; partnering with them in the support process (ensuring respite) and offering them high quality professional development opportunities eg in mentoring or in the supervision of challenging workers.

The Transition Support structure may well offer volunteers who are working with young people who are travelling well

- The effective brokerage and matching of motivated (and vocationally clear) young people to a pathway opportunity
- New models of vocational learning and work experience that have a low disruption factor (to the workplace) and yet offer high stimulation to the young person i.e. creative mechanisms of education-industry collaboration that are not reliant upon the placement, but based upon other models, including the facilitation and employer review of peer led projects
- Additional opportunities to mentoring i.e. supporting individuals who want to contribute directly to young people through such vehicles as coaching, tutoring, reviewing a project or resource person to an activity or even supporting parents and other volunteers (but without the intensive and longer term demands of mentoring).

If a Transition Support structure or agency/school can offer such support to these employers and community volunteers, it may help conserve the rare and valuable resource that is so vital for the well being, learning and career development of seriously “at risk” young people.

### **Supporting the “at risk” by Significant Adults**

The caring and skilled significant adult can offer vital coaching and mentoring to such a young person. They can provide special and nurturing opportunities for a young person who is likely to fail without more intense support or simply fail for the first time. The damage, neglect or even abuse experienced by many of these young people demands that such support be available. These young people often face multiple barriers to their personal and career development. Examples of such support includes

- The training of employers and volunteers in understanding such concepts as Freedom’s Orphans; why young people are “at risk” and what needs they have

- Networked work experience placements that cater for “three strikes and your in”, that is the less skilled and unconfident young person may not complete two earlier placements but makes a success of their third placement and all employers involved know of that final success
- Offering “at risk” young people one-to-one coaching and mentoring by adults; ensuring that these significant adults reflect all sectors of our community; including the one in which the young people have been raised
- Volunteers working with professionals to offer the strugglers additional support in their vocational learning activities (including peer led project).

#### 4. Working with Peers

##### **“Young people generate as well as receive career and transition support”**

A strong strand of research and practice (albeit not mainstream or openly stated in OECD member education policies) recognises and/or employs the concept of peer support. Whether it is psychological research (Judith Rich Harris – The Nurture Assumption), youth work surveys (Mission Australia Youth Survey), recent writing on the current generation (Hugh Mackay – Rising Generation and Y Generation writings), this approach highlights

- The power of peers as a source of information, achieve and support (whether informed or not) to young people
- The importance of working the peer group, not just the individual
- The never underestimating the capacity of most young people to give, as well as to receive transition support.

Models of good practice occur throughout the western world, particularly with programs aimed at emerging young adults, who are chronologically closer to adult than child (15½-18 years). These programs and procedures seek to tap, inform and add value to peer support. Some strengthen existing bonds within a cohort, whereas others also seek to help build bridges between peer groups and the broader community eg intergenerational youthwork.

The proposition is that the vast majority of young people who are 15½ or older, and who are travelling well, are able to generate transition support for each other. This is particularly the case if Career and Transition Support structures can work with others to facilitate, and place trust in the skills and energy of young people. We can then exploit this pillar of support and conserve more intensive and adult-provided resource for the more at risk. This does not mean that “at risk” young people should be excluded from such an approach, but they will often require more intensive support and/or structured lead-up activity before the peer support can make a positive

contribution to what society deems as a successful transition. Even within the case management model, peer support can play a key role through such a mechanism as a “buddy system”. It is worth noting that for some marginalised young people, the “gang” is seen by them, to be the only form of support on offer.

A Career and Transition Support structure can develop and release peer support by

- Developing programs of vocational learning and career education where young people take the lead and investigate pathways, and teach each other i.e. a young person led approach to career and transition education
- Helping professionals and volunteers refine their skills in facilitation – that is working alongside or behind the group and responding to their emerging needs as they the group takes peer action (as distinct from one-to-one mentoring)
- Resourcing research and development which enables young people to help shape and promote career and transition support services that are provided by adults e.g. by helping in hiring staff, establishing career captains and school career clubs, not to overlook the proven concept of young ambassadors for the trades eg Try a Trade
- Continuing to support peer mentoring initiatives in schools and youth services (generally a form of peer support provided by “older” young people to younger adolescents).

## Concluding Comments

**The empowerment process** that underpins the four pillar framework is the gradual and deliberate strategy of enabling the young adolescent to progress from dependency upon parents and professionals to the young adult who is interdependent with their peers and community (also with their family and the professionals who now facilitate their career and personal development). This is the key principle of youth development, and youthwork across OECD nations.

As young people develop their peer support, and begin to lead programs/interventions of vocational learning and career education, they generate support as well as receive. Apart from helping to develop young people’s higher order, life and employability skills of initiative and enterprise, the empowering process helps to build a sustainable supply of career and transition support in our society.

**A respect for cultural diversity** challenges the framework and structure of the four pillars to be flexible and open to revision and refinement. In certain indigenous and non-English speaking background cultures, family and/or community expectations may wish to challenge or refine the concept of empowerment presented within this concept. At local level, schools, youth agencies, partnerships and their structures of Career and Transition Support will make the necessary amendments and/or form their interventions accordingly.

**The power of the political economy** impacts upon the successful transitions of young people, whether that be the “holistic” transition of child – adult, or the more specific move from a compulsory school to employment/higher and further education. The very foundation stones and institutions of capitalism and democracy have favoured certain communities and cohorts across OECD nations to create and seize opportunities, whilst determining that others struggle to benefit from the decisions, “foot print” and values of the powerful. In turn, less favoured communities and cohorts (often referred to as disadvantaged or excluded) have found it more difficult to strengthen and then tap the four pillars of their village and raise the child. Subsequently they found it even more difficult to support the successful transitions of their young.

Many of the “at risk” young people and their families are a part of these same communities. Rather than model the confident, flexible and enterprising character and lifestyles of the Y Generation (Gen Y) they are floundering in an economic world characterised by uncertainty, lack of consistent protection and structure, and an expectation that the employee of today is both skilled, able to learn and a self-starter. Rather than being a Y Generation, they are much more of a Freedom’s Orphan.

The four pillars concept must be placed in context with the political economy, professionals (and the organisations and policies that shape their work), and community volunteers must work with parents and young people so they can more fully understand their past, present and future. Teachers, trainers and youthworkers can assist Freedom’s Orphans and “at risk” young people to understand the opportunities and barriers placed in front of them. They are then more informed (individually and as a cohort) and able to take action. They will be able to have a clearer idea of where they are? why are they there? what action/journey do they need to take? what can help or hinder them? and what can we and others do to help them progress?

The four pillars concept is currently being reviewed with respect to exploring how structures of transition support (the four pillars) can be strengthened and then tapped to help these “at risk” young people and their families/communities to look into the past, present and future.

**Further resources on the Four Pillars of Transition Support** are available (purchased at low cost) from DJ Turner Consultancy. They include sets of slides which explain various interactions, and handouts which detail the steps to be taken in making those interactions. You will also note that the paper refers to various program ideas (especially under peer support) which are described in either the “Workshop Topics” or “Developing Youth Program” sections of the website.

## Attachment 1

# Investing Resource for Career and Transition Support Mapping Your Interventions

“Where are the strengths and the gaps?”

Strengthen and Tap the Four Pillars →	Parents/Family + Caregivers	Professionals	Community and Employers (Significant Adults)	Peers
Mainstream Young People (Travelling Well)				
“At Risk” (Often Multiple Barriers to Transition)				

→ “An incremental process of empowerment for young people from 12 – 18 years” →

## Attachment 2

# The Four Pillars Framework for Adolescent Well being, Policies, Programs and Organisations that Build and Exploit Their Capacity

“An across government and community effort to strengthen and then tap the sources of support for the well being of adolescents 13 – 19 years old (especially the disadvantaged)”

Four Pillars	1. Family Nurturing	2. Professional Expertise	3. Community Networks	4. Peers Adolescent/Peer Support
<b>Who</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents, caregivers and the extended family</li> <li>Guardian for many of the most “at risk”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers and youthworkers</li> <li>Health and welfare workers</li> <li>Specialist services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant adults</li> <li>Employers</li> <li>Parents of a “mate”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The peer group as a positive force “voice heard”</li> <li>Peer learning – IT and social media – “the way it is”</li> <li>The young person led approach to program design/delivery</li> </ul>
<b>How to Strengthen and Tap!!</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops – parents support the child’s well being and that of their friends</li> <li>Parents/Family Hotline and Home Based materials</li> <li>Connecting to Specialist Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access/Referrals to sensitive professionals across portfolios</li> <li>Consult with young people – voice heard</li> <li>Engaging young people</li> <li>Understanding Y Generation and Freedom’s Orphans</li> <li>Cross-sector/multi agency professional development i.e. education, health, police, welfare</li> <li>Key role of school managers/executives of youth services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media campaigns and awareness of youth needs</li> <li>Vision for engagement i.e. young people and national development</li> <li>Facilitation and coaches</li> <li>Mentors – when the chemistry happens!!</li> <li>Role of employers; nurturing opportunities for the most “at risk”</li> <li>The skills/training agenda to integrate emotional well being</li> <li>Volunteers to create youth services/venues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources directly to young people – facilitators, coaches and project funds</li> <li>Scaffolding for less confident/the strugglers</li> <li>Youth Hotline</li> </ul>

**“Well Being” Means – Connecting, emotional health, physical condition, resilience, skills and access to pathways.**