



BoysTown

Australian Council for Adult Literacy: Conference 2008

**Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Lifelong Learning:
A Cross-Sectorial Dialogue**

*How does literacy relate to issues of social and
economic exclusion*





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Social Exclusion – More than a Catch Phrase

A nebulous concept with a range of diverse meanings in research literature.

An outcome from the dynamic interaction of individual, social, economic, cultural and place factors that results in particular groups of people being unable to exercise their full citizenship rights:

- Economic
- Social
- Community relationships and
- Political





Policy Responses to Social Exclusion

Two dominant paradigms:

1. Reduce long-term unemployment and poverty by:

- Economic development and employment generation
- Distributional policies

 Promote social solidarity/capital amongst citizens by:

- Ensuring that all citizens experience a sense of community belonging through the provision of the same life chances
- Focus on providing support to high risk groups e.g. sole parents





What are the Barriers confronting marginalised Young People?

- ❑ **Indigenous** - 33%
- ❑ **Unemployment** – 40 weeks (medium)
- ❑ **Paid employment** - 28% have never been employed
- ❑ **Family's experience with work** – Main income earner never worked or in and out of part-time and casual work: 36%
- ❑ **Highest educational level** completed – 47% had completed Grade 9
- ❑ **Detention** - 16%
- ❑ **Family Support Networks** – 32% reported to have no family support
- ❑ **Peer Support** – 20% reported no supportive friends

❑ **Anger Management** – 43% reported difficulties with controlling anger

❑ **Substance Abuse** – 26% reported having trouble with others due to drinking or drug use

❑ **Future Orientation** – 32% expressed hopelessness about the future

' I can't think about the future because I have problems with drugs, and my family and where I am going to live'

❑ **Literacy** – 53% reported having poor writing skills and 36% reported having difficulty with reading

❑ **Numeracy** – 50% reported difficulties with daily tasks

' I don't know how to work out the cost of things at sales like 20% off'





Literacy and Social Exclusion: An Interactive Relationship

People with low literacy and numeracy skills find difficulty accessing employment and better paid jobs

Work available to these groups is more likely to be casual in nature and prone to impact from economic cycles

Demographic groups more likely to have low literacy and numeracy skills are already marginalised eg:

- Families with a history of intergenerational unemployment
- Indigenous peoples
- Children and Young People from CALD backgrounds

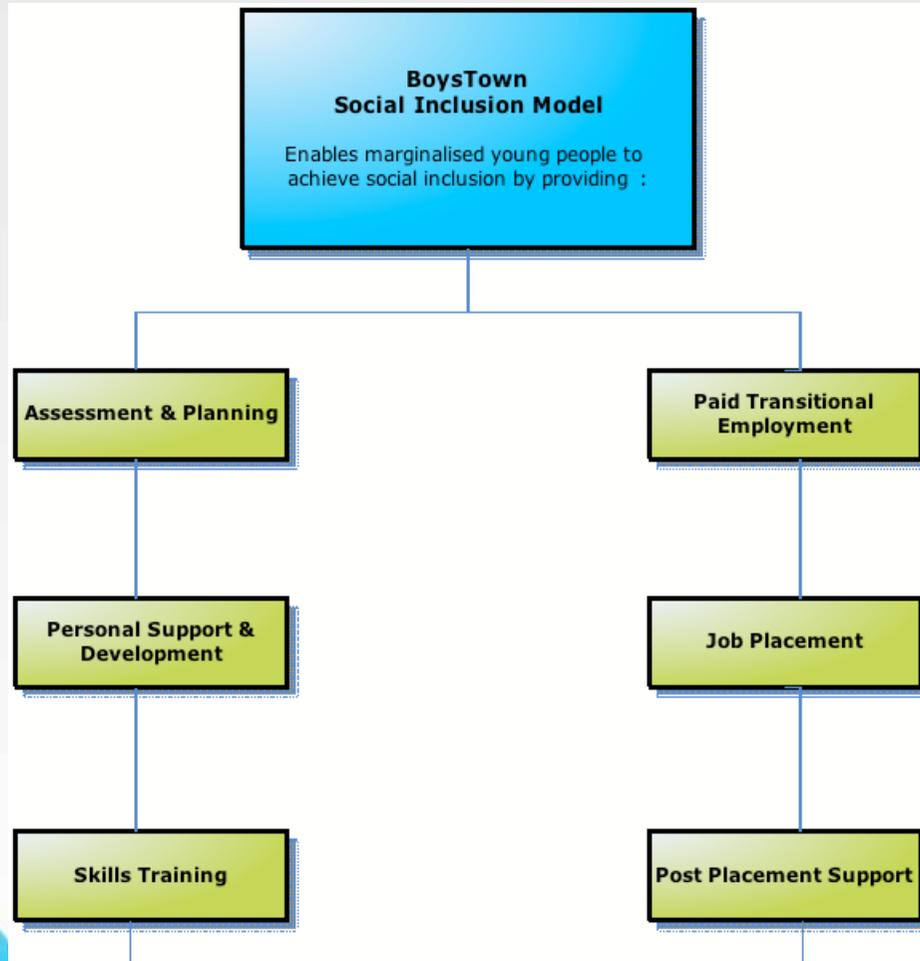
Cycle effect:

Marginalisation → lower literacy and numeracy skills → deeper marginalisation





BoysTown Service Model



All young people receive individual case management and youth work support and have 24/7 access to professional counselling.

Measures of success:

- changes in status
- progression through programs
- exit from BoysTown
- longitudinal surveys.

Key indicators include:

- accommodation status
- level of independence
- physical & mental health
- offending behaviour
- participation in social activities
- literacy/numeracy levels
- educational qualifications
- level of information retrieval & exchange skills
- level of employability/vocational skills
- level & range of work experience
- employment status



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What key factors support socially excluded youth along pathways to Employment and Education

BoysTown in partnership with Griffith University is now conducting a research project that aims to:

1. Identify the key variables that assist marginalised young people to achieve employment or educational outcomes
2. Disseminate these findings across Government and the Community sectors to increase the effectiveness of services in engaging with this demographic group





Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative analysis using data collected from:

400 clients across three States to be surveyed at entry, mid, exit and post exit follow up:

- General Health Questionnaire GHQ12 measuring wellbeing
- Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale
- Sections of the Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale
- Sections of the Outcome Questionnaire
- Interviews

In-depth Interviews with 40 young people to be undertaken progressively during their participation in Boystown programs

- Surveys, interviews and focus groups

40 young people to participate in Appreciative Inquiry focus groups

- Exploring the future orientation of BoysTown clients

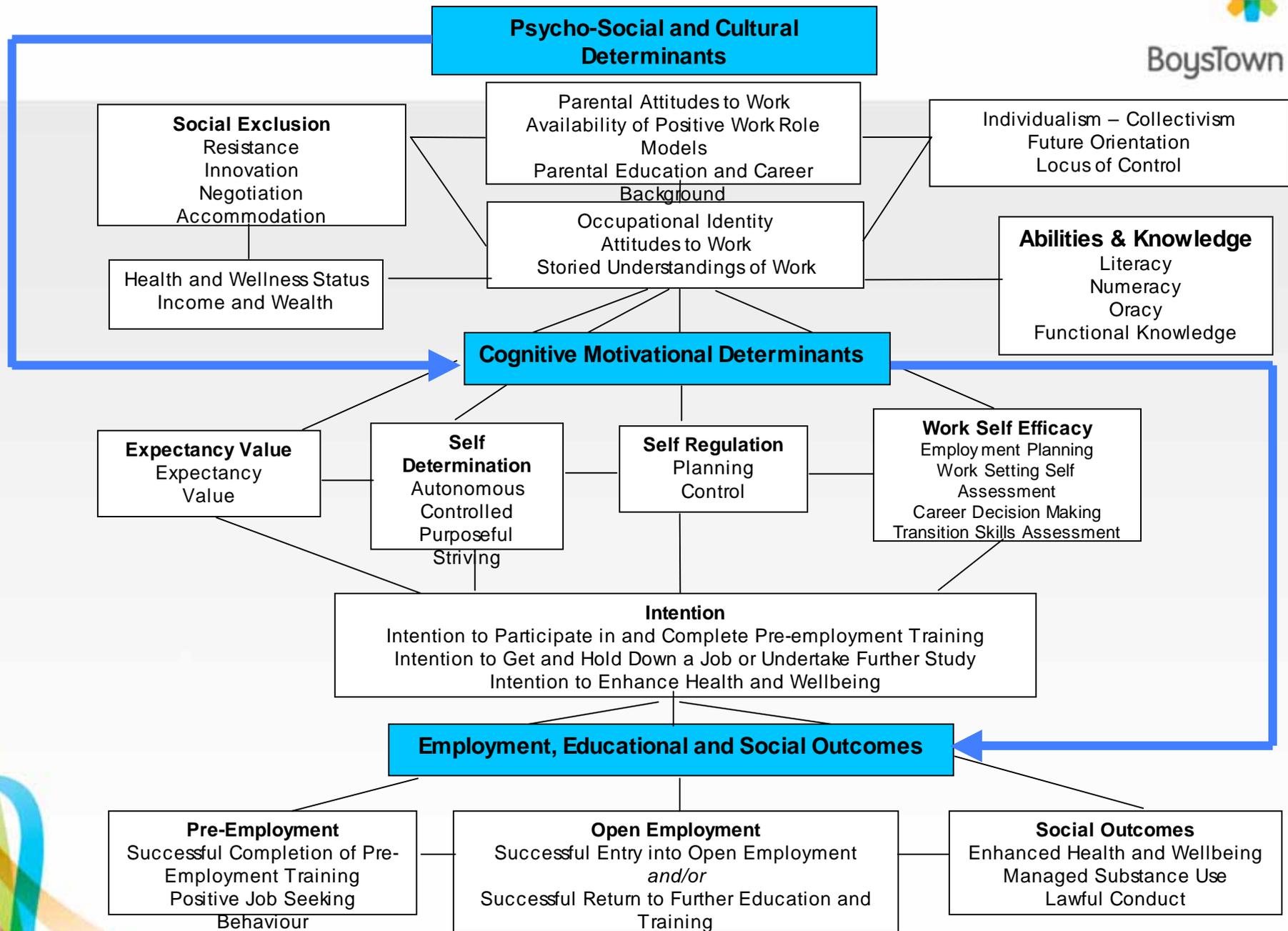


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The Starting Point

Unemployment – Employment/Education Theoretical Framework







Preliminary Findings

Young People who experience social exclusion are assisted along pathways to employment and education by:

1. Providing opportunities that bolster self esteem

- Participation in social enterprises

 The quality of the mentoring and support relationship between Youth Trainers, Youth Workers and the young person

- Highlights the importance of all staff in youth services having highly developed relationship building skills with youth





Preliminary Findings

☰☞ Young people need to believe they have a future

- Many young people have a 'here and now' - 'survival world view' and can not conceive of a future
- Young people will only commit to the task of literacy, numeracy and vocational skill development if they believe that these skills are relevant to an imagined and achievable future

4. Quality of the work skills training

- Learning by doing – the importance of literacy and numeracy skills is emphasised through work activities
- Skills approach using materials of interest to young people e.g. internet skills are learnt through job search activities.





Preliminary Findings

Case Management

- Assistance provided to young people to overcome their personal and social barriers e.g. stabilising accommodation, addressing alcohol and drug abuse, working on mental health issues.



Conclusions

1. Literacy and numeracy are essential skills that enhances social inclusion
 2. The relationship between social exclusion and literacy and numeracy can best be described as a 'Spiral Effect'
 - ❑ Socially excluded groups tend to have lower literacy and numeracy skills which further compounds their social marginalisation given the demands of modern work
- 📄👤 Effective responses involve interventions across a range of factors impacting on socially excluded young people e.g. living circumstances, family, social skill development, literacy and numeracy, work experiences and employment support
- 📄👤 Young people must believe in a future to commit