Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

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1. **Overview of Western Chances, including scholarships and other relevant programs**

Western Chances has a vision to see Melbourne’s West working together as a proud, vibrant and successful community.

To achieve this, the organisation, founded by Terry Bracks in 2003/4, assists talented and self-motivated young people in the western suburbs to realise their potential through the provision of scholarships and other related programs.

Our ethos and reason for being is that there are many young people in Melbourne’s West, who have potential but cannot fully realise it due to lack of resources, lack of money and absence of networks.

This is where Western Chances steps in and opens doors.

Our focus is on creating opportunities, supporting scholarship recipients for the long term and building the social capital of the community in which they live.

We facilitate career and educational outcomes by creating ongoing economic, social, cultural and educational opportunities where our resources and support can make a difference.

Western Chances works with public schools and community groups across the cities of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley & Wyndham.

We run with a lean team of five part-time staff, who are supported by several volunteer committees.

We receive no Government funding, with all funds raised via business, foundations and individual donors.

Western Chances scholarships are provided to the school or community service, to be spent on needed items or services, including:

- Computer & Internet Access
- Specialist educational software
- Travel cards
- Language lessons
- Specialist tutoring
- Art, dance, music and acting lessons
- School excursions

Our achievements include:

- Over $1 million has been invested directly into the young people of the West
• Over 1,018 scholarships have been provided to over 690 scholarship recipients with 328 of these as ongoing scholarships.

• Young people also have access to “opportunity programs” in partnership, such as:
  o the ACM1 Digital Storytelling workshop,
  o m0Ve! with Orchestra Victoria and the Siemens Science Experience Program
  o LINKS employment work experience program.

2. The backgrounds, pathways and outcomes of scholarship recipients in 2007/8

Case Studies

Violet is an eighteen year old from the Western Suburbs who never dreamed that she would one day live and learn in Australia.

Emigrating from Vietnam in 1995 without any knowledge of English, the challenges were vast. Primary school was the first step to learning a new language and through the support of teachers and friends she was fluent by the time she entered high school.

Violet's abilities and determination throughout her high school years have already given her the opportunity to be a part of the Accelerated Learning Program and the Melbourne Access Program run by the University of Melbourne.

Western Chances donated a computer to help with her studies. "It allowed me the freedom to computer access whenever I need it and this created a great improvement and ease in completing schoolwork", Violet said.

Violet's teacher says: "She sets high goals in life and strives very hard to achieve them. The scholarship from Western Chances has enabled her to get closer to her dreams than ever before."

Violet is now a third year Commerce Melbourne University Student.

Siu was only 16 but isolated and stressed about her long term prospects. She had been out of school for two years, leaving school in year 8 to care for her sick mother.

A youth worker from Young Carers Victoria referred her to the SpiritWest Fresh Program. Over the course of 2007, Siu completed a Certificate 11 in General Education for Adults and also enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), completing a vocational certificate in Retail Operations.

Siu’s received an offer from RMIT University to enrol in its VCE Program. However full time study became an issue for Siu, whose family’s sole income was the part-time work of her father.

A nomination for a Western Chances scholarship solved the financial dilemma when Siu was awarded a $1000 scholarship for school texts to undertake further studies. "The scholarship has made it so much easier for me to attend school, I have been able to buy all the books and equipment for my subjects."
• **level of demand for Western Chances scholarships**

*Appendices 1 & 2: New & Renewal scholarships*

**Total Since 2004**
- Scholarships awarded = 1,018
- New Scholarships = 690
- Renewal Scholarships = 328
- Percentage renewing = 47.50%

**Since 2004 we have awarded through scholarships**
- approx. 100 computers
- approx. 110 internet access
- 75 memory sticks
- 530 books, texts & equipment/resources
- 290 school related resources—extra tuition/VCE lectures
- 50 dance scholarships
- 100 travel cards
- 60 arts related scholarships
- 110 music related scholarships
- 10 language scholarships

3. **The promotion of Western Chances scholarships and other programs, and the level of awareness of opportunities among local teachers, parents and young people**

**Promotion of Scholarships**
1. all state schools, other organisations, principals and nominators in the Western Suburbs are notified four times a year of the scholarship rounds
2. the scholarship rounds are usually advertised in the local newspapers and on the WC website
3. parents are informed through the schools, newspapers and websites
4. Two DVDs sent to schools and other organisations since 2004, one for businesses and one for schools.

**Municipality Scholarships**
- Brimbank: 366
- Hobsons Bay: 71
- Moonee Valley: 52
- Maribyrnong: 112
- Melton: 67
- Wyndham: 45
- see Appendix 3: scholarships by municipality
**Promotion of other programs—facilitated programs through the schools**

1. Western Chances /Orchestra Victoria mOVe programs
   - 2005 with 28 participants.
   - 2008 with 92 participants

2. Western Chances/ Australian Centre for the Moving Image
   - 2005: 17 participants
   - 2006: 18 Participants
   - 2007: 24 participants
   - 2008 (so far): 11 participants
   - **Total: 71 participants**

3. Western Chances/Free Debate:
   - an organisation that takes debating into schools for teachers and students
   See Appendix 4: Free Debate

4. Western Chances/ Victoria University/ Siemens/ Siemens Science Experience Program
   - An opportunity for 130 Yr. 9 young people from 13 schools to participate in a three day VU / Siemens Science Program facilitated by Western Chances

5. Western Chances/ Crusaders /Merv Hughes Program
   - An opportunity for interested Western Suburbs young cricketers to participate in a cricket program conducted by the Crusaders/ Merv Hughes Program

6. Western Chances/ Lord Somers Programs
   - An opportunity for some Western Chances scholarship recipients to participate in the many Lord Somers Camp Programs

7. Western Chances/ Rotary Youth Programs
   - RYLA Camps
   - National Science Forum

**Alumni Programs**

1. Western Chances/ Leader “ Young Western Leaders Youth Summit”
   - A two day fun, interactive leadership, learning journey.

2. LINKS Program
   - Western Chances is working with its partner/investor organisations in the development of a range of employment opportunities for scholarship recipients to further their skills and career opportunities through work experience, vacation
employment and work placement programs – a key element of creating the appropriate LINKS for individual recipients.

Western Chances has identified a need for our Western Chances young people / Yr. 12, UNI & TAFE scholarship recipients to experience quality work experience with a potential careers focus.

- application processes for assistance from Western Chances
  Western Chances has a rigorous application process to cater for the high demand of scholarships:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
<th>Process starts again the next year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewal Scholarships</td>
<td>New Scholarships</td>
<td>Renewal Scholarships</td>
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4. Factors impacting on education participation in Melbourne’s Western region

Although schools do have Work Experience programs and strategies are given to students on how they should go about applying for jobs, this does not seem to be reinforced into their thinking because of the community environment they find themselves in:

- Parents’ education levels and job skills are low and they never had to present for jobs, they often are therefore unable to instil the importance of making a good impression on other people.
- Young people don’t have role figures to model themselves on.
- Parents either have unrealistic expectations of their children because they have no idea of what is required to achieve these expectations or often they don’t have any expectations of their children (not because they dislike their children but more because their own lack of knowledge and their low expectations of themselves).
- Because many families in the West are struggling to survive on basic wages or in many cases government support pensions, young people (with parent encouragement) look at short term economic gain by leaving school early if they find a job (usually low paid and often dead-end).

Often young people are criticised for not knowing how to write an impressive CV. These skills are being taught in schools from around Year 9. However, how can they write up an impressive CV when:

- Their experiences in community activities and affairs are nonexistent. Their parents and extended families have never been involved in things like that, so why should they be different?
• Often they will go through school and have never had part-time employment.
• Their academic achievement is often very poor.

So what can they write about to make their CV impressive? Even if these young people are talented academically they are not getting the chance to expand and demonstrate these talents.

5. Recommended Strategies or initiatives to raise higher education aspirations, participation and success for people in the West

The only way to raise higher aspirations, participation and success for people in the West is through a combined community approach. Schools are doing the best they can through careers programs that they provide for their students, building partnerships with local industry and businesses through their membership of Local Learning Employment Networks. Unfortunately, these curriculum programs and partnerships, although important and valuable, are only token solutions to a deep-seeded community problem.

Therefore, a broad community approach is required and must be seriously tackled by all sections of the community, including all sections of business, local and state governments.

Organisations like Western Chances through their newly launched LINKS Program must be seriously supported by all levels of government and strongly promoted in all sections of business.

The LINKS program is designed to create employment opportunities for talented young people in the Western Suburbs by matching their career aspirations and talents with appropriate paid employment experiences though vacation employment and work placement programs which complement their studies. This not only gives these young people an insight into the world of work but it also provides the young people with some financial independence.

The success of this and other similar community programs to assist and encourage young people in the West to broaden their educational and employment opportunities is dependent on wide support from employers in the West and some form of incentive from Government to encourage employer participation in these programs.

The success rate for Western Chances scholarship recipients entering University is 95% the overall rate for the Western Region is 36.1%
See Appendix 5: Scholarship Recipients Attending Tertiary Institutions
Any other issues relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Can I leave you with this thought?

I believe that Western Chances has established that there is a huge need to boost the confidence and aspirations of young people in the West.

Western Chances is in danger of not being able to continue its successful work with young people in the west due to financial constraints.

If government money is to be put into supporting the West then some of that money needs to come to Western Chances.
Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Tuesday 12th August 2008

Report prepared by
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New Scholarships, Value and Number Since Inception
Renewal Scholarships, Value and Number Since Inception

Renewal Scholarships

Value

Number

Round

Value

Number

Renewal Scholarships

Round

$0.00
$10,000.00
$20,000.00
$30,000.00
$40,000.00
$50,000.00
$60,000.00
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$80,000.00
$90,000.00

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Scholarships by Municipality, All Rounds to Aug 2008

- Brimbank, 366
- Hobsons Bay, 71
- Moonee Valley, 52
- Maribyrnong, 112
- Melton, 67
- Wyndham, 45
Scholarship Recipients Attending Tertiary Institutions

- RMIT, 22, 23%
- VU, 34, 37%
- Melbourne, 9, 9%
- Monash, 6, 6%
- Other, 18, 19%
- LaTrobe, 3, 3%
- Deakin, 3, 3%
Introduction

Free Debate (FD) is an entirely not-for-profit organisation that operates with the aim of helping people from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds gain skills in communication and persuasion.

Western Chances and FD have been working together since 2006 to deliver high quality communications training to young people in the West. Both organisations believe strong communication skills are essential for young people to take advantage of opportunities and increase social participation.

In 2006 FD implemented a successful pilot programme at Bayside College. This programme focused on basic debating training and research skills and each participant was awarded a certificate by Western Chances for their committed involvement. Since then, Free Debate has expanded its programme to include a “train the trainer” course for teachers with the aim of fostering a debating culture within schools.

Programme Coverage

Summary (student numbers are approximate)

In 2006, FD provided:
- 4 training sessions
- at 1 school
- for 30 students and 2 teachers

In 2007, FD provided:
- 18 training sessions
- at 5 different schools (across 8 different campuses);
- for over 120 students (years 7-12) and 10 teachers;

In 2008, FD is in the process of providing:
- 15 – 25 session (5 session are already scheduled in August)
- at 8 schools
- for (expected) over 150 students and 10 teachers

In 2007 the program grew to incorporate different skills training at the request of participants. Many schools, such as Kurunjang Secondary College (Melton), Kealba College (Kealba) and Bayside Secondary College (Williamstown) were given training in formal debating with the goal of participating in competitions in future, as per the original FD pilot programme. However, other schools, such as Copperfield College (Delahey) received training as part of the school’s leadership training program which focussed more on persuasive presentation training and confidence building.

FD also provided training for teachers at Bayside SC (Paisley Campus, Newport) on why and how to use debating in class, and on activities they can use to build public
speaking and analytical skills in their students. It is anticipated that, in 2008 and 2009, FD will continue to expand the train the trainer aspect of the program, and develop further leadership training with requesting schools.

Response to questions

The responses below are based on the experience of our senior trainers, in their capacity as providers of complementary educational services to schools in the west. We acknowledge that some of the responses below rely on generalisations about staff or student behaviour which will not be true in all cases.

What are the greatest barriers to education in general

Lack of resources:

It is difficult for students to get experience in debating (and consequential improvements in speaking skills, confidence and analytical thinking) if their school cannot afford to allocate resources to enter them into the school debating competitions like those run by the Debater’s Association of Victoria. Although teachers can run excellent programs within the school, students benefit more from interacting with a range of other schools (particularly outside their local suburb or area).

One of our trainers experienced an extreme example of this problem. They observed a bright year 8 student that had never learned to read or write properly, i.e. she could hardly spell common words, did not understand basic grammar and generated unreadable written work. This student did not have a learning disability, and when our trainer asked the teacher why she was not given remedial classes, the response was that because the student was not dyslexic the school would not get extra funds to help her, and there were just not enough resources to help her and all the other students. According to this same teacher, there were 5-10% of students at the school whose written English made them "functionally illiterate", that needed and were not receiving remedial help.

Upbringing/home support:

Many students our trainers worked with had poorer communication skills than students at private schools because often their families do not speak English much at home, or they speak it at a less-than-fluent level. This in itself is not a critical problem as many children from an ESL background do well academically. However, several of the students our trainers worked with, from both ESL and native-speaking families, seemed to receive very little parental support for education/academic pursuits. In addition these students were not exposed to much news media. As a consequence, our trainers frequently spent a significant parts of the sessions explaining to students why they should want to learn, in addition to teaching them about issues relevant to debating and public speaking.

Staff motivation:

This is difficult to generalise about, given that there are so many outstanding teachers at the schools FD has worked with. However, our trainers found that, at many of the schools, the whole program relied on one teacher championing

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1 While the Debaters Association of Victoria does offer some free places, it is unfeasible for them to give free places to all the schools in the west.
debating. Anecdotally, those same teachers usually seemed to be coordinating several other programmes in addition to their classes. The workload of these teachers sometimes meant scheduling conflicts which would require the assistance of other staff members, who were not always willing to help. This lead to sessions being cancelled or nearly cancelled on several occasions.

In addition, when FD ran a trainer-the-trainer session at one school, the coordinating teacher struggled to get other teachers (particularly English teachers who have to teach debating as part of their classes) to attend. Ultimately, only 5 teachers attended and, although this session was very productive, it concerned our trainers that other teachers were so busy/overworked that they would not attend a 1 hour after school session, organised a month in advance. It is likely that this problem can be linked back to the resource issue, and will require either more teachers which creates more capacity to take on extra-curricular work, or more incentives to teachers to take on such work.

*What are the greatest barriers to Higher Education*

The issues set out above are also barriers to higher education, especially because they limit student’s abilities to gain entry into higher education institutions.

**Confidence and aspirations:**

Lack of confidence is an issue in the later stages of high school, especially in terms of applying and being accepted into higher education programs, and also influences outcomes if students gain admission. Many of the students our trainers worked with thought that most higher education was not a real option for them. They believe that they will not be able to get into courses; that university is just for "rich private school kids" and so on. Our trainers observed several very intelligent students, who believe they could never get into a university like Melbourne, Monash, Victoria or any other higher education institution. When our trainers were asked by students what they studied (to which the response is often "I study Arts and Law at Melbourne/Monash University") they often received the response, "whoa, no one at our school could ever do that". These lower expectations can be entrenched by other factors which in turn creates a vicious cycle. For example when students do not see many students from their peer group or region pursuing higher education, in comparison to the outcomes of big private schools, students in turn believe it is not realistic, which in turn reduces their motivation and chances.

This can also link in with teacher motivation as mentioned above. Students may feel like there are not options in higher education and may also be in schools with teachers who do not have the time or resources to convince them of the value of such a path. Consequently these students become harder to teach, take school less seriously and look for other options. These other options, such as vocational training and apprenticeships, then become the only options for students rather than as part of a range of alternatives that includes higher education.