

SOUTH PORT UNITINGCARE – BOLT PROGRAM

South Port UnitingCare is situated in South Melbourne where we serve the community of the City of Port Phillip and beyond.

Wellbeing and community is at the heart of everything we do, and we try to reach as many families as possible with our range of programmes and services. We are a small not-for-profit organisation which enables disadvantaged people to reach their full potential by providing opportunities for development as well as active participation in a supportive and inclusive community.

South Port UnitingCare's programmes support vulnerable children (3-11 years), youth (12-18 years), adults (18-54 years) and senior community members (55 and over) including carers, people with complex disabilities, the homeless, low-income families, disengaged youth, long term unemployed and young children with special needs.

Our current services include:

I. Youth Services, which provide prevention programmes to engage young people in education and provide opportunities for young people to engage with each other and with their local community.

II. The Port Melbourne Kindergarten, which has provided quality care for over 80 years and is renowned for its positive development of children.

III. Planned Activity Groups (PAG), which provide opportunities for older people and those with a disability to socialise and connect with their community. The Food Pantry and Relief Service which provides support through food parcels and material aid, as well as advocacy to those in crisis.

The programme which I'm especially keen to introduce to you is BOLT (Bicycles Over Lunch Time). In 2013, South Port UnitingCare was approached by Port Melbourne Primary school regarding a group of young boys in grades five and six who they identified were displaying anti-social behaviours and were at risk of disengaging from school and unable to transition to high school.

We responded by developing BOLT: Bikes Over Lunchtime which

is an early intervention programme based loosely on a previous programme called 'Roll On' which successfully supported disengaged youth in 2012 and which revolved around bike mechanics. South Port UnitingCare piloted the BOLT programme in Port Melbourne Primary school in 2013 with great success. The school asked for the programme to continue beyond the pilot.

What they noticed was an improvement in the confidence, self-esteem, resilience and leadership of young people, a reduction in behaviours of concern, less teacher interventions due to classroom disruptions carried out by the young people, and most importantly young boys were engaged in their school environment and had created connections to others including male mentors & other participants.

We then approached other schools locally including Albert Park, Galilee and St Kilda Primary schools to determine whether they too required the BOLT programme; which they did, and in 2014 BOLT was delivered in four primary schools locally.

Fast-forward to 2015 and we are now delivering BOLT in seven primary schools including Elwood locally and an extension into primary schools in Frankston and Werribee. We are also in the process of making arrangements with primary schools in Kensington, Stonnington and Geelong to deliver BOLT this year.

Looking forward to 2016, we would like to see BOLT delivered in an additional 5 primary schools and have earmarked Geelong, Bendigo, Albury, Wodonga, and Shepparton due to their growth, high levels of disadvantage and intergenerational poverty. This would support up to 40 young people.

The BOLT programme supports boys aged 9-12 in their middle years who are at risk of disengaging, by providing positive adult role models through a practical hands on programme revolving around bikes, as well as including lunch and weekly discussions regarding topics which relate directly to these young boys such as communication, resilience, leadership etc. Each young person is provided with a handbook which outlines weekly activities and topics. A trained youth worker and volunteers provide support and for some of the participants these are the only positive adult role models in their lives. BOLT runs for 10 weeks during the school term once a week.

The boys we work with are starting their lives in a position of disadvantage and with the real possibility of taking their issues with them into adulthood. We are taking action to support them through this – making changes to the ways that they are supported and treated and giving them the opportunity to see that there are other possibilities and outcomes available to them.