



## Overview:

The Student Youth Network Inc. (SYN) is the premier youth participation media project in Australia. SYN currently operates a full-time Melbourne-wide community radio station (90.7 SYN-FM), produces 7.5 hours a week of live television (broadcast on Channel 31 Melbourne & Brisbane), publishes a quarterly magazine (Pecado) and maintains a full-time internet presence ([www.syn.org.au](http://www.syn.org.au)). Of most significance, SYN is managed, operated and maintained entirely by people under the age of 26. This has been fundamental to meeting the organisation's philosophical goals, summarised in the 2004 Mission Statement:

- "to provide young people with opportunities, education and training in all areas of the media;
- to provide an informative and entertaining alternative to mainstream media;
- to support the interests of the youth community;
- to be youth focused and operated, fully;
- to respect local and new music, arts and ideas;
- to represent;
- to keep it real."

SYN membership is open to any individual (costing between \$5-25) and all members aged under 26 have the opportunity to apply for their own show. To ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to access airtime, the programming grid is completely re-formulated five times a year. All presenters have complete autonomy over the content, style and music of their show.

SYN has become a dynamic, informative and entertaining media outlet providing unparalleled access for young people to participate in creating their own media. SYN has proved to be an innovative leader in the community broadcasting sector and many of the youth-based participation programs developed by SYN have been utilised by community broadcasters across the country. This was recognised at the end of 2003 when the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia presented SYN with the Tony Staley Award for excellence in community broadcasting.

However, SYN has become more than just a media organisation; rather, it offers a unique access point and meeting place whereby like-minded youth organisations and individuals meet, make contacts and undertake initiatives in support of the diverse needs and interests of the youth community. As-a-result, SYN has been able to undertake numerous projects encompassing a broad range of activities designed to serve young people from across Victoria.

## **Key Programs:**

Education and training is the major focus of the Student Youth Network. All SYN members have the opportunity to be trained in all areas of radio production and the media industry. As part of the network, SYN has the formal support of over 20 youth educational organisations. Since full-time broadcasting commenced in January 2003 over 60 secondary-schools from across Victoria have directly participated in SYN-FM's on-air programming. SYN also has the formal support of every major tertiary student union in Melbourne, the National Union of Students, and several TAFE colleges. Secondary colleges use SYN for curriculum initiatives such as Oral English and ESL. SYN has also developed curriculum for the Victorian Certificate of Advanced Learning (VCAL) in the areas of radio production and media studies. As SYN is embedded in youth, all of the education and training programs are delivered on a peer-to-peer basis.

## **Re-engaging Young People in Education and Training:**

SYN's education and training focus endeavours to re-engage young people in learning through media creation. Young people are becoming more and more disenfranchised with traditional forms of education. SYN facilitates learning in a positive, practical and youth friendly environment, offering real and tangible outcomes for individuals. In the Australian Primary Principals Association Review of Teaching and Teacher Education ("Young People, Schools and Innovation" 2003), multi-media studies were identified as a useful tool to modern learning and learning for life:

"It (multi-media) not only fosters innovation and creativity, but also a greater engaging between students and learning. The outcomes seen among disenfranchised learners, such as Indigenous students and boys in the challenging middle years' cohort, have been extremely positive."

Multi-media studies not only enhance innovation and culture, but they offer a hard copy of processes and outcomes to be shared with others, whether it be in audio, video or computer media generated medium.

Studies have also found a number of strategies can be employed to improve students' learning and behaviour in school. These include:

- Hands-on learning and practical activities;
- Enterprise education, emphasis on collaborative learning styles with definable outcomes;
- Collaborative tasks, ways of delivering traditional curriculum in alternative ways;
- Peer-tutoring and developing;
- Open discussion and language development.

In a submission to the standing committee on Tasmanian Employment, Education & Workplace Relations ("Inquiry into the Education of Boys" July 31, 2000), Studentworks found that the most successful programs in the pursuit of these ideals were vocationally focused enterprise programs, which work in partnership with industry and the community. These ideals are embodied in SYN's education and training program.

More uniquely, for youth-at-risk who may not be involved in formal schooling, SYN provides an opportunity for them to explore post-secondary educational options. A key example of this is Ben Carey, whose program entitled "Sounds of the Street" won a National Youth Media Award for his story of homelessness and heroin addiction. Ben, who had not completed secondary-school when he joined SYN-FM, won a scholarship to study Sound Production at Northern TAFE.

### **Young People:**

In 2003, SYN-FM put over 1400 young people to-air. On top of this, it is estimated that over 2500 young people were involved through SYN's extensive education and training programs.

In terms of diversity, SYN-FM not only accommodates but embraces differences. It is a network that provides access to young voices which are excluded by the mainstream media, providing airtime to indigenous, physically impaired, youth-at-risk, youth from non-English speaking backgrounds, women, gay and lesbian youth, and other marginalised groups. SYN's ever-evolving network structure ensures such diversity of involvement. However, SYN's commitment to cultural diversity is not restricted to diversity of backgrounds, but includes diversity of interests. Since full-time broadcasting began, programs have been devoted to rock, dance, rap, hip-hop, punk, metal, reggae; to arts, sport, politics, cinema, comedy, feminist and environmental issues. Because of its inclusive structure, SYN will always respond to and engage with the emerging youth culture.

### **Geographic Area:**

SYN-FM's broadcast signal covers the entire Metropolitan Melbourne area and is as far reaching as Ballarat, Lorne, Kilmore and Warragul. SYN's education and training program is Victoria-wide, with many programs specifically targeted at including rural and regional secondary-schools.

### **Key Partnerships**

#### **Youthworx:**

Youthworx is a not-for-profit organisation focused on creating positive development programs for at risk young people through media creation. Youthworx brings with it the professional expertise to work effectively with disadvantaged and marginalised young people. The partnership with Youthworx is a core component of SYN's commitment to full representation, diversity and access. SYN and Youthworx have worked closely over the past four years and have established a strong and mutually beneficial relationship.

#### **Department of Education & Training (DE&T):**

SYN's extensive secondary-school involvement is facilitated through the organisation's partnership with DE&T. As-well-as providing access to all public secondary-schools, DE&T have given financial and in kind support towards SYN's education and training program (in the form of teaching, mentoring, curriculum development and administration).

#### **Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBA):**

The CBA is the peak body for community radio and television stations.

SYN's effectiveness to deliver education and training programs in rural and regional Victoria is limited once outside the SYN-FM broadcast area. However, SYN has been able to develop partnerships with rural and regional community radio stations through the CBAA network. This has enabled greater connectivity between young people and their local community radio station, as-well-as maintaining practical and tangible outcomes for the education and training programs delivered in these areas.

**Regional Arts Victoria:**

Regional Arts Victoria is a government funded organisation that initiates, facilitates and celebrates contemporary cultural practice and the arts in regional Victoria. Regional Arts Victoria has assisted the development of SYN's education and training programs in rural and regional areas of Victoria.

**National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC):**

The NEMBC has worked closely with SYN in developing a culturally and linguistically diverse component to SYN-FM's on-air and education and training programs. SYN is one of the only media outlets that creates opportunities for young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. The NEMBC play a vital role in assisting SYN's development as a culturally sensitive organisation.

**3KND:**

A not-for-profit community radio station, 3KND (Kool 'n' Deadly) serves the Koori population of Melbourne and surrounds. SYN has worked closely with 3KND to ensure that as many indigenous young people remain engaged in community broadcasting as possible.

**Joy-Melbourne:**

Similarly, Joy-Melbourne are a not-for-profit community radio station serving the gay and lesbian communities of Melbourne. SYN and Joy have undertaken joint projects specifically targeted at engaging gay and lesbian young people in community broadcasting.

**Melbourne Community Television Consortium Ltd. (C31 Melbourne):**

SYN-TV was launched in June 2003, a joint venture between C31 and SYN. SYN-TV is a live music video program hosted by presenters under the age of 18. SYN-TV is simulcast on 90.7 SYN-FM, C31 Melbourne, Briz31 and [www.syn.org.au](http://www.syn.org.au) (4:30 – 5:30 pm weekdays). In the period since, SYN's C31 programming has increased to 7.5 hours a week and television production has been incorporated into the education and training program. SYN continues to explore further expansion opportunities in partnership with C31.

**RMIT:**

SYN is located at RMIT City Campus and has been supported financially (cash and in kind) by the University, Student Union and a number of departments and faculties. Historically, many of SYN's tertiary-aged members have been associated with RMIT. (NB. SYN currently has involvement from all seven Melbourne-based Universities.)

## Impact Assessment

SYN has an emphasis on providing a real world education that encourages and facilitates participation, self-development and peer-to-peer learning. As-a-result, the education and training programs SYN provides are primarily focussed on delivering outcomes such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem, improved communication and analytical skills and a re-engagement in learning. While these outcomes are critical to develop among young people, particularly the disenfranchised, their intangible nature creates challenges in measuring their impact.

While feedback from participants (including teachers, youth-workers, etc.) is gathered regularly, the life-changing impact SYN may have is only revealed through broad anecdotal feedback. SYN regularly receives an overwhelming volume of positive feedback from parents, teachers and youth-workers; as-well-as individuals themselves. Every week there are examples of young people, previously disinterested in secondary-school curriculum, having a positive learning experience through SYN. A letter of support from one parent has been attached as an example.

Due to SYN's infancy, the overall impact of the education and training programs are too early to measure. In future years, SYN intends to critically analyse the relevant statistics (eg. retention rates, VCE/VCAL results, etc.) with regard to the secondary-schools that have had involvement from SYN. These can be used as a comparison to those schools that have not participated in SYN's education and training program. Systems are being put in place to ensure that the relevant data is collected for such analysis. Currently all education and training sessions require that trainees complete evaluation forms.

Secondly, a direct outcome of SYN's expansive education and training program is the creation of direct pathways into the media and entertainment industries. Opportunities for young people in the media are limited and incredibly difficult to obtain without experience in the industry. SYN's provision of such have placed it as the premier breeding ground for young media makers. After just 18 months of full-time broadcasting, SYN has amassed an impressive alumni working in community, commercial and government media organisations. This includes:

- Joanna McCarthy – previous SYN President, now working for the CBAA as the Membership & Development Manager (Community Broadcasting);
- Hamish Blake, Andy Lee & Ryan Sheldon – previous SYN-FM drive-time hosts, now comedy writing and presenting at Channel 7 (Commercial Television);
- Andrew Apostola – previous SYN Publicity Manager, now the NEMBC Youth Coordinator (Community Broadcasting);
- Danny McGinlay – previous SYN-FM announcer, now announcing at FOX-FM (Commercial Radio, Melbourne);
- Suzanna Rowe – previous SYN Production Manager, now the Talks Producer and drive-time host at 3RRR (Community Radio, Melbourne);
- Tansu Cogar – previous SYN-FM announcer, now announcing and music programming at SBS (Government Radio, Melbourne);
- Luke Morris – previous SYN-FM breakfast host, now announcing at Sea-FM (Commercial Radio, Townsville).

While these individuals are usually the “high fliers” of the organisation, they represent a beacon of success to the general SYN community, particularly the disenfranchised and at-risk young people involved. As such, the contribution of

talented and highly skilled individuals is an extremely valuable component of SYN's education and training program.

An indirect method to assess the impact of SYN is to analyse audience size and demographics. Although this is not critical with regard to meeting SYN's philosophical goals, a large and involved audience will be significantly more powerful for all on-air participants on 90.7 SYN-FM. (NB. SYN-FM's audience was estimated at 60 000 listeners per week; MediaMark: November 2003.)

### **Strategic Priorities**

The continued expansion of SYN's education and training program is a constant priority. At this stage, demand from secondary-schools, community groups and auxiliary educational providers far exceeds SYN's current capacity.

This is primarily due to a lack of resources, both physical and human. While SYN has been successful in garnering enough support to cover basic operational expenses and a skeleton staff, much of the organisation's operations are sustained through the efforts of volunteers. (NB. Transmission alone costs \$90 000 pa). Although volunteerism will always play a vital role in meeting SYN's philosophical goals, at present there is a heavy over-reliance on the goodwill of individuals. This is completely unsustainable.

To address this, SYN is implementing a comprehensive Business Plan over the coming 12 months (Executive Summary attached). The primary objective of the Business Plan is to create a staffing structure that continues to facilitate and support volunteerism, but is not reliant on such. This requires long-term, sustainable revenue streams. SYN has a significant capacity to generate revenue through commercial sponsorship and various promotional activities (eg. benefit gigs, CD releases, outside broadcasts, etc). But until the organisation is in a position to employ dedicated staff in these areas, these business drivers remain largely untapped.

Furthermore, SYN is severely hamstrung by a lack of space. SYN's entire operations, including studios, reception and office, currently run out of 100 square metres at RMIT. As a top priority for 2004/5, SYN management will continue to explore partnership opportunities to secure affordable office space and infrastructure. Significant progress has already been made over previous months, with Youthworx gaining support from the Salvation Army. This will hopefully translate into dedicated office space for SYN and Youthworx to co-locate.

In summary, SYN's foremost priority of the coming 12 months is reaching a position of long-term, financial sustainability. This will directly translate into a higher quality and more expansive education and training program, capable of meeting the substantial market demand.