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Doing nothing is no longer an option for young people

From the beginning of the new school year young people turning 17 in 2008 will be required to stay at school, be at TAFE or in training, do an apprenticeship or traineeship or be employed in a job with genuine career prospects.

Landmark legislation which passed in 2005 raised the school leaving age to 16 in 2006 and 17 in 2008.

To assist with the transition the Department of Education and Training has employed more than 80 new staff as ‘Participation Coordinators’ to help students, who are at risk of not being successful at school or in training, to find an education, training or employment option that suits them.

Former Fremantle Dockers player Kingsley Hunter has been working with the Department for Education and Training for almost a year as the Fremantle-Peel District Participation Coordinator and finds the work of placing young people on a pathway to a brighter future very rewarding.

“I think it is important for people to remember that the new leaving age laws don’t mean they have to stay in a classroom. They can be in training at TAFE or another registered training organisation, or they can be employed in a job with genuine career prospects.”

“The most common barriers to these students succeeding are family or social issues, but once they see they are capable of learning in a training organisation or working in a good job their confidence improves and they become totally different people,” Kingsley said.

“What makes a big difference to them is the support offered by the participation coordinators. We are always available to offer advice, help them get to interviews or find work. That kind of support and direction is essential and through it we create a pathway for them to gain a career.”

Kingsley said he had worked with 16-year-old students in the past 12 months who were too shy to speak at interviews and one who had not been to school for more than a year.

“After discussions with the students I was able to find out what they would like to do and through the connections we make with industry and employers they
had interviews and gained employment. Often this leads to apprenticeships and further training.

“Once the students have been successfully employed their confidence improves and they feel capable of taking on a training course. And we offer support, such as extra tuition, if they are struggling.”

INFORMATION ABOUT THE NEW LEAVING AGE LAWS

- The changes do not mean people turning 17 in 2008 have to stay in school, but it does mean that doing nothing is no longer an option.
- Other options than school include:
  - TAFEWA
  - Private Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
  - Apprenticeship or traineeship
  - Meaningful work with future prospects
- For young people who find school does not suit them support is available from District Education Offices through Participation Coordinators.

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