

**GREATER DANDENONG YOUTH NETWORK 2025
AGENDA**

Meeting Theme: Breaking Barriers: Understanding and Addressing School Refusal

Wednesday 19 February

9:30am – 11:30am

Meeting Format: Face to Face

Greater Dandenong City Council, Level 2 Meeting Rooms

225 Lonsdale St, Dandenong VIC 3175

<p>Acknowledgement of Country</p>	<p>9.30am</p>
<p>Welcome and Introduction Background: Victorian data submitted to a Senate enquiry showed the rate of school refusal grew by 50 per cent between 2018 and 2021. More recently, a 2023 survey conducted by the Greens found that 39 per cent of parents agreed or strongly agreed that their child had experienced school refusal in the past year (ABC, 2023).</p>	<p>9.35-9.40am</p>
<p>Series of service and program overviews Dept of Ed, Navigator Program Vic Govt funded initiative that supports disengaged students aged 12-17 to re-engage with education training pathways. Louise Palalagi is the Navigator Coordinator, employed by DE in Regional Office: Offers personalized one-on-one support to address underlying issues and explore alternative training opportunities. This program is available to young people living in CGD, Casey, or Cardinia Shire who have been severely disengaged from education for over one term. Referrals are open to anyone who can identify these young individuals. Offers intensive outreach support, facilitate referrals, and connect participants to appropriate pathways, ensuring access to the right educational resources. Collaboration with SE LLEN and South East Community Links enhances the support network. Catholic Care Dandenong Office facilitates the School Refusal Support program Domenic Vigilanti is the Senior Manager, Family Relationships & Wellbeing Services: CatholicCare offers a holistic approach and a toolkit for families and schools to help identify and address underlying issues. The School Refusal Support program was created 15 years ago as a multi-disciplinary initiative. It includes school-based units and counsellors who work closely with educators to identify challenges early and educate both parents and teachers. Early intervention is a key focus. The program also offers resources to help parents better understand and manage their children's emotions, with counsellors providing techniques such as yoga, muscle regulation, and emotional regulation to support emotional well-being. Uniting operates the School Attendance Support Program Jessica Homicki is the Team Leader, School Attendance Support Program (SASP) and Groupwork: The School Attendance Support Program (SASP) recognizes that school refusal is often a behaviour driven by underlying factors. The program offers comprehensive support, addressing a wide range of barriers, and works collaboratively with children, parents, and schools. Based in Cardinia Shire, the program focuses on early intervention, often beginning in the home. Schools within Cardinia can refer students to SASP, while individuals in Cranbourne, Clyde, and Clyde North can self-refer, along with referrals from professionals and schools.</p>	<p>9.40-10.00am</p>
<p>Understanding School Refusal (Desiree Smith, Orygen – joining via Zoom) 1. Brief overview of school refusal and its importance. 2. Understanding School Refusal 3. Root Causes and Risk Factors</p>	<p>10.00-10.20am</p>

<p>Orygen – Mental Health Support for Young People (12-15)</p> <p>Orygen offers specialised mental health services for young people aged 12-25, including clinical support and workplace training. They are committed to ensuring young people receive the right support at the right time.</p> <p>In 2021, there was a decline in school attendance from 91.2% to 87%. Education terminology can differ from mental health language, so it's important to be mindful of this when addressing attendance challenges.</p> <p>When identifying early signs of distress, it's important to use strength-based, non-stigmatising language. Academic underachievement, social and family difficulties, distress, and mental health challenges often intersect. Long-term effects can include poor academic performance, employment difficulties, and school dropout.</p> <p>Young people may display signs of distress in the morning, such as refusing to get out of bed, claiming to be sick etc. Also, during the day at school, such as requesting to leave class or calling parents. Parents and carers are often the first to notice these signs. It's important to understand how the young person describes their own experience at school.</p> <p>Multi-Tiered Approach to School Attendance</p> <p>Orygen use a multi-tiered approach to address school attendance challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1: Universal support for all students. • Tier 2: Targeted support for students showing early signs of difficulty. • Tier 3: Intensive support for students at risk of school dropout. <p>Key Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use consistent, strength-based language. • Avoid labels that may create stigma. • Early intervention is critical to improving outcomes for young people. <p>Resources:</p> <p>Orygen: A Guide For Supporting School Attendance</p> <p>Orygen: A Collaborative Approach to Supporting Young People Experiencing School Refusal</p>	
<p>Case Study x 2</p> <p>Small group discussion</p>	<p>10.20-10.40am</p>
<p>Presenting Services Panel Discussion</p> <p>Opportunity to unpack case studies with panel of subject matter experts, who were introduced prior to the case study.</p> <p>Question: Provide examples of schools doing a good job – what do the programs / initiatives look like?</p> <p>Schools vary in their resources and training on wellbeing and trauma-informed practices. However, many schools excel by implementing creative approaches, such as activity-based learning groups and collaborative initiatives. These efforts help build stronger communication and connections with families, ensuring a holistic approach to supporting students.</p> <p>School counsellors play a key role, along with proactive parenting programs that foster engagement and support at schools. Parental relationships with schools can be influenced by their own experiences, which may impact their level of engagement. This can create intergenerational challenges that affect school involvement.</p> <p>Question: How can we strengthen collaborations between schools and services?</p> <p>The key is to approach conversations with empathy, always working towards shared goals and a common understanding.</p> <p>The processes differ between Catholic and public schools, making it essential to navigate and overcome these barriers for effective collaboration.</p>	<p>10.40-11:00am</p>

<p>Question: How can parents, teachers and carers help kids find ways to attend school? One effective approach is the "PACE Model" (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, and Empathy). This emotional coaching technique helps young people regulate their emotions and develop a deeper understanding of their feelings, ultimately encouraging school attendance.</p> <p>Parental education and cultural awareness are critical. Engaging parents in the process of supporting their child's education through training and upskilling creates a stronger foundation for student success. Family involvement is essential for long-term impact.</p>	
<p>Network Information Sharing An opportunity for network members to introduce themselves and share a brief program / service update.</p> <p>Youth Health Clinic – sexual health, physical health, vaccines, young people looking for GP. Hanish – enquiries@headspacedandenong.com.au</p> <p>CGD Media Makers: 8-week program for young people to grow skills in social media content creation. CGD HAC (Holiday Activity Committee) for young people aged 12-16. Introductory program for leadership. FReeZA committee – event management course for young people to create events and paces within CGD. Autumn school holiday program – registrations open on Monday 24 April Adheesha – youthservices@cgd.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Busy at Work Employment services – support young people disengaged from employment and education. 15-24 yr olds. tel:1800-761-561</p> <p>YSAS – youth drug and alcohol services, day program for young people. YSAS programs and services are designed to meet the needs of young people who are, or who are at risk of, experiencing substance use related harm, difficulties with mental health and criminal justice system involvement. Jarrad – reception@ysas.org.au</p> <p>City of Greater Dandenong Youth Services website: Youth Services Youth</p>	<p>11.00-11.05am</p>
<p>Evaluation Thank you to the 41 people who completed the evaluation form. The results were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I was satisfied with today's meeting:</i> 9.2/10 • <i>I would attend another GDYN meeting in the future:</i> 9.7/10 • <i>I would recommend the GDYN to other local professionals:</i> 9.7/10 <p>For those who attended but haven't yet completed the evaluation form, you are still welcome to respond here.</p>	<p>11.05-11.10am</p>
<p>Meeting Formally Closes</p>	<p>11.10am</p>
<p>Time and space to network for those who can stay a little longer</p>	<p>11.10-11:30am</p>
<p>Next meeting Thursday 1st May 2025 Meeting Format: Online Link: https://greaterdandenong.zoom.us/j/88662086378?pwd=xlNOgtTi8qa4izxhQSb5QuNjyOwbP.1 Meeting ID: 886 6208 6378, Passcode: @pB8KB@JQz</p>	

**For submissions to the GDYN eNewsletter, please provide a brief update to Aishling.Fagan@cgd.vic.gov.au
Deadline for March 2025: Tuesday 25th February**