**‘Broadening Horizons Toolkit’ Transcripts**

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*Music:* [*Cuz I Love You*](https://bsta.rs/1ec8fe07) *by* [*wavytrbl*](https://wavytrbl.beatstars.com/)

**Episode 1: How might young people resolve community matters?**

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**Narrator:** Liz Smith works for Broadening Horizons in Gippsland, a Victorian program pairing industry partners with primary and secondary school students. It’s an awesome model for how young people might create change and solve problems in their own communities.

**Liz:** Industry organisations are very busy places. So we’re talking about a lot of government bodies like DELWP or Vic Forests, Parks Vic, in rural areas. And then other places like Latrobe Valley Bus Lines, the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority… so they face problems of practice within their daily work that engage community. So they might be something like, ‘how do we stop illegal dirt bike riding in our forests?’. For the Catchment Management Authority in East Gippsland, they’ve posed a question saying, ‘how might we explain how one area of the river links to the estuary and how do we educate community about the importance of those links and river health?’

So we frame problems as ‘how might we…’, so industry will pose questions like that and young people aged between grades five to ten will often, through a little bit of guidance, have the ability to come up with innovative and creative solutions to these problems, because they haven’t been looking at the same problem for five years. They have unique skills with their age; so digital literacy and finding information is something that they naturally, they’ve grown up in a world of technology that is far better than most people working in these organisations. And those are skills that can find authentic solutions to real problems of practice.

So the idea is that students work with mentors to A) sometimes identify what the actual problem is, and then B) come up with a solution and pitch it back to the industry partner.

Teachers have to hand over control to the students, and they have to let the students drive their own learning. Which, once teaching practitioners accept that kind of brief, they find success in the program. They get to see students grow by acting as a facilitator rather than providing the answer.

**Narrator:** What we can learn from this is how young people can make great contributions in community matters when you:

1. Establish a genuine, mutually beneficial relationship
2. Figure out together which unique skills they offer to the solution
3. Give space to their fresh perspective
4. Facilitate self-guided learning

This toolkit is part of YACVic’s Learning from COVID-19 Series, sharing the creativity and adaptions of the youth sector. For more stories like this, visit YACVic.org.au/COVID-youth-work. Or to get in touch with the Broadening Horizons program, visit [broadeninghorizons.com.au](http://broadeninghorizons.com.au/).

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**Narrator:** In the next episode, we discuss three great engagement ideas for online or hybrid activities.

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**Episode 2: Three great engagement ideas for online or hybrid activities**

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**Narrator:** Like several youth programs, Broadening Horizons moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Liz Smith shares three adaptions that her team created, what was successful and what they learned.

**Liz:** So the first thing was creation of an online portal for all of our participants to interact – within DET [Department of Education and Training] guidelines obviously. But what it’s created is an opportunity for industry to engage remotely. And the unexpected benefit of that is that a school as far up as Genoa or Mallacoota that might want to interact with us in the future can access industry, ‘world of work’ problems from an organisation based closer to Melbourne. And the flipside of that is that students can engage with the hub as well and access that information in a safe way, and that’s not reliant on Google or controls or things like that. So we’re setting it up so that that partnership and mentorship can happen in that online hub space.

The second thing that we’ve taken the time away to work on is a family-school partnerships toolkit for schools. They know how important it is to engage parents and carers in the learning of the children. Often they might have access to strategies or assessment tools, but not necessarily the toolkits to do so. So what we took the time to do was go away and actually create those lesson plans, or that activity, or that thing that gets you walking around the community with your child, taking an active role in solving problems and things like that. So encouraging families to participate in the program as a whole.

The last project is a mentor professional development package. So that’s a short, intensive training program and follow-up procedure for all of our mentors that engage with our program. And that’s to do with helping people that haven’t set foot on a school ground in 40 years know what to do when they get back to school, so that they’re not having to learn everything from scratch, and giving them a sure footing when they engage with a young person what might happen. And just giving them that help so that they are supported as they engage with our program and they feel as though they can do it confidently. And go in and all they’ve got to know is their content, and they can go in and deliver that.

**Narrator:** It’s clear that successful online engagement actually happens when it isn’t *all* online – it needs to be combined with real-life activities. Our three strategies to do this are:

1. Use safe online platforms to connect young people with their adult mentors
2. Involve parents and carers in real-life learning
3. Support mentors to know what to expect from online activities (more on that in episode four)

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**Narrator:** In the next episode, we go deeper into involving parents and carers in remote activities, and discuss three great strategies.

**Episode 3: Three great strategies for engaging families in youth activities**

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**Narrator:** Schools and youth workers know it’s important to engage families to improve young people’s outcomes, but how? And what about in remote environments? Liz Smith shares the tools the Broadening Horizons team provide, what works, and what they’ve learned.

**Liz:** The activities that we have that are conducted at home, they align with the Broadening Horizons learning model, so they’re designed to be deployed throughout the term.

There’s two Q&A activities, so the idea is that the child or young student sits down with their parent, carer, uncle, older cousin, whoever – and asks them what their opinions are of two topics in those questionnaires. So the first topic is ‘Projects’. The idea is that through a Q&A process, the student can say to their parent or carer, “what do you think about projects? What kind of projects do you do? What skills do you think they need?”. And through that Q&A it builds a conversation, or capacity to have a conversation, about the value of inquiry-based learning.

The second Q&A is all about resilience. So it’s a scaffolded Q&A where the young person can ask their parent or carer the question in a structured environment and receive answers that might teach them what their adult role models think what resilience means. And then feeding that back into the classroom and the class coming up with a special definition of resilience just for them, because it’s different to everybody.

There’s a community walkthrough activity that’s designed to be done as a family at primary school level. At secondary school level it’s about one-on-one time; so one student, one parent or carer. And the idea is that they go through the community and take a mindful walk, and ask structured questions around what they’re noticing, what problems they might see. And then thinking about thinking about places in the community that make them happy, that might spark a special memory. So it’s all about building a connection to place, and the ability to engage mindfully – and that’s, you know, putting the phone away and just walking around. But then coming back to the classroom for a reflection activity.

And then the last at-home activity is a family reflection challenge, and I’ve received some feedback that it might be a little bit too long, so we might cut it down. Over the space of the week, the idea is just that just before dinner time or just after, family comes together and takes ten minutes to answer a set couple of questions each day. And then the questions are different each day so that it’s encouraging active reflection within the family, and also sharing that reflection in a safe space.

We don’t know what the uptake of that will be, that’s probably the most challenging one on the list. Especially for blended families, where kids aren’t in the same household for seven days at a time. So there’s some challenges that I need to think about to reinvent what those look like, because a lot of the tools out there for schools to deploy are not aimed at diverse families. So I think part of the work that our program can do, even though we’re not engaging directly with the students that are affected by that diversity or that blended situation is that we can provide the tools so that they can be used in any capacity and that we’re not excluding people.

There’s so much research around improved outcomes when families are involved in the school. So if you can capture those families where literacy isn’t as high or engagement hasn’t been historically that great, that means that you’re already kicking a goal.

**Narrator:** So our three great strategies for family engagement are:

1. Structured Q&A activities, where the answers are then used as class materials
2. Community-based activities, that apply what young people learn to their local environment
3. Family reflection activities, that encourage safe and active discussion spaces within a household

Liz also suggests considering needs like the practical length of activities, diverse family situations, and literacy levels.

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**Narrator:** In the next episode, we dive into how adult mentors who aren’t normally youth workers, can be prepared to engage safely with young people.

**Episode 4: Tips for adult mentors working with young people**

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**Narrator:** Youth mentoring is often defined as a structured relationship between a young person and a trusted adult – an adult that is normally someone other than a parent, teacher or coach. The relationship should offer guidance, support and encouragement, so it’s important that the adult is well-equipped for this. The Broadening Horizons program recognises that the adult mentors they connect young people with might not have much experience working with young people. Let’s hear Liz Smith’s tips for supporting mentors to keep young people both engaged and safe.

**Liz:** Because Broadening Horizons is a way of working, and the program belongs to the schools, risk mitigation around mentors remains within the school's remit. And having said this, because the program is embedded within the school's curriculum, it allows for space where the program team - that being me - can build capacity of teaching practitioners to communicate the importance of the child safety standards to mentors. For example, we offer all mentors a professional development package. We offer that to schools on a school-by-school basis, if they would like. We also offer a generic one, or we offer some one-to-one support as it's required.

So within that mentor professional development piece, we invite the school to contribute so that they can explain school policies. Having that work done for us, it frees up my time to ensure that we're having really productive conversation: working on the actual mentors and the way that they engage with students, but also talking to the teachers about how they communicate policy, because there's a way to do it and there's a way to not do it. Because there's an existing policy and existing procedure, what we can do is take that time that's freed up by not having to come up with our own, to understand each school's procedure. So it means that I have a good knowledge of how they can differ; so, a small school to a big school.

And it means that I can take that time to help the teacher learn how to communicate that to somebody who is outside the school. So someone who's not familiar with a school policy, where there's jargon or… we can really break it down and make the policy and procedure easy for mentors to use. Say you've got one school that is presenting a positive behaviour matrix to a mentor, and saying, ‘we expect our students to show these qualities and positive behaviours in the classroom and we enforce that.’ And for a mentor that's quite jargon-heavy. So ‘positive behaviours’ is like, well, what does that mean?

My way to break that down for the mentor is to say, okay, when you're having a discussion with a young person and you feel like perhaps the behaviour is turning towards something that where you might be spoken to rudely, or you might not feel welcome, or something like that: perhaps look at the matrix and look at what types of behaviours you're seeing and what ones you're not seeing. And then also feel comfortable to say to the young person, hey, this is what your school asks you to do and I'm a guest at the school. So maybe you could afford that same respect to me as well. And there's a way to have that conversation with a young person just about making it clear that you have that boundary in place. You're not their friend, you're their mentor.

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**Liz:** Getting them to put themselves in the young person’s shoes. So saying, “well, do you have a child that’s this age? What would you be comfortable with someone asking them? With parents that’s a bit easier because they get it straight away and they’re like, “oh okay, well I would be okay with *that*, I wouldn’t be okay with *this*, so I’ll do *this*.”

With people that are a bit older – so say, Gipps Dairy engages mentors for our program that are dairy farmers, that have probably have never had a Teams meeting or a Zoom meeting before, let alone engage with a young person through that environment. But having said that, through that guidance of just saying, look, you’re a real person, the student is a real person, they might not have their camera on because they don’t feel comfortable and that’s okay. And just guiding them to say, you are allowed to ask them to put their camera on, but if they say no, don’t push the issue. And that was giving mentors the ability to feel empowered to ask a question, but also giving the students the ability to say, “well no, I don’t want to do that today,” and then them being okay. So it worked at both ends.

And I think throughout the pandemic, it was difficult for mentors to engage with students in a remote space, because it doesn’t feel like you’re having a real conversation with a real person. So we came up with a few things to tell mentors about, well, you might have a shared hobby or interest or, you don’t actually have to talk about the problem of practice right now. Just work on building that rapport so that next time you’re going to have a discussion you’re able to get to the next step. So for some mentors, that was about saying, “oh, where do you live?” and, “what do you like about where you live?” With some particular mentors, that’s been about getting them to think about why you were interested in the program in the first place.

But it’s also about encouraging them to think about the way they engage with young people. So some mentors are inclined to really want to help, and that means that they might provide the answer too quickly. Our program is about building capacity, right? So some mentors just need that little extra push to say, so we want you to be a really ‘evil’ Socrates-like figure \*laughs\* who just teaches through question-asking all the time. And whilst students or young people might find that frustrating, that type of inquiry-based learning is crucial to developing critical thinking and problem solving.

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**Liz:** Ethical youth work is about putting yourself in the shoes of a team coach. The coach's job for a team, it's not to score the goal; it's to encourage, advise and build capacity for their team to score the goal themselves. I encourage mentors to think about people in their own life, who have made an impact and how they did that.

**Narrator:** Working in a safe and engaging way with young people requires so much more than a Working with Children Check – it’s a consistent, multifaceted commitment. Let’s sum up Liz’s tips for supporting a mentor who may not have experience with young people in a professional capacity:

1. If you’re partnering with schools or other youth spaces, there’s a great opportunity to collaborate for mutual benefit rather than reinvent the wheel each time. Evaluate what already exists that you can leverage or build on.
2. Communicating child safety standards is not just about providing yet another document – it needs to be accessible and in plain language. Training and ongoing conversations are crucial for bringing policies to life, putting these standards into context, and showing why we have these standards in the first place.
3. Help mentors identify themselves as one adult part of a team, and encourage active reflection on what good examples of the mentor role may look like.

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**Narrator:** Thanks for following this series. Share it on social media and tag @YACVic, or get in touch to let us know what you thought.