

MORNINGTON PENINSULA YOUTH ENTERPRISES

....*For the Love of a Son*

Disappointment, frustration and lack of funding are all components of this community group's story, but there is also a "happy ending", or should one say, "continuance".

For MPYE (Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises) love was at the core of its conception, but other emotions also played a role. Love for a special family member. Disappointment at not being able to help with his problem. Frustration at the lack of support and understanding by established support agencies. But never one to give up, this is where and how MPYE started with the strength of character and determination by Russell Ardley, its anchorman, with the support of his wife, Debbie.



In 1996, Russell met up with a youth worker who helped set him on a journey of discovery not only for he and his son, but also for many who have tread the path to MPYE, as it is known today. Russell initially started a woodwork and welding program from a shed in his own backyard for disadvantaged kids with nowhere else to turn.

In 1998 with the help of many – including the Mornington Peninsula Shire – Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises was incorporated and further expanded its program.

Today, Mornington Peninsula Youth Enterprises undertakes many projects – a nursery that provides plants for sale to nurseries, wholesalers and the general public; wood working that allows individuals the opportunity to produce products from new and recycled timber, while at the same time gaining experience and knowledge of tradesmen's equipment and techniques; metal work and welding, office administration, basic computer training, vegetable growing, craft work and lead lighting. Plans for 2010 will see other courses added to this already expansive 'menu'. It is important at this point to note that all courses are free to disadvantaged youth. MPYE raises funds through nursery sales, sponsorship, the occasional grant and public donations.

When one uses the word 'disadvantaged' it can conjure up many notions. However, in the case of MPYE, their target audience is young people aged

from 15 to 25 who are disadvantaged for many reasons. Lack of education leading to being unemployable. Some hoping for the chance to start a 'new life' after being caught up in drugs and alcohol. Others who have spent time in youth detention centres and deserve a second chance. All have the promise of hope at

MPYE and the opportunity to contribute to the community in both their work and personal life.

Self Esteem is at the Forefront of All Actions

MPYE has a Committee of Management and 40 volunteers who put their heart and soul into all that they do for and with young people. It is also interesting to read the Facts Sheet, which outlines the calculation of savings to the community in the form of volunteer hours since MPYE's inception. It is estimated that volunteers work

406 hours per week and based upon a rate of \$25 per hour, they 'contribute' a yearly saving of \$447,726! Taking up on a real estate slogan, one would have to say – dedication, dedication, dedication!

Glamour is not a word that would be used to describe the group's surrounds with Russell's office being a converted shipping container. It bursts at the seams with brochures, end of year reports, grant application forms, stationery and files.

But then again a light at the end of a somewhat long tunnel is what MPYE is all about, not glamour. Of special significance, though, is what is pinned to the walls.

On first sighting they appear to be photocopied sheets of paper. But, oh, they are so much more to the senders and the receiver.

These are letters from some of those who have passed through the doors of MPYE and who have indeed turned their lives around. Their anonymity has been maintained by the blacking out of their name, but the message is heartfelt and similar in each case.

"Dear Russell thank you for what you have done for me".

Some contain details about their new jobs. Others about their 'new' life. And others about success in both business and life. Disadvantaged? Never. Simply someone who took the wrong turn but managed to

get themselves back on the right road with the help of a 'good road map' – MPYE.



As Russell Ardley states: "We don't measure success in monetary terms, but rather in the lives we all help to turnaround".

If you would like to help someone turnaround their life either by volunteering or making a donation, telephone 5977 2976.

- Dianne Baxter