



Program at risk

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM FACES THE AXE

By **JOSH GIDNEY**

THE Partnership Broker Program, South Coast Workplace Learning's largest contract, is under threat and job losses may result if it is terminated.

The program brokers agreements between employers, charities and schools to direct young people at risk of long-term unemployment into work, education, training and work experience.

For the past four years SCWL, through the Partnership Broker Program, has been creating pathways between students and employers in the Eurobodalla and Bega Valley shires.

Partnership Broker Program executive officer Craig Dadds said the organisation had been told "categorically" that May's federal budget would result in the program's funding ceasing at the end of the year.

A spokesman for Senator Scott Ryan, the parliamentary secretary for education, said the previous Labor government had not funded the service beyond 2014 and any further cash injections were still the subject of budget talks.

SCWL executive officer Steve Picton isn't giving up hope that the Partnership Broker Program won't be axed.

"Nothing has been set in writing, and we do hold strong hope that it will continue," Mr Picton said.

"It hasn't been made official and we still hope it will be considered in the May budget.

"At the least I would hope that they offer a period to do a solid review and come up with a viable alternative.

"The end of the program would not mean the end of SCWL, which has other contracts, but would be a big blow to youth gaining practical workplace skills."

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Mr Picton spoke to Eden-Monaro MP Peter Hendy about SCWL on March 27, and received a positive response.

"Peter was very interested and impressed by the program," he said.

Mr Picton said the service had worked with more than 4000 people and 850 businesses in the region over the past four years, as well as many schools.

"The students completing year 12 increased for 57 per cent to 63 per cent between 2009 and 2012," he said.

SCWL statistics show that 4835 opportunities for students to access businesses and community groups including mentors were created between 2010 and 2014.

Moruya High School head teacher and SCWL board chairman Mike Dent says he is "quite gutted" about the threat to the Partnership Broker Program, even though he predicted it.

"That they are not going to renew it or replace it with anything is devastating," he said.

"What is done by the Partnership Broker Program won't be able to be done by the schools; they are flat out."

He believes that it is to be scrapped because the government "doesn't want to fund Labor policy".

"But the precursor to this program, Careers Advice Australia, was a Howard Government initiative," he said.

"If they do this, we will lose the conduit between schools and local employers, which would be a real pity in an area with such high youth unemployment.

"It would be a retrograde step, like if they said 'let's cancel health care for everyone over 60.'"

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PLEASE RECONSIDER: South Coast Workplace Learning executive officer Steve Picton, Moruya High School careers advisor Tracy Hogg and head teacher and SCWL board chairman Mike Dent hope the federal government will not scrap the Partnership Broker Program.