



Initiatives

CYBI Inc.

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Empowering Youth through Innovation

– An interview with Mary Wooldridge



Mary Wooldridge says the Foundation for Young Australians, of which she is the Chief Executive Officer, operates as a 'venture philanthropist.' The description sits well with a dynamic, not-for-profit organisation that invested \$4 million in initiatives that benefit young people in 2002, and managed an active grant portfolio of \$6 million.

The Foundation was formed in June 2000, from the merger of the Queen's Trust and the Australian Youth Fund. Both of these organisations had been operating for some years to promote initiatives in favour of young people. They had different perspectives: 'The Queen's Trust tended to focus on excellence and leadership, whereas the

Australian Youth Foundation was more focussed on projects involving disadvantaged young people,' according to Mary. However, since the merger, these different approaches have tended to support each other, and have resulted in a model that is strongly youth-led and flexible.

'We seek to help young people by supporting new ideas, helping them to realise their full potential, and contribute actively to the community,' Mary explains. The theme of empowerment is omnipresent in the Foundation's work. Youth are not only running the projects that the Foundation funds, but are also directly involved in approving the grants – 56 young people, in fact, sit on the Foundation's funding committees, giving them a majority say in a significant proportion of the Foundation's decisions. The central role that the Foundation gives to youth involvement is probably its main distinguishing feature.

Perhaps because of this, the range of projects in which the Foundation is involved is extremely wide. There are programmes to reduce the incidence of car theft and build employment skills amongst young people who have been released from the Justice system or who are long term unemployed; to teach skills to young mothers and re-employ them in the hospital system; and to fund professional development for young artists in the ACT, amongst many others. Projects benefiting young Indigenous Australians receive a quarter of the funding.

Mary sees the process of involving young people in decision making as extremely important. One of the major initiatives for 2003 has been the launch of Partnership Grants with Organisations. This innovative programme involves two phases; in the first phase, nine organisations that work with young people have been selected (from 170 applicants), to form partnerships over a 3 month period. These partnerships identify needs and then develop specific proposals to address the young people's areas of concern. In the second phase, about half the organisations will be selected to implement their proposals. As well as giving the Foundation the chance to work with organisations for three months before making major commitments of funds, 'with youth leading the thinking on identifying the issues and developing solutions, there's the

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A Natural Combination

Yoga and naturopathy are a natural combination for Julia Cahill, and both are becoming more popular in Canberra. 'All the yoga teachers have as many classes as they want. There's a very large pool of people interested in starting yoga, so you don't have to compete with each other at all to generate those numbers. There's a real sense of sharing teaching opportunities and classes,' Julia says.

A naturopath will typically guide people into under-

taking some regular exercise, and yoga is one of the best choices, because it's for

everyone: 'If you're breathing, you can do yoga!' So the two sides of Julia's business are mutually supporting.

Both yoga and naturopathy take an holistic approach to health maintenance. 'Yoga is a system of health and lifestyle management, focussing a lot on physical exercise, and breathing awareness. There's also a large component of relaxation and meditation and a philosophy of living that underlies those physical practices,' Julia explains. 'People utilise the various

practices of yoga to suit where they are in their life. It's very flexible - like a smorgasbord you can take what you need at the time.'

'Naturopathy,' on the other hand, 'is a healing modality based on the principle that nature has everything we need to be in the best health, both of body and mind. It comes down to 5 basic principles, fresh air, sunshine, clean water, good food, exercise (which is where it fits together with yoga).' Like yoga, naturopathy has a

wide appeal. 'It's for anyone whose health isn't what it could be, or as good as it used to be, or who wants to maintain it.'

'If you're breathing, you can do yoga!'

Julia Cahill

Julia started getting involved with both her professional pursuits some 15 years ago as a student in Sydney. When she realised how much she loved it, she began a teacher training programme. 'I was looking at how to meld yoga with another career base, and decided naturopathy would bring both of those together,' she says. After graduating in 1998, Julia moved to Canberra, partly because she joined the NEIS programme here.



'NEIS was the best thing I've done in regards to my business. I got a whole lot of contacts and a whole lot of doors opened for me just through the process of writing my business plan,' Julia comments. Within a week of starting NEIS, she had been offered a job teaching yoga, and the chance to open consulting rooms, at the Fernwood Fitness Centre in Braddon, where she worked for 2 ½ years. 'I could link into their existing larger client base,' Julia says. 'The biggest challenge in my field is actually to connect with the people who are your potential clients.'

While Julia was working in Braddon, she found out about CYBI, and joined the programme. It was the networking and support aspects that appealed, since Julia did not utilise CYBI finance. 'It was a good chance to reconnect with the spirit of NEIS, sharing ideas with other people who were all giving their own businesses a go.' Through CYBI, Julia made contact with a CIT marketing student, who made her business a final year project, and helped with ideas about marketing and strategy. There were also ideas on tax, and advice when considering expansion. 'At the times when I

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Expansion in the Capital Region

The project is moving closer to completion.

Following the encouraging response from regional community representatives, the details of implementation are being settled. A strong communication campaign is being designed which will be featured in coming issues of *Initiatives*.

The project is supported by the Capital Region Employment Council (CREC), and by funding from the Regional Assistance Program administered by the Department of Transport and Regional Services. ◊

Specialised in Small Business

When a potential candidate approaches CYBI, their first point of contact is CANBAS (Canberra Business Advisory Service), which provides administrative support and helps publicise the programme. When they call, it's most likely that they'll talk to Vicky Baldwin, Business Information Coordinator, who will deal with their enquiry, and send them the required information, so Vicky has a key role in the success of the programme.

CANBAS is a programme funded by the ACT government, which helps small businesses throughout the Canberra region. It runs an extensive programme of seminars, workshops and one-to-one facilitation for small businesses in every stage of development – starting up, managing, expanding, or closing down. This gives Vicky and her colleagues a wide exposure to small business and small business support organisations throughout the ACT - in fact, since Vicky and her colleagues meet many people intending to establish their own businesses, they are frequently able to introduce them to the programme.

Vicky describes some of the work in which she's involved: 'There is a semi-

nar for people just starting out in business called *Your First Steps*. People can attend the workshop, then if they have any further questions they can arrange a one-on-one appointment with one of our business facilitators by contacting our office. We have monthly workshops for businesses that are a little more established, that anyone can attend offering a good networking opportunity.' CANBAS can also help if you want to buy or sell your business, or need information and assistance with business planning. What's more, most of CANBAS' services are provided free of charge.

Now, Vicky's heavily involved in promoting the *Small Business Employment Ready* programme. 'That and CYBI are my 'twins'.

You just have to be bold!

Vicky Baldwin,

The Employment Ready programme is a 2-day free workshop for businesses that are looking at employing for the first time; it covers all the compliance issues and everything to do with employing staff. We have guest speakers from ACT WorkCover and the Australian Taxation Office, and we have the ACT Chamber of Commerce, who come and talk about Australian Workplace Agreements on behalf of the Employment Advocate.' Of course, while Vicky is promoting CANBAS' wide range of programmes, she's also able to promote CYBI, particularly when she meets people in the right age group.

Vicky has been in small business herself, with her husband, running a motorcycle workshop in Queensland, so she knows how it works – and the challenges small businesses face. The most common problems she sees in her work here are difficulties in market research, control, and administra-



tion. The expectations of the Australian Taxation Office and WorkCover are high, and not enough people know about their requirements. 'When we run our workshops, there are always people who realise they're not doing something they should, so we do our best to help everyone and answer all their questions, or guide them to where the solution lies' Vicky says. 'Finance is always an issue as well. People often don't have any idea.' CANBAS doesn't recommend any particular suppliers, but can provide contacts to give professional advice.

The issues faced by young people starting in business are not much different from those in the other age groups, 'although often they have a good idea, they just don't have any finances, –this is where we will offer them CYBI,' says Vicky. They also need help to build up a network, and the ACT is quite well set up in this respect. 'We have a fair few young people who are regular attendees at our workshops, and participate in mentoring programmes.' The biggest problem, for young and old alike, is getting up the courage to participate, but there are no magic solutions for this. 'You just have to be bold!'

Ponderings

Most of the important experiences that truly educate cannot be arranged ahead of time with any precision.

Harold Taylor, President, Sarah Lawrence College



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A Natural Combination

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was at the point of making big decisions, it was nice to be able to get advice from people who were really experienced,' she says.

Julia didn't end up expanding the business, choosing instead to have a baby. 'I'm still doing some yoga teaching. I've selected my best classes, the ones that fit in with my time, but I'm taking a longer break from my consulting,' she says. 'I've been able to create my own working conditions and hours, and there's a lot of benefits from that especially now. Also, I can decide how big my business becomes.' The key, though, is to know that you are running the business, not the business running you.

Of course, running your own business isn't always easy. For Julia, the main challenge was getting on top of the financials. 'My skills aren't around computers,' she admits. 'I found the GST was quite a challenge – particularly the frequency with which I had to have everything sorted out. For me it was enough to get on top of using MYOB!' Finding self-motivation is also an issue. 'That's where something like CYBI helps,' Julia says. 'I like to draw on other people who are doing a similar thing, so that there's more of a support base professionally, and also to feel like you're part of a team.' This also helps combat isolation, which can be a problem 'Especially if you're in a healing profession where you're constantly the person who everyone's coming to for help on some level, physical mental or emotional. You give out a lot,' Julia says.

Julia's recommendation to anyone starting a business? 'Give it a go and utilise all the advice and experience that you're offered.'◇

Empowering Youth through Innovation

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learning and excitement that comes from the role young people play as a leading part of the organisation,' says Mary.

By necessity, the Foundation's structure is flexible. There is a National Board, with representatives from each state and territory, and a headquarters in Melbourne, where there is a staff of 15. But beyond that, there is a network of volunteer committees in each state and at a national level, who are involved in the decision-making on the grant round, and on specific projects as need be. The prevalence of volunteers reflects the value the Foundation places on community involvement. 'We seek to be as broadly networked as we can,' Mary says. The Foundation is sitting on a number of Commonwealth government committees and fora related to youth enterprise.

Both in its emphasis on youth initiatives, and its commitment to community involvement, The Foundation for Young Australians shares the values of CYBI, and in fact (together with the ACT Government) the Foundation and its antecedent the Queen's Trust has been CYBI's main source of funding over the years. CYBI is, in turn, proud of its role in supporting the aims of the Foundation in the ACT.◇

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