

# Parish Life blog: Skills to succeed

Fr Andrew Hamilton | 04 July 2019



**World Youth Skills Day is a clunky phrase. But the day, held on 15 July, is important because it insists that each young person is important in themselves and is a gift to society.**

Young people are the future of an increasingly sophisticated and interconnected world in which those who have skills will find employment much more easily than those who are unskilled. Training is important at a time when many unskilled jobs are disappearing and when young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than their elders.

## **EDUCATION A HIGH PRIORITY**

To gain skills young people need good teachers and mentors. Access to good education is a high priority for society. It is particularly important for young people from a background of deprivation.

That is why most Catholic schools and teaching religious congregations began by reaching out to children in impoverished areas. Ragged schools drew children who were not attending school and gave the children a good basic education that enabled them to find employment and to develop their skills and self-confidence. Later, as societies became more sophisticated, schools prepared people for tertiary education so allowing them to teach, nurse and to enter other professions.

In developing nations in which there is much poverty it remains a priority to help disadvantaged young people connect with society and gain skills through receiving a basic education. In Australia it needs also to be a focus in Indigenous communities and in other areas where people are disadvantaged.

## **SOCIETAL CONNECTIONS**

Young people who have been in the justice system need the education and skills that enable them to connect with society. That can make all the difference between a life spent in and out of prison and a life of stable relationships in the wider community.

It is a sobering thought that in Australia a large proportion of the prison population comes from relatively few geographical areas. It is equally striking that in those areas people are more likely to suffer from mental and physical illness and addiction. They are less likely to have access to child and educational support and are more likely to be unemployed. On every scale of disadvantage these areas are conspicuous.

Society has ultimately to pay for the human costs of failing to support people in early childhood, in schooling, in parenting and in dealing with illness at an early stage through the building of prisons, institutions for the mentally ill and hospitals.

### **SUPPORT NEEDED**

It would contribute greatly to human happiness and a fruitful society if the resources devoted to addressing this failure could be devoted to supporting them connect with society. In that, education and the gaining of skills are essential.

Of course, the learning of skills and access to education are not simply about building a more prosperous society. They are about helping people, each of whom is precious, to grow in respect for themselves and others, to develop their gifts and to build good relationships with others and with their world. Skills matter because people matter.