

Young guns

"Deep down, everybody wants to know that they are an amazing person, that they can have amazing success in life and that they're loved," says Williams (right) with his Tomorrow's Youth co-founder and friend, Dale Beaumont.



THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

When two life-changing events forced schoolmates Dale Beaumont and Brent Williams to re-evaluate their lives, they founded Tomorrow's Youth, an organisation that helps troubled youths to realise their worth. Now, with 2000 members across four countries, they're definitely doing it for the kids. By Carrie Hutchinson. Photographed by Harold David

As final year high school students back in 1999, Dale Beaumont and Brent Williams had bright futures mapped out. They'd met in year seven where they'd formed a solid friendship. They excelled academically and had great families and good friends. Williams dreamed of a career as a movie director; Beaumont was exploring possibilities as both a personal trainer and health and fitness writer.

Fast forward to 2004 and the perfect ending to this story would have seen the two 23-year-old men rich and famous. Then again, as these two will tell you, success in one aspect of life doesn't necessarily guarantee triumph in another. Two weeks after completing the HSC, an event occurred that changed Williams' life and, ultimately, that of his friend. Late one night, outside a nightclub in an outer Sydney suburb, he was robbed. "I had a gun to my head for about 10 minutes," he says. "I was trying to calm the guy

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down. My life flashed before my eyes and I saw all the images of the person I had become. Then all the regrets came in - all the things I said I was going to do and hadn't done."

Thankfully, security guards came out of the club and scared off his young attackers, who were arrested later that night. But the incident made Williams look at life in a different way. "I decided I had to make the most of my life because it can go like that," he says.

Beaumont's life-changing event had occurred the previous year: his younger brother Lee was killed after being hit by a train. "It was a freak accident," he says, but that didn't save him from a mountain of guilt. "Because he was my younger brother, I felt a sense of responsibility that I should have been there to support him and protect him. I was really depressed. I didn't really know what I wanted any more, and I was crying a lot."

The incidents made both men wonder what they really wanted from life and, more importantly, how they could achieve their aims. It led them to a wealth creation and personal development course that proved to be a revelation. "We loved it," says Williams. "We soaked it up like sponges."

That course lead to others - on success, finance, career, communication skills. Thousands of dollars later, they realised their fellow "life students" were much older than they were and an idea formed: the pair decided to create a program to teach teenagers the life skills they never learned at school.

In October 2001, Tomorrow's Youth was born in Beaumont's parents' garage. For six months, they wrote the program and spread the word. "The first program we ran, we had three people come along, so it wasn't a very big launch," says Beaumont. They were troubled teens from a drop-in centre.

"We were 19," says Williams. "The biggest thing was when a guy who was 21 turned to the sister who ran the centre and said, 'You've been telling me this stuff for years, I never listened. These guys are younger than me, so there must be something to it'."

While they never intended to target troubled teens, it proved to be a good start, and through word of mouth, more young people - and their parents - searching for guidance discovered the pair.

Now, three years later, that initial three-hour program has expanded to encompass an entire weekend called Empower U. More than 2000 people, aged between 11 and 25, from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia, have taken part. Beaumont and Williams have also written a companion book, *The World at Your Feet*, (available from major bookstores) and run a monthly "All-Star" support group for those who've done the course.

On meeting them, you can't help but be impressed by their self-belief and wide-eyed enthusiasm. If you were the mother of a teenage girl starting to date, they're the kind of clean-cut, young men you'd hope would be knocking at the front door on a Saturday evening. (For the record, Beaumont is married but Williams is single.)

Getting the business off the ground wasn't

easy. As they explain some of the difficulties they'd experienced, proof of their background in personal development appears. Williams explains his personality type is "high influential", while Beaumont is a "high D, which is very dominant".

"When we started this, Dale got on my nerves more than I got on his," Williams adds matter-of-factly. "We got in each other's faces a lot of the time."

Beaumont barely bats an eyelid at his friend's abrupt honesty. "Now we know our strengths, know our weaknesses. It's like yin and yang - we're really able to work together."

For those who take part, the Empower U journey is an emotional one. Williams turns on his laptop to display photographs of cheering teens flushed with their own success. "All these people on Friday night [when they arrive] are sitting there going, 'Get me

out of here' and playing with their phones," he says.

Over the following two days, participants are immersed in an alien environment. There are concert lights, videos and a DJ as well as hugging and talk of emotions. Beaumont and Williams speak about communication, emotional intelligence, goal-setting, leadership and career success. Both talk of personal experiences, including Williams' robbery, but are careful not to share too much of themselves. "We're very conscious of the fact that people aren't there to hear about how great we are, they're there to hear how great they are," says Williams.

Seventeen-year-old Armina Soemino attended Empower U two years ago and is now a volunteer. She's an excellent student with a loving family and friends who, nevertheless, think her dream to be the president of Australia is quite mad. She's just the sort of teenager Beaumont and Williams hoped to inspire when they launched Tomorrow's



Youth. "People were putting me down because I have grand dreams," she says, were saying you might want to choose an ambitious field or you're too young or you're a woman or you're Asian. Now I believe in myself and have the confidence to say that I can do it and that's all that matters."

This type of result is common. By the weekend, most of the kids saw that their most important things in life than having a flashy phone or expensive trainers. "By Sunday they're coming out crying, hugging their parents and telling them how much they love them," says Williams. "People say, 'How do you do this and-a-half days?' I guess if you can shake up enough, really stick it in their face - let's live life, let's look at where you're at, let's get out of your comfort zone - you can achieve amazing things. And people want to do that. Deep down, everybody wants to know that they are successful, that they can have amazing success and that they're loved."

While the program is a success, there are some knockers - those who think young people believe they can teach others about life. "I've had upstarts. Soemino says some of her friends don't understand her dedication to the program. "It's hard to explain to people," she says. "They think it's a religious cult or something really weird."

At 23, both Beaumont and Williams are still in their days as Empower U presenters are num

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Teenagers, it seems, only trust other young people and they're busy searching for younger people and expanding the business. "We need people, like corporate sponsors or the government, to get behind it," says Beaumont.

Ultimately, they'd like to see Tomorrow's Youth in the hands of their volunteers. "We know this is greater than two people," explains Williams. "It has a life of its own now. I think that to hang on to it, it'd never grow."

Besides, they have other fish to fry. Williams has to pursue his dream of becoming a filmmaker like Spielberg and Beaumont hopes to further his writing and speaking profile and, perhaps, get into politics. "We know this isn't something that lasts forever, but we have committed the next few years to working with young people," says Beaumont. "It's also a stepping stone for us to go on to greater things." ■

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