



Public Submission
Education of Boys Standing Committee
This submission is made by:

Rock Eisteddfod Challenge

“Celebrating 21 years...”

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Pretty soon it was our turn to perform, There were a lot of nervous people but everything went really smoothly for us. Onstage was really excellent and dancing in front of up to 6000 people was surely an experience we'll never forget"

Jonathan Crawley, Charter Towers State High School

Aim of Submission

The aim of the inquiry is to look at what may be done in early to middle schooling that can help and benefit boys. What should also be addressed is what programs / initiatives are already being implemented that could possibly do with more support from the Government to ensure they keep running, thereby supporting our boys !

The Rock Eisteddod Challenge is Australia's number one schools' based youth culture event. In 21 years over half a millions young Australians have participated in a Rock Eisteddfod Challenge event and the subsequent television specials are watched by over one in three 12-18 year olds each year.

With an advocacy of 100% tobacco, alcohol and drug free lifestyle remaining the central philosophy and ethos to the event it becomes very clear that such an event can be a bridge to help troubled teenagers especially in the areas the committee is investigating. (Appendix 1 & 2)

*“Joining the REC was easy, we imagined ourselves
perving on girls, bludging on Sundays and
generally stuffing around with mates. But as us
three losers marched through the door we were
rudely shocked upon seeing that the reality of REC
was nothing but blood, sweat and tears. We didn’t
know our full dancing potential, but as REC
progressed we have now realised that we are
DISCO KINGS!”*

Hans Bootsvan, Frank Beaver and Hip Bomaderry High School

Introduction

The Rock Eisteddfod Challenge (REC) is a performing arts event involving secondary schools and their students around the country. The program has proven to be quite successful with it being implemented in New Zealand, the UK and in 2000, at the invitation of the US Surgeon General - Dr. David Satcher in Washington DC. As a general education and drug prevention vehicle, its primary focus is on youth being the best they can be without the use of tobacco, alcohol or other substances. (Appendix 3)

It communicates health and social education issues messages to teenagers in a positive and supportive environment. It empowers youth with the resources and the opportunities to express their creativity through music and dance. Students acquire new and valuable skills as they learn about the many elements of creating a stage performance including music production, choreography, staging, set design, and construction. The need for commitment and co-operation enables students to develop effective approaches to social and professional situations, which can be utilised throughout every aspect of their lives.

The Rock Challenge is highly successful because it involves students through the mediums of music and dance in an interpretation of **their** world. Students find the REC to be a great way to express themselves theatrically, to define the way they dress, the figures they model themselves on, and the culture and sub-cultures they identify with.

“ This is my fourth REC. Being one of only a few boys at our school willing to go on stage to dance (most guys go backstage) is a real challenge, but the feeling of performing in front of an audience is great.”

Aldo Bogatini, Yanchep District High School

Community Building

- Preparation for the REC is primarily an **extra curricular** activity for most schools, which encourages young people who often have no other interests to make positive use of their spare time.
- The preparation of an REC entry provide an ideal opportunity for **informal contact between a school and its local community**.
- Feedback received from teachers involved with this event indicated that **truancy is reduced and discipline is improved** amongst its participants.
- The Rock Challenge attracts young people with a wide range of capabilities, **including disaffected pupils who would not normally take part in extra curricular activities**, and encourages them to extend themselves.
- In building communities, **the event develops protective factors** which help students resist alcohol, tobacco and other drug misuse.
- In terms of social education, the event can be used as **a focus for personal, social and health education**.
- Participating students inevitably **develop their personal and social skills** such as self-esteem, teamwork, and evaluation.

Why the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge in my school

An event like the REC involves thousands of students, teachers, parents and community members every year.

My school has been actively involved with this program for 12 years, and it continues to be a vital component within the school extra curricular program. Over that time I have seen approximately 1500 students involved in some capacity, with many coming back to help even though they have long finished school.

Whilst there is a high percentage of females involved, the number of males on stage and backstage continues to fluctuate year by year...but there are always males involved. Gone is the "sissy" attitude that went along with males performing on stage, instead a pervading sense of pride and success, and willingness to be part of the team.

I have seen shy males' self-esteem increase, students gain personal satisfaction at work done, and leadership skills improve. Students are given the space needed to explore their own feelings to work relationships, along with working with people from a variety of age group.

What the REC helps provide within my school is an environment for boys to reflect upon a number of things including their behaviour towards females, staff, their peers along with the concepts of, teamwork, working individually, conflict resolution etc.

Rules are established early on in the piece with each student signing a contract asking them to uphold a variety of structures set in place. (eg, no smoking, punctuality to rehearsals, and school work not suffering etc.)

Boys want rules and rights clearly expressed, but they also need relationships!

Boys also like competition, and there is an element of this within the REC and within the group. (eg. The backstage group work hard at getting the stage set up and then struck in 4 minutes one of the rules of the REC).

Over the years, we have had males as leads, backstage managers, on – stage managers, hosts, etc. We were not gender specific towards certain roles, and both males and females noted that they could be asked to do a job because they could do it, not because it was expected that boys did it better or vice versa. (eg. Girls in the backstage crew lifting, and boys dancing).

The school football team were usually part of the backstage group, not because they didn't want to go onstage (some were very keen), but their training schedule prevented them attending vital dance rehearsals, as they often clashed. When we first started boys were quite self conscious in performing, dancing wearing makeup, but over the years other males saw that the usual social stigma associated with boys in the creative arts was indeed a fallacy, and that performing in the REC did not mean you were "Gay".

Addressing gender issues alongside social issues such as homophobia, substance abuse etc. is vital during adolescence, and exposing students to role models (ie. Year 7 students see older males happy to be onstage etc.) helps in the overall socialisation process of males.

Boys are also given ample opportunity to work one to one with staff, and have often found solace and comfort when other issues are distracting them, through talking about it with an adult, whom they consider as both friend, role model and confidant.

Another opportunity forwarded students within the REC framework which we participated in last year (1999) was the **Battle of the Bands**, which saw three boys who had been playing together socially in a garage band, a professional opportunity. These students were a real mix - one who was a quiet achiever, another 'loud mouth' who was failing his subjects, and the third an average student – academically, and socially.

As their Yr. 12 Coordinator, I thought this event may help them get organise and motivate them. I kept pushing them to get a video together and ultimately they did, which was submitted. They made the semi finals and got to perform at the Hills Centre. Whilst they did not win, they were then motivated to record a cassette of original songs which was sold to the students. Self-esteem of the group was high. They did not have to win to realise success comes through a little hard work, initiative and motivation.

Many schools have their own story to tell, boys schools enter the competition (in Sydney De La Salle, Ashfield won the Grand Final three times and many of the boys went off into theatrical careers. These were typical “Mediterranean Males”, who were not afraid to perform in skimpy costumes. I know of one student who went off to study drama at NIDA and several others have successful television careers under their belt. (*Wildside, Water Rats* etc.)

Boys and girls schools (eg. Randwick Boys and Girls High, or Moorfield Girls / James Cook Boys High) combined, helping them improve their social skills. Other schools have created Senior Boys / Junior Boys dance troupes as a direct result of Rock Eisteddfod, proving the opportunities forwarded our students through this program are indeed numerous for both males and females.

Summary

“The arts provides a safe container for every person or every culture or every group to express things about coming into being as an adult, dealing with hardship, dealing with a sense of beauty.

No other activity, provides us with that.

[The arts and humanities] allow us culturally, individually to say things and do things we might never get to do.”

Carlos Uribe

Director of Programs Center for Contemporary Arts Santa Fe - Teen Project

The positive effects on participants in the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge go far beyond the direct health benefits of being drug and alcohol free. It has changed their general outlook on life as well.

“I have a healthier attitude to life.”

“You do not need drugs to have a blast.”

“I have a new outlook on the whole idea of having fun without drugs or alcohol.”

Comments from students such as these were common and a staggering 97% of Australian teachers surveyed stated that participation in the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge has improved the self-esteem, self-respect and personal growth of the students involved.

This provides tangible evidence of the powerful, positive influence that the Rock Eisteddfod has in promoting health, responsibility, team-work, commitment and personal development through creativity and a drug-free high.

Organised youth activities can deter risky behaviour in adolescents. Quality youth programs such as the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge are crucial sources of supportive relationships and vital experiences.

In Lismore, to help their local youth, the community has created a REC group from **nine** different schools. Using the Police Citizen Youth Club (PCYC) as the base, the Lismore group has successfully performed at two Open Division Grand Finals (1999/2000)

The PCYC also received an award from the PCYC organisation - Deputy Commissioner Jeff Jarrett for their 1999 REC initiative based on how it has helped the youth of their local community.

Yes we do need to address boys in education, and as a school practitioner (Senior English/Drama and Senior Yr. Coordinator) I am confronted daily by problems that are quite gender specific. However, lets not lose sight on what is offered to our schools and how we can utilise these kinds of programs with more support both from outside and from within the school system.

Appendices

1. The Aims of the REC

- To recognise that students are the focus of the event and that fairness and integrity are integral to having fun;
- To show young people that a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle requires positive choices and personal decisions;
- To encourage young people to live a healthy lifestyle, free from alcohol, tobacco and other drug use by delivering substance abuse prevention messages and activities to youth, teachers, parents and communities;
- To provide the opportunity for young people to learn about the many elements of producing and performing in a full scale production in a professional and positive environment;
- To increase positive social, professional and academic relations by developing in the individual problem-solving skills, self-concept, bonding to school, self-efficacy, confidence, co-operation, self-control, social skills and communication skills
- To decrease anti-social norms and decrease favourable attitudes towards alcohol, tobacco and other drug use and to encourage young people make informed decisions about their use;
- To teach in a positive reinforcing way that excellence is achieved through application of creativity, hard work, enthusiasm and co-operation;
- To mobilise the mediums of television, radio, and internet and print media to help reduce the use of consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs by 12-18 year olds males and females
- To encourage youth to develop responsible attitudes to alcohol consumption, and to avoid tobacco and other drug use by reducing the sense of glamour and excitement associated with tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, and by demonstrating the benefits of an exciting and 'drug-free' lifestyle;
- To encourage and assist adults in setting positive examples of decision making in relation to tobacco, alcohol and drug-use.

2.The Benefits

Some include:

- Teenagers will be living healthy and active lifestyles;
- Teenagers will be better informed about drug use and prevention, and will experience positive alternatives to substance abuse;
- Communities will become more closely knit in mutual support for the schools and for our youth;
- Schools will benefit from a stronger sense of school pride and positive profile within the school community
- Students will enhance their social development by gaining experience in leadership and teamwork, and by making a commitment, thus experiencing increased self-esteem and a sense of achievement.

3.Chatback Cards 1998

In 1998 the REC undertook a research project to ascertain the effectiveness of the REC as a tobacco alcohol and other drug prevention program.

With a response rate of over 65% in Australia, students reported that:

- Over 97% of participants agreed with the health message
- 81% believed their involvement in the REC had made them think about their behaviour regarding their health
- Importantly almost 80% reported that they had decided to change their behaviour as a result of participation in the REC
- Over 33% reported they had actually changed

A. List of Studies conducted in Australia

1. 1997 Research Report Australia –Dec 1997 Conducted by The Rock Challenge in association with QLD Health and the Commonwealth Dept of Health and Family Service. Used the Chatback cards and Teachers Questionnaire as method.
2. 1997 Research Reports for WA, ACT, QLD, NSW, NT, TAS, NZ, UK, VIC-Dec 1997 Conducted by The Rock Challenge in association with QLD Health and the Commonwealth Dept of Health and Family Service. Used the Chatback cards and Teachers Questionnaire as method.
3. 1998 Research Report Dec 1998 Conducted by The Rock Challenge in association with QLD Health and the Commonwealth Dept of Health and Family Service. Used the Chatback cards and Teachers Questionnaire as method.
4. Drug Offensive Research Report – An evaluation of the 1994 National Rock Eisteddfod Challenge TV Specials and the Regional TV Specials Sponsored by the National Drug Offensive.
5. Drug Offensive Research Report – An evaluation of the 1995 National Rock Eisteddfod Challenge TV Specials and the Regional TV Specials Sponsored by the National Drug Offensive.
6. Drug Offensive Research Report – An evaluation of the 1996 National Rock Eisteddfod Challenge TV Specials and the Regional TV Specials Sponsored by the National Drug Offensive.
7. Drug Offensive Research Report – An evaluation of the 1997 National Rock Eisteddfod Challenge TV Specials and the Regional TV Specials Sponsored by the National Drug Offensive.
8. Drug Offensive Research Report-An Overview of the 1990-1995 National Rock Eisteddfod Challenge TV Specials and the Regional TV Specials Sponsored by the National Drug Offensive.
9. 100% in Control statewide campaign monitoring survey conducted by Market and Communications Research (MCR) in 1996 and prepared for Health Advancement Branch Queensland Health.
10. Evaluation of Drug Offensive Sponsorships of Rock Eisteddfod by Elliot and Shanahan Research in Dec 1996. Prepared for Public Health Division Research and Marketing Group Dept of Health and Family Services.
11. 100% in Control 1996 Evaluation report. Sponsored by QLD Health through the 100% in control campaign.
12. 1996-Rock Eisteddfod Challenge participation from the perspective of Senior Students-conducted by faculty of Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo.
13. Rock Eisteddfod Challenge 1997- Summary Report of surveys involving two schools in UK Country- administered and reported by Research Services, Social Services, Research and Information unit (SSRIU) University of Portsmouth UK.
1st Survey – Dec 1996
2nd Survey –April 1997

KEY:

ACT Australia Capital Territory (Canberra) WA= Western Australia
NSW= New South Wales NT= Northern territory
VIC= Victoria NZ =New Zealand

QLD= Queensland
TAS= Tasmania
UK=United Kingdom

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