

Tuesday July 4 2006,

To the Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters,

Following the very successful community forum on an Active Civics Program for secondary students, held in Redcliffe earlier this month, I learned from community leaders and students that an Active Civics Program would be a welcomed policy of the Australian Government.

I spoke openly about my proposal, which would see secondary students contribute to the community on a regular basis. I believe this is an imperative step to repair and improve the increasingly lost ties between the youth and the community. I invited representatives of working examples from within the electorate of Petrie to explain to the community the benefits of the program. Everton Park State High School's principal Leon Livermore, teacher Mary Findlay and student Jim Morris spoke of their experiences with Meals on Wheel's Jack Pool in implementing a mutually beneficial program which sees students working with volunteers to prepare and deliver meals locally.

It is important in the early stages of development that any possible Government policy has the support of the community and any parties which would be affected, which is why I personally invited community organisations, principals, school students and finally the wider community to contribute to a community forum. I explained my idea and asked for written responses on the presentation. From the feedback forms distributed on the day, I learned that out of twenty-five responses, eighty-four per cent thought that the program was a good idea. Twelve per cent were undecided and four per cent were against the idea.

There was a great deal of positive feedback. The Active Civics Program was regarded by some participants as, an *"opportunity for both younger and older people to learn tolerance and understanding"* and a way *"to make young people aware of the need and value of community involvement, both as a service and as a character builder"*.

Throughout the forum questions on insurance, funding, logistics and project development were raised. But after Jim Morris, a participating student from Everton Park State High, addressed the forum and explained the benefits he had experienced socially through volunteering at Meals on Wheels, the forum began to understand the benefits of a civics program outweighed the work load.

I received a great deal of praise on the idea of inter-connecting vocational certificates with civics work in secondary schooling. For

example, a hospitality certificate could be gained through working in the kitchens of Meals on Wheels; a childcare certificate could be acquired through working in a community child care centre and a certificate in Aged Care and Disabilities could be obtained through training in elderly homes.

Throughout the forum overseas examples were also raised and participants were interested in the progress the United States and the United Kingdom were making with students actively contributing to their community from a young age.

According to *Volunteering Australia*, 6.3 million Australians are actively engaged in volunteer work. According to statistics active civics service is on the rise - In 2004 forty-one per cent of adult Australians volunteered compared with thirty-four per cent in 2002 and twenty-four per cent in 1995. With the introduction of an Active Civics Program in secondary schools these figures have the potential to rise and the rate of youth being engaged with the community will most certainly be a benefit to many.

The proposal has received a great deal of support within the electorate of Petrie, as well as nation-wide. In April, *Today Tonight* conducted a phone-poll on the issue, where eighty-seven per cent of callers agreed that civics work for students was a mutually beneficial concept.

Please find attached a detailed report on the responses gained through the feedback form, distributed at the June Community Forum held in Redcliffe.

I hope this information has been useful and I wish you all the best in your endeavours to explore civics and electoral education.

Yours sincerely,

**TERESA GAMBARO**  
**Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs**  
**Federal Member for Petrie**

TG/ch

## Why do you think the Active Civics Program is a good idea?

- An introduction of this program would help the students to understand community groups
- Opportunity for both younger and older people to learn tolerance and understanding
- It gets younger kids out and about and they get to see the community and what people are like
- Experiences drawn from civics can help students get a job
- Young people deserve a gradual introduction to the world of work – great!
- Helps young people to understand the elderly
- Community needs aged and youth links
- Social capital – we need to factor into funding processes
- Encouraging student into the community is well worthwhile
- To make young people aware of the need and value of community involvement, both as a service and as a character builder
- It is an opportunity for young people to learn skills whilst supporting community programs
- Meals on Wheels project an excellent example good for fostering social responsibility and integration into the community
- It gives the students/young people something to do create interests and gives them some responsibility, determination and appreciation of life
- Mutual benefits with major outcomes
- It is win-win when embedded
- Develop sense of community
- Challenge perceptions in students
- Develop critical thinking skills
- It gives them a great sense of responsibility and the opportunity to serve those less fortunate
- Can open their eyes to the greater community
- I believe a program such as this develops the students broader perspective and helps them to be less egocentric to be more outward looking and lets them develop relationships with other people
- They see the face of God in the people they meet, share interests with those less fortunate and develops communities
- I think the idea has merit for year 10/11 students as they do need to look outside themselves. It is important that students value all people within the community
- Community experience would give students life experience
- It would very much depend of the areas the young people would be involved in
- While some areas of this program would be highly successful, other areas may fail miserably

### **What do you see as weaknesses in an Active Civics Program?**

- It's no different to work placement.
- No volunteer community service aspect to it.
- The issue that is yet to be determined appears to be whether the young people participating are going to be attending uni or are attempting to gain fulltime employment
- It could place a great deal of unnecessary pressure on community organisations that are already resource-stretched
- I am involved with life education – I hear state and federal governments like the program – but also no funding
- Who pays for it?
- Is it yet another role for schools to paly with an already overloaded agenda?
- Where is support for the schools to do this?

### **Additional comments/ideas/suggestions**

- Needs to be used with a multitude of community groups, so all can benefit
- Opportunity to engage whole community
- After forum I think we would have sufficient resources
- Worried about students in full academic courses
- Suggested school committee system, which his school uses
- Only a good idea if the civic training is volunteered and not forced
- The idea of involving the program with service clubs could have a great deal of potential. And other community organisations
- Good for students to be able to get an insight into the ways of volunteering without being forced
- Students are the making of our future
- Meals On Wheels have the right idea of encouraging to volunteer as part of their learning
- Social isolation of some community members is increasing
- Social visiting program could be a great project
- I don't know if compulsory volunteering will work.
- Our service relies on volunteers and most of them are there because they are community minded.
- We also have volunteers who are referred to us from various agencies, who need to perform a service to receive benefits. To them it is a chore and this is reflected in their work.
- As an active participant of MOW for many years I know how much the daily contact with our clients means to them.
- I have encouraged my grandchildren to accompany me when they can, and it is something they really enjoy and I feel to encourage students to volunteer to participate is something we should strive for.
- Provided it is not compulsory
- I prefer to see schemes where students are encouraged to volunteer – where the idea of interacting with the community is attractive.
- We rely on volunteers and it is rewarding to see young people becoming involved
- The Lions club has a number of projects where young people could be actively working in aid and see the end result of their endeavours
- The potential of certificate recognition would be an added reward for the service provided
- I believe that this is a good concept, however I believe they should be an option for the young people to participate and not be forced as part of their schooling.
- I believe that these programs should be offered to other young people not engaged in education institutions
- Happy to discuss further

- Have heard some negative comments but the people making them obviously had not known how it can work as well.
- It is obviously character building and helps with good self esteem, so much needed by young people
- Needs national support and co-operation, plus education and encouragement
- The Motor Neurone Disease Association of Queensland are actively talking to high schools to encourage young people attend a one day training course which will enable them to give talks about the motor neurone disease (new program)
- We have a kit available for those interested
- Lions Club with their Leo Clubs and Rotary Clubs with their Interact Clubs are the forefront in encouraging community service amongst students in schools
- There is a lot of hands-on work and not necessarily fundraising
- I think this is an excellent idea but would require careful management as long as young people are given a choice of where they can volunteer and community organisations are properly resourced to manage the monitoring and needs of volunteers.
- The program would be a success and a wonderful boom for any community
- I think a number of hours on a number of activities would be beneficial
- Links with schooling/important industry
- Consultation of resources, workplace, health and safety and child protection issues
- There would be a considerable amount of work that is required by individual schools to get a program up and running.
- Will there be opportunities for all students in a particular year level to achieve a vocational qualification?
- Time, money, resource needs to be allowed for staff/teachers to organise a program
- If a civics program is to be introduced it appears it would be associated with a number of different programs (eg. Students studying hospitality or childcare)
- Would a civics program be compulsory for all students?
- I would be greatly interested in exploring this program to provide social support, specifically for people with high functioning aspergers syndrome.
- I'm not at all sure how this could happen, however if young people of year 10-12 would be interested and a program could be activated which would cover all legal areas for these young people, and the respondents.
- The people with aspergers who have very few social outlets and skills due to their disability, would definitely benefit

# Active Civics Program Community Forum

## Feedback Form Report

Friday June 2 2006

### Model communicated to the forum:

Meals on Wheels has partnered with Everton Park High School as a voluntary component of the Hospitality Course for Year 11 students. The students have access to the cooking facilities and social interaction for a few hours each week, and in turn Meals on Wheels has a few extra helpers. This has been a very beneficial and happy partnership for both parties.

### The forum heard first-hand accounts from the following:

- o Jack Pool – Stafford Meals on Wheels President
- o Leon Livermore – Everton Park High School Principal
- o Mary Findlay – Everton Park High School Teacher
- o Jim Morris – Everton Park High School Student/participant in civics training
- o Judi Buckley – Craigslea State High teacher/researcher in US civics training