

***House of Representatives – Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs .***

Substance Abuse .

(INVITED SUBMISSION - FOR PUBLICATION)

“ Where to next? “

This is very much a question of attitude in the first instance rather than one of action – and it comes in two parts.

The first resolution is to determine whether or not we are to continue with our historic attitude of Band-Aid application, in dealing with our social problems – or whether we really want to address the subject of solutions. This is a “foundation” problem, yet we continue to gaze up into the ceiling looking for answers, almost tongue-in-cheek.

Our social problems are our largest growth industry, representing a huge bottomless pit into which billions of dollars are thrown each year – with next to nothing devoted to honest “solution research.” It would be a worthy study indeed to research the impact that this represents on the corporate and business sector – as it is they who sponsor the growing number of social welfare organizations, mushrooming around the nation.

This is money drained off as negative expenditure – away from the support of new projects and proposals and good ideas that could greatly benefit the Australia community and our gross national product. This must also be taken into account when determining the cost of substance abuse. We either pursue solutions – or we make things worse!!

The second - is to determine whether we are going to make a concerted effort to provide our children with the attitude - not only to cope but also to excel under pressure. This too is something largely ignored; despite it having such a vital influence on the outcome.

One factor seemingly lost to the decision making process is the fact that everything is part of something else and everything needs to stay in balance. As soon as we mess with the balance, we end up with a mess. This is very much our problem today.

In the first instance, the “unethical 80’s” and the breath taking rush into social change, much of which was social experimentation in it’s rawest form, provided the foundation for many of today’s problems, of which substance abuse is a predictable consequence.

“Substance abuse” is not the pursuit of pleasure but rather the pursuit of escape.

It does not take Einstein to work out why an increasing percentage of youth is motivated towards escapism – and why the same problem expands into adulthood. The past 25 years have seen a dramatic change in community behaviour, just as the same is apparent in lifestyle, technology and electronic communication. The contrast is that the quality of social education has fallen, while the need for greater quality has increased, as determined by the added pressure of lifestyle, technology and electronic communication.

The “unethical 80’s” - that heralded the era of rights without responsibility and the equal rights with adults without experience, came at a terrible price. Many parents went along with the “let the children raise themselves” theory, many others lost the right to “impose” quality on the raising of their children through supported child rebellion, and too many other parents saw it as a means to abdicate responsibility altogether. Each one of those situations is both sustainable and a major contributor to the substance abuse problem.

Education – largely influences attitude. Be it social or academic, education needs to have a point to it other than just the cramming of knowledge. This alone is a subject that needs attention – as part of this whole question. The difference between the need factor and the execution is alarming, when it comes to both academic and social education.

Social education – has a completely different mix to it today than the one apparent in the raising of the older generation. However, it is the older generation that was raised with the “tool kit” not only to cope but to succeed under adverse conditions.

The older generation was predominately **ability driven** with a far smaller component of academic focus. Children learned from practical experience and parental guidance and “freedom” (rights) was something that was earned not an entitlement. School homework was of minor consequence and there was ample time for children to involve themselves in life and the great outdoors. There were no computers and no television. Games played, toys play with and the enjoyment to be had at the time were all made or created by the children of the day, with their own hands and minds and little else but adult support.

This meant that children from an early age had to exercise skills in logic and lateral thinking, to work out the what, why and how of things, as a means of achieving anything. They were taught to be creative and inventive. This became a way of life – throughout life. This is why the older generation is loaded with people of capacity and capability and practicality – ability driven people in the pursuit of excellence and achievement.

Children were taught that achieving was the only way to go – and there is still no substitute for experience. There was no Social Security or any other kind of handout, either. Ethical behaviour - with all due respect for others and the law and authority was as much a fundamental **priority** in social education as was personal discipline. Discipline was (and still is) essential. Children were taught to cope, because it was unacceptable not to.

What is the contrast today? Children today do not have the personal discipline of the previous generation. They are not taught the values of the previous generation. The level of foul language used so freely by our youth in public is shameful. The level of disregard for the rights of others and property and the Law and authority is also indicative of people raise NOT to care – either for themselves or anything else.

These factors alone impact badly on self-esteem and self-respect as well as the attitude in the individual to cope and succeed – or even participate at all.

This is the breeding ground for personal decline - literally. Look at the rising number of “children” having children – children who themselves cannot cope, having children of their own. Once again, the focus is hopelessly wrong, based on financial gain, supported by bureaucracy. The vast majority of this section of youth smokes heavily and is constantly involved in drug and or alcohol abuse – while they generally condemn their children to the same syndrome. The ever-expanding cycle continues - with no solutions !!

The most appalling, humiliating and degrading aspect to this is the street-kid problem. We in Australia – “the lucky country” - have the worst street-kid problem in the World, on a pro rate basis. The problem was apparent 20 years ago and we did nothing. They are now street-adults breeding with a new generation of street-kid, raising our own “street culture” – children who will never know a better life than one in the gutter. Why do we allow it?

Why do we waste billions of dollars every year, in the “noble” pursuit of Band-Aid application? Why not spend the money on the creation of live-in, social education colleges? Why not build managed villages, as a total concept environment, with education facilities, in which to decently house and raise street-kids – and give them a chance? Why do we have so little care and regard for human dignity?

Instead of maintaining standards in order to protect the community and our young – we focus on protecting the right of the individual to behave badly – and no one wins. Where is the obligation of leadership to preside over our youth with intelligence and compassion – be it parent, teacher or politician? How do we define wanton negligence? Is there a sustainable argument to support such leadership mentality?

Children today have everything turned on for them, everything ready made and instantly available. The requirement to exercise their limbs and mind in a co-ordinated manner has been reduced to a minimum. The level of distraction away from experiencing life is very diverse and entertaining. They are bogged down in academic education that captivates their time and energy, leaving very little time or inclination for the pursuit of anything else.

In contrast to the “get involved in life and the great outdoors” of the older generation – this younger generation spends a third of its life in bed and three quarters of the remainder in a classroom, in front of a television set or at a computer. We wonder why we have the worst, youth obesity problem in the World.

Where does their experience of life come from? How do they know about their own capacity and capability and exercise ability, if they are not called upon to exercise it, to actually physically do something creative for themselves, on a regular basis?

- **Ability is not gained from a book.**
- **Experience is not gained from a book.**
- **The acquisition of intelligence is not gained from a book.**
- **And none are gained from a classroom either.**

The school system teaches on the one hand that it is great to succeed – but if you don’t want to, well, that’s ok too. We are excusing laziness and disinterest as justifiable conditions and they are not. Mankind was intended to achieve, to improve (at something), no matter how small, and contribute in a positive manner to our community existence.

It is corrupt for an able bodied person to contribute nothing – and then expect the community to support them while they do it. This is not an argument against those on unemployment. It is an argument against those who have chosen to do nothing, to drop out. But, it is the gross insufficiency of the education process, both social and academic that produced the attitude in such people, to drop out, to give up – to quit.

There is too much freedom of choice that is negatively orientated – when there should be none at all. There is too much reward given for wrongful behaviour – when there should be none at all. There is a “why should I even try – the community will pay” attitude that thrives today, because we deliberately created it that way.

We need to get back to setting minimum standards of performance with compassion – that allow for a minimum acceptable level of contribution or achievement and a minimum level of inoffensive social behaviour – as a benefit to everyone – not as a penalty to anyone.

A classic example is the attitude towards smoking. Smoke has been proven to be deleterious to our health, so we progressively ban it in an increasing number of public places. A great deal of social behaviour today is also deleterious to community health. It impacts badly on the environment of others around it, just like cigarette smoke. It is an appalling impact on our quality of life. The cost to the community is every bit as great. The offensive nature of it is every bit as great – yet we defend poor, social behaviour.

The “unethical 80’s” introduced us to the greatest pursuit of double standards seen in our history, as we tried to justify or quantify or tolerate or excuse too many things that were and still are just plain wrong. We constantly corrupt ourselves by introducing a different set of rule to situations of similarity. **And we ask “where to next.”**

The education system needs to concentrate on **attitude building** not just knowledge building. Too much of the focus is wrong. Our education system teaches children to look for a job, instead of encouraging them to create a job. In addition, there is too much support given to the punishing of mistakes, be it ridicule or condemnation or the like – rather than a positive encouragement to push parameters. Positive, not negative thinking.

What is suggested here is simple.

- The previous generation was generally raised to cope and succeed, ability driven, in the pursuit of excellence and achievement.
- These are people who are innovators, planners and ideas people who are always pushing parameters.
- These are people who do not fear mistakes, because they know that pushing parameters produces mistakes.
- This is how capacity and capability is constantly redefined upward, as each new best result or personal best is achieved.
- These people optimise opportunity, in order to optimise success and getting the best result achievable is always the focus.

This generation was raised to a high level of self-confidence, to stand on its own two feet. It is loaded with experience, broad-spectrum experience that produced many capable practitioners in “big picture planning.” It is these people who understood how to keep things in balance, because they knew, largely based on logic and lateral thinking, how each cog in the community machine affects the other cogs in the machine. This is a process determined at the planning stage and one that very much contributed towards preventative management – avoiding mistakes. Experimentation is a recent, academic phenomenon.

What is the general contrast in today’s generation ?

- The present generation is generally raised not to cope very well, is very much academically driven, in the pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism.
- These are people of limited practical ability through lack of practical involvement.
- These are people who are confined to rather narrow parameters and generally fear any initiative that is outside their comfort zone, because they fear failure and the unknown.
- These are people who minimise opportunity.
- These are people who have difficulty handling anything not neatly package, in a form that they recognise, tied with a nice bow, and with a certificate that says “can’t fail.”

These people go through life achieving about 40% of their potential, imposing the same limitation on anything over which they preside.

Those in the pursuit of excellence and achievement – see obstacles and problems as a welcomed challenge to ability. Those in the pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism, all too often see obstacles and problems as a reason to quit.

Those in the pursuit of excellence and achievement produce leaders while those in the pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism produce those who have to be led.

Unfortunately, we are finding those in the pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism in greater number in positions of leadership and management and it is having a crippling effect on bureaucracy, business, clubs and on our gross national product.

The present trend away from the pursuit of excellence and achievement is sustained by many factors.

- The lack of opportunity to experience life brought about by the huge demand on time spent in academic study and knowledge cramming
- The lack of opportunity to experience life brought about by the huge attention given to computers and television
- The lack of opportunity to experience life brought about by the huge variety of largely indoor entertainment alternatives, readily available, without effort.
- The ready availability of alcohol and drugs.
- The minimisation of the size of residential allotments also reduces the size of backyards where the older generation had ample room in which to play and build things and create. This is already having an alarming affect on “hand-eye” co-ordination skills in the present generation and it will flow on to their ability to perform in the workplace.

We are only confident when we are doing things that we know about. That comes from experience – our physical involvement in doing things. This influences our decision making ability and if we are not confident then our decision-making ability is limited. Hence, the pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism – the reluctance to venture beyond our “comfort zone.” The pushing of parameters is a frightening concept to many such people.

Yet, how many such people currently preside over the resources needed by those of ability in order to achieve? What criteria do we use in the selection of leaders?

The hardest achievement to make in Australia is to get a good idea off the ground – to get support for the local product. Australia has a long history of producing brilliant achievers and great inventions – yet :-

- There is no Country in the World (per head of population), that has lost more of its good ideas, brilliant inventions and people of great ability overseas than has Australia.
- There is no other Country in the World (per head of population), that has more good ideas, excellent inventions and people of great ability sitting idle, a wasted resource for want of support, than we have in Australia.

Instead of embracing this phenomenal asset of ours – it is largely ignored and always has been – while we pour billions of dollars down the bottomless pit of social deterioration.

The pursuit of guarantee and perfectionism is a chronic and very, very costly problem. And, it goes back to **attitude** - cultivated by social and academic education. Another trend of the past 20 years to further deteriorate perspective and broad-spectrum experience – has been the decided trend towards more and more **specialisation in careers**. The focus is always inward – on smaller and small cogs in the community machine, taking up just as much time and concentration, as was previously spent on matters of far greater diversity and complexity and generality.

Are we producing people with parameters so close together that many have little idea of the influence that their own cog has on those adjoining, much less on those more remote? Are we producing a generation of “little picture” people who have little capacity when it comes to considering consequence in decision making? Who is to keep the balance?

There are too many changes being made to cogs in the community machine devoid of knowledge of the effect on other cogs - consequence. It has heralded an age of experimentation, as one change after another is made, while we sit back to see what damage is going to be created by them in other directions. The cost is horrendous.

The era of preventative management, the result of the skilled use of “big picture planning,” based on logic and lateral thinking, is seemingly dying out with the older generation. We do not have an education environment that encourages such diversity - on the one hand – and an ingrained, academic culture that only recognises academia, on the other.

Training is as fundamental to performance - as it is to coping - as it is to success. It is the same in sport as it is in business as it should be socially. So, why do we insist on pursuing a different set of rules socially?

The quality of the training is determined by a number of factors, including perhaps discipline, dedication, aptitude and the experienced guidance and attitude of the educator. Everyone has ability, at something, to some extent. Everyone has capacity and capability, to some extent. Everyone can contribute to something worthwhile, to some extent.

We are what we have made ourselves. The vast extent of our social problems today, probably the worst in the World on a pro-rata basis, are there because we provide the environment for the breeding of them. Our attitude has been to support the structure that produces them – and fiercely defend the “right” of those who wish to trash themselves – to do so. We promote a set of rules socially that could not survive in business or in sport.

And, we ask the question – “where to next.”

It is a question of cultivating a better attitude – the attitude of those in the community, those in positions of leadership, in positions as educators, in parents in the home.

Then, and only then, will we start to produce –

- **less substance abuse,**
- **less personal abuse,**
- **less abuse of property,**
- **less waste – both in human and financial terms.**

This needs to be – “where to next.”

Volunteer Community Service.

- Vice President - Brisbane Arts Council.
- Executive Member - several Sporting Clubs.
- Board Secretary 3 years - Brisbane Youth Crisis Service.
- Branch Secretary – Qld. Sub-Normal Children’s Welfare Assoc.
- Founding, Executive Member, Family Council of Queensland.
- Council Member - St. John’s Anglican Cathedral Brisbane.
- Member - Australian Coast Guard, Caloundra, Queensland.
- Founding Executive Member – Community First Australia.
- Council Member - Queensland Justice’s Association.
- Project Director (current) - Australia’s National Horse Trail.

John - represents a generation raised to be resourceful, through practical experience, skill, cultivated ability and ethics. His diverse history is one of ability driven achievement, with a skilled practice of lateral thinking and “big picture planning.”

John - was a very competitive sportsman & is active in community affairs -

- An outspoken Justice of the Peace, on social standards & injustice matters.
- Spoken on ethical conduct & constitutional loyalty to Clubs & Organisations.
- Conducted talks on construction & site management strategy.
- Contributes to Law Reform, Domestic Abuse Reform & other matters.
- Public speaker – leadership & management, domestic abuse, social problems, youth survival.
- Invited contributor - Federal Government Committee on Substance Abuse.

John – has always been in the exciting pursuit of excellence & achievement. Problems and obstacles are there to challenge ability. They are never a reason to quit.

Impossible and can’t do not exist.

There is always an answer – from those of ability .