

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION NO. 117

Active Civics Submission

The Hon. Teresa Gambaro

**Federal Member for Petrie
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs**

Submitted: 4 December 2006

To the Chairman and Committee Members of the Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters,

Thank you for the opportunity of addressing you today. It is my opinion that young people are increasingly isolated from their outside community. Community research undertaken in 2005 by the *Older People Speak Out* action group in Queensland has confirmed this situation. There are serious inter-generational break-downs where the youth and the elderly are feeling the impact of a communication barrier, which is why I believe it is imperative that we alter our national curriculum to combat this growing social problem.

I have come before the committee today to explain the working example that has developed in my electorate, where students are experiencing increasing connectivity and links to their community. Everton Park State High hospitality students have been undertaking assessment in the community arena, with the assistance and guidance of Stafford Meals on Wheels. It is here that the students assist community volunteers with meal preparation and other kitchen duties, as well as experience the appreciation of Meals on Wheel's customers, the elderly residents of their nearby community. This program, added to the school's curriculum in April 2006 has been a great success, but not withstanding the hard work and dedication of a few key players.

Whilst before the committee I must give my greatest appreciation to the hard work of Jack Pool of Stafford Meals on Wheels and Fiona Begg of Government funded organisation, Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated for their hard work and dedication to see the students of Everton Park assist the community in meal preparation and distribution. Everton Park High School principal, Leon Livermore and teacher Mary Findlay have also contributed a great amount of time to work together and deliver this program in a mutually beneficial setting.

The Program – how it works

Students and Education

It was proposed that students across the year 11 Catering/Home Economics class and students involved in the Special Education Unit at the school be offered the opportunity to participate in the program. Students undertaking food studies would also receive credit within the curriculum for work undertaken in food preparation. Twenty students from Everton Park High School participated in the program over three school terms (ten weeks).

Students assisted with:

- The preparation of meals in the Meals on Wheels kitchen
- Cleaning up the kitchen
- Washing up process
- Servicing the meals in the prepared trays
- Packing for delivery
- Accompanying volunteers to client's houses delivering the meals

Time Commitment

The proposal required a four hour commitment from the students on one designated day each week. Meals on Wheels would accommodate different students each day, for three days per week.

Transport

Students would be responsible for getting themselves to and from the Meals on Wheels centre and returning to school.

Insurance

Insurance was a concern that many respondents at the Active Civics Community Forum held in June. This example shows that insurance is an obstacle that can be overcome, as most community organisations now have an insurance policy that covers all volunteers, regardless of age. Both the school and the community organisation exchanged insurance policies and produced two documents for parents and students to sign, outlining the details and acceptance of the program.

The Worklinks Agreement outlines:

- Attendance times and dates agreement
- Workers compensation (insurance) restricted to permanent impairment or death
- Students responsibilities regarding attendance
- Emergency contacts for parents information

The Work Experience Agreement outlines:

Student

- Structured work experience agreement
- Responsibilities in regards to attendance, dress standard and behaviour
- Performance – to the best of the students ability
- Agree to comply with reasonable directions
- Directed to tell supervisor of personal injury or damage to property

Parents

- Acceptance of agreement

Work Experience Provider's Agreement (Meals on Wheels)

- Inform the student of particular safety requirements in the workplace
- Notify the school of any accidents and damage to property
- Agree to supervise nominee
- No payment will be made
- Hours worked will not exceed normal hours as worked in the industry
- The student will not perform work which is prohibited by law
- Agree to notify the school of any unexplained absence

I have attached a copy of both the Worklinks, (which covers insurance) and the Work Experience Agreement (which outlines the responsibilities of both students and work experience providers) for the committees information.

Staff Commitment

Three members of the school staff were involved in tasks such as supervision visits and paperwork. The teachers liaised closely with five Meals on Wheels staff members and eighteen Meals on Wheels volunteers to monitor and grade the involved students. The Meals on Wheels co-ordinator was the lynchpin for the project in terms of ensuring that the many tasks and participants roles were undertaken in such a manner that client's needs were always met with the additional benefit of providing new knowledge and practical experience to the young people involved.

Improvements Required

While this program was hugely successful, it was felt that more staff resources were required for the most beneficial outcomes. Additional staff members could have eased the staffing issues put on the school by implementing this project. Next year another teacher will assist in the program.

Further resources, including explanatory brochures for parents and increased advertising in school newsletters and newspapers to boost the community and student interest in the program has been suggested.

Transport issues need improvement and the school will be addressing this in 2007.

I believe all of these issues can be overcome through increased government funding and a transport service provided for the students to arrive on time for their community commitment.

Evaluation

In order to assess the effectiveness of the program and ascertain the views of all involved in terms of perceptions of the work of the program, Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated agreed to undertake a survey, involving key participants. A number of respondents completed a survey administered on a one-to-one basis by an Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated staff member. Students, teachers and Meals on Wheels staff, volunteers and clients were interviewed to assess the effectiveness of the program. The results were incredibly positive with all 22 interviewees responding "yes" to the question, *Would you recommend the program continue?*

The Community Impact

In a recent action research report entitled "Their voices are heard, now who will listen" carried out by *Older People Speak Out (QLD)* in 2005 – it was highlighted that young people and older people actually have a lot in common but that there are limited opportunities these days for younger and older people to interact and this in part contributes to a significant sense of alienation between the generations. They simply do not get to know each other. In addition research indicates that both young people and older people share a common fear and lack of understanding of each other which would be changed by this project. *Older People Speak Out* has highlighted the need for intergenerational projects in the interests of both young people and older people to promote positive ageing and foster a sense of community identity and responsibility, which is another reason Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated and Meals on Wheels were so willing to undertake this program.

With this research in mind, one hundred and forty clients were visited by the students and over time many stereotypes have been broken down. Some responses from Meals on Wheels clients and students alike outline the obvious joy at interacting together on a weekly basis:

- "I think it definitely should continue, especially for older people who can't leave their homes – so nice to see young people."
(Meals on Wheels client)

- "Excellent idea for young people to know there is life beyond their normal four walls, CDs and Xboxes." (Meals on Wheels client)
- "Seeing somebody young, somebody different – you get very down when you don't see anyone, and the kids get to work with very special people – the Meals on Wheels volunteers" (Meals on Wheels client).
- "It's good to be in touch with wiser people and see how they live" (student)
- "I thought they might just be sitting around watching TV, but they were really lively and really like to talk to us" (student)

These are just some of the quotes which speak for themselves, and the impact that this service has had on both parties – the youth and the elderly is so positive, the program must continue.

Active Civics Forum

Following the very successful community forum on an Active Civics Program for secondary students, held in Redcliffe on June 2nd 2006, 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 a program they have this year, integrated into their curriculum. 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:

- *"Who pays for it?"*
- *"Is it yet another role for schools to play with an already overloaded agenda?"*
- *"Where is support for the schools to do this?"*

I am completely confident that with additional resource and funding provided by the Australian Government, this program could be very successful and an excellent investment to our youth's future and that these problems of funding could be easily overcome. Also, 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 support 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.

The Australian Government believes that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific academic skills and knowledge and is providing funding of \$29.7 million over 2005-2008 to help make values education a core part of schooling. Care and Compassion, Doing your Best, Fair Go, Freedom, Honesty and Trustworthiness, Integrity, Respect, Responsibility and Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion are the values the Government is attempting to instil in our youth. I believe that an active civics program which promotes volunteering as a part of the national curriculum is an imperative step in the process of connecting the youth to their community.

I have spoken to the Education, Science and Training minister, the Hon. Julie Bishop about this proposal, and she has given her in principle support to expanding and implementing this program into our school curriculum.

I have attached further details for the benefit of the committee, on the insurance and student obligation contract. Please see the Worklinks contract which outlines the insurance policy for the students as well as the Work Experience Agreement which states the students and Meals on Wheel's volunteer's responsibilities. Both contracts were sighted and signed by parents.

I am pleased to present this updated report on the proposed active civics program, before the committee today. I congratulate the committee in examining the very important issue of civics and electoral education in your terms of reference and I wish you well in your endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teresa Gambaro', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TERESA GAMBARO
Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Federal Member for Petrie

TG/ch

Attachment A

Worklinks & Work Experience Agreements

WORK EXPERIENCE AGREEMENT

Student/Parent : Principal/Work Experience Provider

With respect to an agreement to place a student on a work experience organised under the auspices of the Education (Work Experience) Act 1996 between the Principal of:

School Name: Everton Park State High School
Address: Stafford Road
EVERTON PARK, QLD 4053

Phone: 3354-0222
Fax: 3354-0200
Contact Person: Leon Livermore

and

Provider's Name: Meals On Wheels,

Street 38 Appleby Rd.

Contact Person: Jack Pool

Suburb: Stafford **4053** Post

Code:

Phone 1: 3356 2382

Postal Address:

Fax No: 33562382

Suburb:

Post Code: 4053

Name of Student : Gender: female Everton Park SHS School Year: 12

Out of School Hours Emergency Phone Number: 38861226/ 04039675218
Birthdate: 31/1/1989

PLACEMENT DETAILS

Structured Sampling Shadowing Research

Industry/Occupation: Hospitality

Model of Work Experience: Structured Work Placement

Dates of Placement: 29th August to: 15th Dec Number Of Days: 12

1. STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

I will attend my placement for the full work experience period. I will ensure that both the school and the person or organisation providing the placement will be notified if I am unable to attend the workplace. My dress and behaviour will be in keeping with the accepted standards of my work experience provider. I will perform my duties to the best of my ability and comply with all reasonable directions given by the work experience provider. I will promptly tell my supervisor of any personal injury or damage to property which may involve me.

Student Signature
(If applicable, attach details of any medical

23/08/06
Date

2. PARENT/GUARDIAN/CAREGIVER'S CONSENT (Applicable to students under 18 years of age)

I consent to participating in work experience as stated.

Signature of parent/guardian/caregiver

23/08/06
Date

3. WORK EXPERIENCE PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

I enter into an arrangement for the named student to be placed with me for the purpose of work experience. Conditions of placement:

1. I understand my obligation of care for the student under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995.
2. I agree to inform the student of particular safety requirements of this workplace.
3. I agree to notify the school of any accident involving a school student, and actions undertaken, and damage to property involving the student during this placement.
4. The student will work under my supervision or my nominee.
5. The arrangement may be terminated at any time by either the school principal or myself.
6. Payment will not be made to the student participating in work experience.
7. The hours worked will not exceed the normal hours worked in my industry.
8. The student will not perform work which is prohibited by law.
9. I agree to notify the school of any unexplained absences by the student.
10. I understand the level of liability cover provided by Education Queensland.

Signature of work experience provider

28-8-06
Date 7.9.06

4. PRINCIPAL'S AGREEMENT

I enter into an arrangement for the named student to be placed for the purpose of work experience with the

X

3 May 2006

Mr Jack Pool
 Meals on Wheels - Stafford
 PO Box 1137
 STAFFORD QLD 4053

Dear Mr Pool

CONFIRMATION OF STUDENT PLACEMENT - STRUCTURED WORKPLACE
 LEARNING PROGRAMME

Thank you for agreeing to support the *Worklinks* structured workplace learning programme. I have outlined below the details of the student/s we have allocated to you together with days/dates.

STUDENT	SCHOOL CONTACT DETAILS	ATTENDANCE DETAILS	DATES
	Everton Park State High School Ph: 3354-0214	Each Wednesday x 6	3/05/2006 to 7/05/2006

Please note the following:

- Either the school will send you a work experience agreement form for your signature **OR** the student will contact you before the placement to arrange the signing of the work experience agreement form. The Principal is to be the last person to sign this form, the original of which must be retained at the school. This form must be signed by all parties before the commencement of the placement to ensure students are covered by workers' compensation. Please note, this cover is restricted to permanent impairment or death.
- There may be some days when the student will be unable to attend because of school holidays or school commitments. It will be the student's responsibility to advise you, in advance, of these occasions.
- I have enclosed an abridged version of the *Worklinks Information Handbook*. It is suggested that you keep it on file for future reference as required. The **Handbook is also available on the Worklinks website at www.worklinks.com.au, in the Local Community Partnerships section.**

Should you have any queries in relation to this placement please contact Kay Albrecht on 3354 3946 ext 223. The Worklinks office hours are Monday - Thursday, 8.30 am - 5.00 pm and Friday, 8.30 am - 3.00 pm. Should you have any queries in relation to Worklinks generally, please do not hesitate to call me.

Yours faithfully

Jan Robinson
 Manager