

2 August 2000

Hello Brendan,

I wanted to follow up on our meeting last Wednesday evening. You will recall that I am the doctor with the practice specialising in counselling men in crisis and the foundation president of the NSW Men's Health and Wellbeing Association (1997-99). We talked about your chairmanship of the Boys Education committee. I suggested that it was important that if we are to understand the poor educational and social outcomes for many boys in and after school age years then boys education should be considered in the wider context of the socialisation of boys and men, the issue of fathering and the way that boys see and interpret the lives of men.

Clearly many men are not experiencing a sense of wellbeing in that they are highly stressed by work, money, relationships, relationship breakdown and a sense of personal isolation. This is not a pretty picture for young men to aspire to and I think is a major contributing factor to the lack of motivation among many boys at school.

I was immensely impressed by your speech and felt that what you said fitted well with the values and beliefs of the men's movement. I have spent a great deal of time thinking about the way that men feel and behave and have been developing a model for understanding healthy manhood and the process by which boys undergo the transition from boyhood to manhood. This forms the basis of a book that I have on the stocks at present. I believe that the existing psychological methods used for working with men are ineffective and are also of little value in finding a way forward in the development of public policy.

I passionately believe that a healthy community needs healthy women, healthy children and healthy men. When men are living their lives in a dysfunctional way then women and children suffer much collateral damage through everything from unrewarding relationships, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, absence of fathering, breakdown of community and ultimately social conflict and war.

I would like to offer my wholehearted support in your work with the boys education committee and would be delighted to talk with your committee should you feel that would be appropriate. I attach a paper which I presented at the 2nd National Men's Health Conference in Fremantle in November 1997 which may give you some idea of the way that we in the men's movement are attempting to think laterally about men's and boys' issues.

At a broader level, I applaud your efforts in the reconciliation and mandatory sentencing debate and encourage you to continue to push the coalition to embrace a vision of community which is inclusive and compassionate and celebrates the wonderful cultural diversity of the Australian peoples.

Very best regards,

George Burkitt
gburkitt@wr.com.au