



THE "C.O.O.L." PROGRAM-  
CONTROL OF ONE'S LIFE  
A SOCIAL SKILLS PROGRAM

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\* Individual/Group & Family Counselling \* Team Building \* Supervision & Professional Development

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## **Parliamentary Committee inquiry into boys education.**

**It has to be acknowledged that boy's education is going through a period of change. For many boys, school is not an attractive environment. Why? The structure of the family has also changed. Young men reach to older men for guidance and find that many of their role models - their fathers, coaches and mentors - are struggling too.**

**This proposal looks at the authors' work with boys in schools and the positive insights gained from listening to young men. There is a definitive need for boys to learn more about themselves. The present school curriculum is centered on the traditional aspects of what we believe boys (and girls) require for life. We believe schools, principals, teachers, families and the wider community want and need to become more in tune with boys needs.**

**Many boys**

- \* Prefer to be outside.**
- \* Prefer and are better at physical activities.**
- \* Are better at practical tasks.**
- \* Like to move around rather than sit still.**
- \* Are not good at cooperative activities, they are too competitive.**
- \* Prefer short term activities.**
- \* Respond better to tasks with clear and achievable goals.**
- \* Young boys are better at gross motor skills rather than using fine motor skills.**

**Rex Stoessiger (1997).**

**The rapid pace of information technology arguably has provided a tool for learning. We believe more research into boys leisure time warrants further investigation. Boys “play” is changing with antidotal evidence of more machine play: computer, playstation, gameboys, CD player etc. We believe that boys need to be consciously challenged on all levels of feeling, thinking, and doing.**

**Our work with middle year level boys (year 8 onwards), is more than mentoring and teaching boys about male issues.**

**“Footy, Beer and Girls” (FBG) : description.**

**FBG is a forum for discussion and activities designed to unmask masculinity, violence, drug and alcohol use/misuse, risk taking behavior, fathers and mentors, relationships and girls, stereotyped gender roles, men’s health, sexuality, being male and the transition from boy to manhood. We’re there to reduce aggressive and bullying behavior in young men through awareness whilst developing communication skills. We reduce risk-taking behavior with drugs and alcohol by being actively involved and interested in their lives and social development. There are a surprisingly high number of young men - chosen for FBG by their peers and teachers - who don’t have a dad.**

**Footy, Beer and Girls has worked with young men from year 8 to year 11. It is an intensely personal experience that has a delightful side effect of establishing a strong sense of community for the young men involved. It isn’t therapy but is very therapeutic. Discussions and activities revolve around key issues for young men.**

- # What do you have to do to be a man?**
- # Fathers/mentors.**
- # Sexuality.**
- # Men’s health.**
- # Dance of life (footy, art, music, sport, friends).**
- # Grass roots (spirituality, goals, dreams, direction).**
- # Speaking from your heart.**
- # Violence.**

- # Great lies.
- # Life's Mysteries.

The program is delivered to a small (10/12) group of boys though whole school presentations have encouraged heartfelt and productive discussions about gender equity and the value of single-sex classes for certain subjects. Young women benefit indirectly from the program (disruptive young men are often the ones removed from normal classroom activities to be involved in the program) and directly (by stimulating the need for a similar and concurrent class for young women).

The aim of the program is to fill boys in on what men really think about. What they fear and enjoy. What being “a man” is like? It’s not just pub-talk. It is about educating young men to speak their truth, that is heart speak, not just head talk.

The program encourages and challenges young men to:

- \* be emotionally challenged.
- \* share what is important to them.
- \* explore different ideas and views about what being male is all about.

FBG can be run over a six, ten, or twenty week period with support visits as required. The program includes workshop days out of school in a bush setting. The aim of this is explore further issues associated with the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. A range of physical activities (walking, carrying rocks, discussion, climbing hills, crossing creeks) are undertaken with the emphasis on infotainment. Boys learn most while having fun.

The FBG program is currently being written as a reference manual. The principles that drive FBG are also taught as a professional development strategy for teachers, parents, counselors or anyone who works with boys.

Here are our goals in a nutshell;

- Reduction in physical and non-physical violent behavior.
- Create a safer school community.
- Develop problem-solving skills that do not include risk-taking behavior (alcohol and drug use).

- **Enhanced well being/more positive sense of self.**
- **Increased/regular school attendance and school connectedness.**
- **Develop a greater understanding of the mysterious world of men.**

### **About the authors.**

#### **Peter Little**

**Peter is a social worker, counselor and welfare worker in the Latrobe Valley. In ten years, Peter has worked in a range of settings - Local Government, the Department of Education (Primary and Secondary Schools), Monash University Gippsland Campus and Community Health.**

**Peter has had a diverse life, travelling overseas and within Australia, working in a range of fields including -**

- \* **Dairy farming.**
- \* **Building construction.**
- \* **Itinerant/seasonal work (grape picking, potatoes, hay carting).**
- \* **Member of the Australian Army.**
- \* **Worked/traveled in England/New Zealand.**
- \* **Disabilities/mental health field.**

**Peter is currently a private consultant to schools, organisations, families and individuals and is a committed dad to seven children. He has developed a number of proactive experiential programs on: parenting, anger for men and life/social skills for adults. He is passionate about boys and men's issues (and their impact on women).**

**Peter and his wife Donna have been developing the Cool Program. This is a social skills program for school age children. Peter is committed to promoting the "heartspeak" concept as a tool for building relationships.**

## **Scot Gardner**

**Scot is a musician, author, masseur, counselor, teacher and professional landscape gardener.**

**His music and madness have seen him performing on “Red Faces” (twice!), producing a music CD and playing/teaching didgeridoo professionally. Scot has written a fiction novel for young adults to be published in 2001 by Pan Macmillan. Scot brings all his art and skill to work with boys and men. Scot and his wife Robyn live in Gippsland, Victoria and have three children.**

**Together, Scot and Peter are a motivated team committed to the further development of life changing programs for young boys and men.**

## **Program evaluation/feedback**

**The program has been delivered to a number of Secondary schools (private and public), in the Gippsland area. Monash University has also evaluated it as part of the Gippsland Anti-Violence project.**

**Written comments include –**

**“They should do this more often, so school would actually be worth attending”- Year 10 male student, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1999, Kurnai College, Morwell.**

**“I learnt more about male stuff than I ever have” – Year 8 male student, Traralgon Secondary College.**

**“FBG was something to look forward to, you could be yourself” – Year 10 male student, Catholic Regional College, Traralgon.**

**“I liked FBG, it did not seem like it had anything to do with school” – Year 10 male student, Trafalgar High School.**

**Peter and Scot utilised humour, personal experiences, counseling and communication techniques, and realism. This included confronting and challenging individual members or the group about their behaviour or other issues as they arose such as:**

- # Violence-comment that “a party is not a party without a fight”.**
- # Being male-we said “you don’t have to have sex, go to war or kill an animal to be a man”.**
- # Great lies-fact or fiction about what people say about you.**
- # Drugs-are you in control of it or is the drug in control of you.**
- # Passion/dreams-can you find something you like, are good at it and create a lifestyle from that?**
- # Women-there is a person behind the body parts.**
- # Sexuality- we related the “McDonalds experience”, what do you want fast food/quick sex?**
- # Fathers/step dads-where are you at with your dad ? Do you spend time with him?**
- # Being male- “how do you know when your a man?”.**
- # School/work-”what would you be doing if money was not an issue?”.**

**Each week, Scot and I would identify the given topic and “bounce off” the boys in assisting them to comment disagree or share personal issues about what was discussed. We would challenge the group to talk through their heart and not just head stuff.**

### **Overview**

**For many boys, school is not an attractive environment, in terms of being or feeling valued. Their education is not meeting their physical, emotional/social and academic needs. As the structure of the family has changed; more one parent families, step families and families with both parents working for example has affected many boys in terms of “what they are learning about being young men. At a time when young men need male role models/mentors to offer guidance and direction there are fewer men able to undertake this responsibility.**

**The education system has also changed. There are now more female teachers (which is great) than there were in the past but this leaves many young men with little or no male contact. In the past men were**

**more available in the role of teachers, coaches and fathers than is the case today.**

**This submission supports the inquiry into boys and their education. The authors believe that middle year boy's benefit from gender based social constructionist programs. Programs such as "Footy, Beer and Girls", are designed to challenge and develop the pathways of communication for boys in school, who one day will be men in society. Here, the statistics for boys and men are not great –**

- **Men live on average six years less than women.**
- **Around 90% of students with behavioural problems are boys.**
- **Almost 80% of students with learning difficulties are boys.**
- **74% of unemployed people are men.**
- **Men and boys commit suicide four times more frequently than women.**

**Steve Biddulph : Manhood, 1995.**

**Suicide has roots in communication. Violence also has roots in communication. Success in relationships depends on clear communication. The education of boys is not just an academic pursuit. This inquiry has a responsibility in shifting this philosophy. Boys are important. They are not just measured by their achievements or actions.**

**This submission was written by**

**Peter Little (Social Worker/consultant).**

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