

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

I am a home educating parent of a near 16 year old son. We have been educating for four years. I am grateful that I am able to participate in this inquiry. I am going to write this submission from an informal perspective as I want to share our story with you and I hope that you can honour us by taking the time to read through this and help our cause to raise concerns that are affecting home education families now and in the future.

I never thought I would be able to home educate as I didn't believe that I would be able to provide my son with a quality education. How wrong I was! At one point during my son's schooling I suggested to a teacher that I should consider home-schooling and she laughed at me and said it would not be an option for [redacted] because of his needs. At the time I thought she must be right although I now find her comment ignorant and misinformed. After repeated attempts and failings to try and make things work for [redacted] in the public school system, over many years, I finally decided to pull him out near the end of year 6 much to his and my relief (and probably the teachers/school's as well) as I really felt that no other option was left available to us. I was dreading [redacted] going to high school the year after and he commented that he would prefer to die instead of endure what he had already been through in his former school years.

[redacted] was inquisitive. He liked to see people's reactions and was interested to see how far he could push the boundaries before everything caved in. At the end of his primary schooling, [redacted] knew how he could avoid subjects he struggled with as well as get out of activities he found uninteresting. He became very good at beating the system and getting what he wanted, which ultimately was to get sent home. He didn't seem to mind getting grounded at home as long as he was away from school.

[redacted] was diagnosed from age 5 with ADHD/ODD. My older son had no problems in school (and no medical problems) and since I was an active parent helper/volunteer I had good connections within the school. [redacted] behavior was quite different and challenging at times and by the end of year 3 it was suggested we transfer schools because they didn't know what else to do with him. This had a great effect on me as I had established my network with parents and staff in the 5 years I had worked around the school. We went from a school where I knew many teachers, students and parents (and our support networks) to knowing nobody. I felt alienated and I was the parent! I did not enjoy the experience at all and always felt like I had let [redacted] down by transferring schools where he had to settle into a new system and make new friends. I thought that the clean slate would be beneficial; however I have found once children develop a reputation in any given school then that

reputation stays with the child for the duration of their school years. It became evident that this school was no better equipped than the last one.

In all this time, had been mediated but by the end of year 5, after trialing the Christmas holiday period without medication, we decided as parents to not put him back on meds as we didn't notice any difference in his behavior and attention span. He did okay for about 6 months in year 6 but he declined quite rapidly, and I believe the school system failed him as he lost everything that he worked toward such as his year 6 formal, which was really sad. They just didn't know what else to take away from him as a result from his consequences even though at this stage the reasons of his behavior were quite minimal in regards to the consequence given. I am certain there were other kids that had more severe difficulties (and I have heard of some) than JA and it saddens me to think what will happen to them if they continue in the normal system and worse still, if parents choose to home educate but then are treated terribly by the 'officials' that are meant to be helping them achieve the desired outcome of a quality education for the child. (After all, isn't that what it is all about?)

I removed 3 weeks before school finished (term 4 – 2010). It was the best decision I ever made. He felt loved at home while at school he felt bullied by the teachers as well as the students. was not a small kid so he wasn't bullied like other kids were; however, he was excluded and often was left alone in his school environment and considered an outcast. I was told repeatedly by other parents that he would often be sitting outside the Deputy Principal's office for hours at a time even though I was not informed on many occasions. This mainly happened in his first school when he was in years 2-3. This really saddens me as his parent. I don't call this quality education yet home educators are treated like less than perfect solutions in regards to providing for children's education needs. I know what I would prefer.

Because was very tall and well-built for his age, he was often treated as being older and this caused significant problems. was often accused of bullying but quite often it would be the result of kids teasing him because his reaction would be physical rather than using his words. He used to get very frustrated and because of his size; it was easier for him to react with force because it ended the discussion quickly! When a teacher sees the act but does not hear the words that started the retaliation in the first place, it creates a sense of injustice and unfairness that had a hard time accepting (and rightly so!) and thus he developed a hard crust against authority as he felt so unlistened to. (Boys don't reveal what is really going on as they find it hard to articulate their feelings.)

I know that _____, myself, and my older son (18) has benefited greatly from the home education experience. I have changed my beliefs on thinking that the original school system was the only way to educate and it has opened our eyes to a bigger world of possibilities. I owe so much to our home education community because it is very daunting when a parent decides to give up what they are familiar with and start something that is so misunderstood or not known about in the general society. I came under ridicule from my family, although my parents were wonderful, I received harsh words from my ex-husband and sister. They both have since apologised saying that home education was the best experience that I could have exposed to _____ because he is the most beautiful child as a result of this decision. I shudder to think what we would have endured if we had stayed in the school system. I know that I would not have the same child nor have the wonderful relationship that I do with him today. We are very close and home education has brought our family unit much closer than it ever was.

There is a common misconception in regards to socialisation in home-schooling. I have found that the home education community has afforded us to have much deeper relationships with a wide variety of people, people that generally care for all children regardless of whether they know them or not. Home educators educate their children for a multitude of reasons. Due to the different ages of home-schooling children in our home education community, my son has developed his social contact skills in that he easily mixes with a larger group of people at different age levels (from babies to the elderly) and gender. In the public school system he would be limited to age group only with teachers in authority positions and since there is a unspoken 'stigma' among teenagers in the public school system (I was a public school participant) in that you do not associate with those from the younger years, it develops a superiority complex that corresponds closely to the order of hierarchy that exists in conventional formal settings. The different ages that _____ associates with have not only benefited him, but my people skills have developed as well as I am more accepting of other people especially when they may fit outside of what the norm expects.

I created programs for _____ according to structure, rather than the unschooled approach, as much as I see benefit in that approach it does not suit either _____ or myself as we are more structured program users. He does also have self- directed days (my 2 working days) so that he can become an independent learner _____ has improved significantly from where he was four years ago. Although I have created programs that suit _____ and his passions, I have given him a wide diversity of subjects because if you never try something you are never going to know what you enjoy. _____ has become very competent in carpentry and computers as we have accessed wood working through local high schools as well as completed a Cert II at Tafe _____ this year. He has also achieved various online

courses in computers and is very skillful at doing things I know little about! has been exposed to a plethora of paid classes such as:

- metal work
- digital photography
- Photoshop
- digital imaging/ video production
- cooking classes (as well as online sushi making and cupcake making)
- drama - directing and acting in a play
- Science classes – held at a local school (as well as other science classes in a private home following the Dive Science curriculum)
- Hospitality & event management (my personal classes with 8 other children taught in the home as I am trained in this area.) The major project was to research, shop and make a dish that was suitable to the outlines given and this was then peer reviewed and comments given as feedback.
- Floristry – I am a qualified Florist so I taught basic techniques in which the children learned how to make various wedding flower arrangements. This helps develop fine motor skills.
- Sport - archery, laser tag, ice skating, soccer, gym. We also had a combined sports day in which the children participated in Olympic style team events.
- guitar lessons (private tutor)
- English classes – to learn how to write well especially for essay type structure. Our home English program is quite significant as I see so much value in English skills for everyday living. We focus on: vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, handwriting, creative writing, and grammar, reading and listening – a variety of texts such as ‘A Fortunate Life’ in which we incorporated history & geography skills as we looked at the different places that the author travelled. English skills have improved dramatically by doing these extensive studies.
- Art classes - street art and general drawing classes
- online computer programming
- Beginners French (online program)
- News programs - Newademic (online) which is a world news online newspaper which has activities associated with it.
- Maths online programs (various for the different ages/stages/levels. Maths was probably one area where we spent the greatest amount of money as the programs are all so

different.)

Other subjects taught include:

- History – study Christian history, Australian history, world history, war history and other general history.
- Bible – This covers Ancient history and how the world was created. This also is a life guide so falls under life skills for general living.
- Geography – World studies & other
- Excursions: various Sydney museums, Art galleries to view special exhibitions such as Picasso, Emperor Qin's Terracotta Army, other exhibitions. Other excursions included The Anne Frank exhibition, Historical Rocks excursion, and other various excursions related to historical aspects.
- Live stage shows – some included The War Horse, Bell Shakespeare productions from Sydney Theatre as well as at local Laycock Street Theatre productions.
- Units of work which consisted of interests such as: Weapons & Warfare, Dogs
- Volunteer work
- Youth at church

1. Financial costs

As you can see from the above subjects, home education is quite expensive for the parent. Financially, home education for me has come at a high cost. I would have finished my teaching degree by now and would be earning sufficient wages by the new school year. I have found most families sacrifice their second income so that their children can have a quality education. It saves the government quite a bit of money.

2. The registration process

I personally have had no issues with the registration process; however, I was fortunate to have registered nearly two years ago before many problems started taking place with other friends. I have been horrified and offended as a home schooling parent that these families have been denied registration because ultimately it is not a choice that most parents want to adopt in their families because the sacrifices are so high for the quality of living they could have if both parents worked.

I believe that due to the recent (2013) increase of declined registrations, or withdraw of application from parents; parents do not want to place themselves or their children under any more stress than is necessary. It seems ironic that an education system that should support all children actually encourages parents to not register due to increases in anxiety that have ensued over registrations this last year. It also seems ironic that the children that were perhaps bullied in their public school environment are now bullied by the education system that should have protected them in the first place. I would hope that this is drastically changed so that more parents could register their children confidently with the assurance of an education system that surely would like the best outcome for the student. There needs to be board members on BoSTES who have home education representation so that we are not all thought of as green eyed monsters that have no idea on what their children need in regards to their education, when clearly those that have been trained do not know what to do with kids with special needs anyway. It makes no sense to me.

3. potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing

has great conversations with his peers via Facebook, his employment, and other social settings about homeschooling as many people are still not aware that it is an option that is available to them. I believe that without this option my son would be in a very bad place right now because we both felt his situation hopeless. Because has a wide network of friends, he is seen as a 'normal' teenager and is respected appropriately. I don't consider that his reputation would have been very satisfactory had he continued in public school. I believe he has been able to salvage his reputation and give himself a clean slate that that his peers can view him for who he really is.

4. support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support

I believe that our home education support network on the Central Coast is a wonderful community. I would support an advisory board to further support the parents to provide additional assistance where needed. It would also be wonderful to be able to access local high schools more regularly than we currently do to further the children's education and give them an opportunity to assemble with other students in a class type setting. I would like to see TVet courses available to students so they are able to access similar education pathways as other students. This will also help them mix with the other students which will benefit both parties involved. I am grateful for the wonderful Tafe courses that has been able to access and I know the quality of teaching has been wonderful.

is well adjusted for his age level. He has decided that next year he would like to experience high school (year 11 & 12) and make some more local friends. I fully support him in his venture and I thoroughly believe that home education gave him back his self-esteem which was severely depleted at the end of year 6. I will be forever grateful to our home education community for their invaluable support and encouragement over the years for helping us to think outside the box for a multitude of subject areas and see the value and importance of our home education journey. I just hope that by entering the school system again, we do not go backwards because we have come so far.

I thank you for reading my submission today and I hope that I have been able to help you see how valuable home-education has been for us and the result that I have seen in my family since we became involved in it.

Warm regards