

Submission
No 19

INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Organisation: Down to Earth P/L
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Position: Director
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Dear Beverley,

Please find below a submission for the Parliamentary inquiry into Bullying of Children and Young People.

#1. The nature of Bullying that I have witnessed over the 18 years that I have been speaking at high schools across Australia is primarily verbal. It is always condescending in nature (put down) and filled with sarcasm. The victim usually has an obvious social weakness and has a lack of social skills as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned. The victim is often publicly isolated and therefore an easy target. This is also the case with workplace Bullying of young people as they are moving into a new environment and are alone, they are the new kid on the block as it were.

The level of Bullying varies from school to school and community to community. Bullying is prevalent in every school I have spoken at over the last 18 years, more so in public schools, but not necessarily exclusive to public schools. Unfortunately schoolyard Bullying has become an acceptable part of school social behavior. It is widely accepted, although never condoned, that you will have bullies at school.

Bullying has had a massive impact at a social level of students that I have spoken with, particularly from the feedback of the 90,000 students I have presented to over the past 2 years. Students withdraw from school activities, ranging from academic, to sporting and social or extra-curricular activities for fear that involvement will open them up for further attacks and anti-social ramifications leading to social rejection. Sadly and devastatingly further, more extreme cases especially in rural communities, I have personally seen the scars on the arms of students who turned to self harming and have heard many stories directly from students whose friends have committed suicide over prolonged bullying that was neither recognized nor addressed.

#2. Factors that contribute to bullying are isolation, where a perceived weaker student is isolated and is therefore an easier target. A victim may have a different race or religion, and again, is a minority leading to isolation. The victim may have hygiene issues, where at home personal hygiene is neither taught or is not a priority leading to poor body and mouth odor. Children and young people tend to pick on anything that is perceived to be a difference or weakness. Most victims come from families where there is a poor or non-existent relationship with the father of the family, this highlights the reason I have found for bullying to be ever increasing considering the divorce rate in Australia is approaching 52% (Australian Bureau of statistics 2007) and that of those divorced families with children, 80% end up with the mother having majority custody thus removing the children from having a significant relationship with their father. Case in point; Macquarie Fields NSW where 80% of the local population are under the age of 25 and 80% of those young people do not have a positive male role model of any kind in the house (information from the NSW Police Macquarie Fields LAC 2007). It has been proven through many studies globally, that it is the Father in a nuclear family consisting of Father, Mother & Children, who is the primary influencer on a child's self esteem-by validation and endorsement for males, and value and protection for females. (See; 'Give yourself permission to fly!' Murray. Finch Publishing) these factors are also contributors to creating bullies as well as victims. As is often the case in my professional experience that many of the factors that create victims of bullying are also factors that create perpetrators of bullying. Often times it is the student or individual

that has not been endorsed (male) or valued (female) by their father or positive male role model who begins to bully others as a way of subconsciously attempting to achieve that endorsement or value that has been void in their life. Because of their low self esteem, they wish to find it through bullying activities and search for value and validation hoping to feel better about themselves. As a consequence of the rejection suffered by these individuals they feel angry, undervalued and hurt. They simply then mirror the behavior that has been displayed to them by the significant adults in their own personal life. Adults teach the young person by way of example, that to be selfish is acceptable social behavior and that hurting people by way of verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse and or neglect is simply socially acceptable behavior. Hurt people hurt people, what a child sees, they copy, what is displayed by adults is emulated by children. Children are a product of their environment.

#3. In my professional opinion the best form of early intervention in anti-social behavior and bullying in particular is to have early notification of such behavior, create environments where this type of behavior is totally unacceptable at an early age, address the problem with parents of students that are behaving in such negative ways and have support networks for single parent families that truly value and honor manhood and the role of positive male role models within the very fabric of society.

#4. There needs to be clear communication between the Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Services that works together for the benefit of youth within the community without politicizing the issues with hidden agendas. Politicians are there to serve the community who elected them as their representatives, and therefore it would be in the best interests of both the community and the elected public servant to see this clear communication take place to formulate positive strategies, policies and eventually programs at the community level on the grass roots to empower individuals within the community to create positive paradigm shifts so that bullying is not longer accepted or expected within school life. There also needs to be clear communication between the department of youth and community Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice to establish positive proven programs for positive rehabilitation for Juvenile offenders to be retrained, encouraged and empowered to re-join society rather than have them simply institutionalized as is the case at present. I share this point after having run the in-house programs for repeat offenders within Cobham Juvenile Detention Centre St Marys NSW from 2005 – 2007 with a success rate of 98% of residents who came through my program being released and not being incarcerated again.

#5. The evidence base that I put forward for effective approaches to anti-bullying is 19 years experience on the coal face working with youth, 14 years personal experience running specially designed camps based on outdoor adventure education for bully's, young men in particular, with extremely positive results. i.e. Punchbowl boys high, 2003 was recorded as the worst school in the Nation for acts of violence, 10 young men specially selected by the Principal and staff because of negative behavior, were taken on a trek by myself across the Kokoda track in Papua New Guinea. The result was in the following 12 months, those 10 young men worked effectively with the school staff and reduced violent incidences by over 70% and helped increase the TER to being in the state's top 10% of public schools. I also run an anti-bullying program and have done for the last 5 years in both public and private sector schools nationally with extremely positive results as recorded and expressed by staff and students at those schools.

#6. The best practiced approaches to address and eradicate bullying within Australia and overseas I put forward based on my personal experience and expertise` are; regularly run outdoor adventure camps, accompanied by anti-bullying programs within schools and coupled with 12 month follow-up programs. These would be run twice per school per year, once for year seven students as an introduction to high school life setting the standard and atmosphere that we wish to permeate the school culture, and then repeated at a more mature level in year 9. Year 10 as the beginning of the senior school years would have a trip across Kokoda or similar type adventure trek within NSW with benefits both on a historically educational level as well as a social and emotional level.

These programs can be tailored for overseas jurisdictions as needed.

#7. A note must be mentioned about children's home life. If a child comes from a disadvantaged low socio-economic background where a male is not present or the male in the house is a substance abuser, alcoholic or violent either verbally or physically or both, there is a high risk that that child will either be bullied or become a bully. These parents need support, education and counselling. We need to stop the cycle. We also need to educate the youth on how to make positive choices and live life positively without substance abuse and have collective social events that support such lifestyles. Such an event exists called Big Exo Day run by an organization called Youth Alive here in NSW. The event is the largest Youth Festival in Australia that is Drug and alcohol free and propagates a life live by and through positive life style choices. I strongly recommend State and Federal Government support of this event.

Kind regards,

Brett Murray
Director
Down To Earth P/L