

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - LOUISE BURKE – 2008 Churchill Fellow

To study techniques for managing the impact of relational and non-physical aggression on girls – Canada, USA

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Signed: Louise Burke

Dated: February 9 2009

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DEDICATION

To Caitlin, Isabel, Jessica and friends:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Marianne Williamson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been fortunate in both the personal and professional support I have received as part of this Fellowship and wish to recognise and thank the following people. Without them, I would not have been able to realise my goals and to achieve so much more than I thought possible:

- The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.
- My parents, Pat and Hugh Burke, and all my family for their continual support and encouragement to achieve the best and be the best I can – not only for myself but also for others.
- Mike Devlin, Sally Woollard and all the staff, students and community of Kingsley Primary School in Armadale, Western Australia.
- The Department of Education and Training of Western Australia for enabling me to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity.
- The many wonderful people I met while completing this work. Thank you for your passion, your generosity, your willingness to share and your friendship. It is wonderful to feel part of such an amazing group of people.
- Herman and Caitlin – thank you for sharing this with me. This was for you, with you and about you.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 CONTEXT

On April 21st 2008, an article appeared on the website of the Mackay Daily Mercury, entitled “Only Pretty and Thin Need Apply”¹. The article described the behaviour of a group of 21 Year 11 students at a Mackay Catholic high school. The group of 21 girls were causing concern among parents and teachers due to growing worry about the unhealthy focus on body image, bullying and discriminatory behaviour shown by the group. The 21 girls were ranked based on size, fashion sense and “bitchy” behaviour, but physical attractiveness was paramount – “ugly girls need not apply”, and displayed their rankings on their wrists. Movement into and out of the group was fluid, playing into the needs of the girls to belong.

On October 17th 2006, American teenager, 13 year old Megan Meier committed suicide. Her suicide was attributed to cyber-bullying through the social networking website MySpace. While at first it was believed the bully was a 16-year-old boy, in fact, the comments that had been posted were written by the mother of another girl, in an attempt to pay Megan back for allegedly spreading rumours about her daughter.²

My 5 year old daughter informed me that she didn’t play with some girls in her Pre Primary class as her best friend had told her not to and that she (the best friend) would not be her friend if she did. This same friend demanded her exclusive attention to the exclusion of others, unless she wanted them to play.

“Sarah considered herself to be a serious student. She had dreams of going to college and becoming a scientist. In elementary school she was close friends with the other girls in her gifted program. She looked forward to the academic challenges of junior high. But Sarah's friends from elementary school seemed to change. They started giggling about boys and clothes and MTV; they didn't want to talk about academics or going to space camp. Sarah tried to act interested in the things the other girls were talking about, but the conversations seemed really shallow to her and the other girls made fun of her when she didn't know the latest gossip about pop stars. Soon the other girls started avoiding her and making fun of her clothes and her interests. They never included her in their trips to the mall or their sleepovers, and they looked the other way when she approached them in the lunchroom. They got boys in the class to call and pretend to ask Sarah out on dates. They even posted unflattering pictures of Sarah on the Internet. Sarah had become a victim of female relational aggression.”³

All the above are examples of the way relationships are used to manipulate, control, bully and ultimately damage other people. These aggressive behaviours are powerful

¹ <http://www.dailymercury.com.au/story/2008/04/21/apn-only-pretty-and-thin-need/>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megan_Meier

³ <http://www.teachersandfamilies.com/open/parent/ra1.cfm>

because we all crave the love and attention of other people and in turn, this need can be used by others to achieve their own ends. These behaviours are distinct from physical aggression in that they are often covert – which makes them harder to identify and deal with – and they leave no visible marks – which, again, makes them difficult to substantiate.

My interest in this area has grown gradually through my work as an educator, my own reading and as a parent of a girl. In reflection, I am able to identify moments in my own life where I have been either the victim of relational aggression or the perpetrator. In my conversations with other women and with girls of all ages, I have yet to meet anyone who has not experienced relational aggression in some form.

Programs targeting the specific needs of girls in the area of covert bullying and relational aggression are under-represented in Australian schools and communities and little local information exists about how best to support the needs of girls who are being bullied. Groups such as STRIDE⁴ offer programs that teachers can deliver with small groups, but the general level of awareness of this area is low. Conversely, there are a large number of organisations operating in North America that provide a diverse range of programs to girls, schools, parents and carers, not for profit agencies and community groups. Many of these groups have been operational for a number of years and have developed an extensive range of resources. Given the many similarities that exist between the USA, Canada and Australia, I was interested in finding resources and strategies that could be re-conceptualised to meet the needs of Australian schools and communities.

Relational aggression has only recently been defined as an identifiable form of bullying. It is typically considered something that girls do rather than boys; however both genders use relational aggression. It has always existed, but has often been characterised as “how girls treat each other” and “the way girls/women are”. Bullying has more traditionally been conceptualised as physical and something that boys do due to being thought of as the more aggressive gender. However, girls are just as aggressive and display this through the relative subtlety of the process.

In my work, I encounter relational aggression every day. I would like to say that as an unhealthy behaviour, it is something that we grow out of, and certainly rates decrease as age increases⁵, but I see it in the full range of interactions in the school and social context. Most nights on television it is possible to watch programs that promote rejection, exclusion and ostracism as an appropriate way of dealing with other people. Bullying and the powerful feelings it engenders in people make it a very difficult behaviour to choose not to do, particularly when it helps you achieve your needs. The lack of the ability of the bully to empathise and reflect on other people and their feelings means they see no valid reason to stop. With these types of behaviours occurring in girls as young as four and impacting negatively on all

⁴ <http://www.stride.org.au/>

⁵ p 40 Understanding Girls' Friendships, Fights and Feuds (2006) Besag

aspects of learning, it is vital that as a community we find ways to help girls and their families recognise, confront and deal with all aspects of relational aggression.

Why girls? Girls use relationships to form their identities⁶. They do this their entire lives and rely upon these close relationships for support and intimacy. With adolescence, the peer group and its common culture take on increasing significance and the need to belong is paramount in many girls' minds. Girls are encouraged from an early age to not be aggressive, and by this we generally mean physical, in dealing with problems. The behaviours they engage in are often not judged as aggressive⁷, but merely a stage in their development.

*With girls, it was a different story. Girl World is full of subtle manipulations, vague power struggles, and intense mental warfare. I was brought up to be a very straightforward and honest kid, but in Girl World, the ability to lie well was your greatest asset. If you couldn't fake concern for a weaker kid one second and then rip her to shreds 10 seconds after she walked away, you couldn't hang with the girls.*⁸

Why is this important? One of the most important things I learned through my Fellowship was that relational aggression is only part of the picture that needs to be looked at. Girl World is in crisis and Boy World is not that far behind it. The intertwining of relational aggression, media pressure, earlier onset of adolescent, sexualisation of childhood, cybersafety and the need to provide safe school and community spaces for all children, all go together to create a complex picture of what the world is like for our children. It is vital that families, schools and communities find ways to work together to ensure we all have access to best practice information, strategies and programs so that we can ensure our children's safety.

3.2 WHAT IS RELATIONAL AGGRESSION?

Relational aggression can be defined as any behavior that is intended to hurt someone by damaging his or her relationships. Some examples of relational aggression are exclusion, gossiping or rumor spreading, alliance building and cyberbullying.⁹ The ease of access and use of technologies such as texting, social networking sites and messaging, is allowing relational aggression to become more covert, more accessible and free of consequence. Cyberbullying is an area of major concern for schools and families as it is bullying at a distance – the bully does not see the immediate effect of their actions, does not witness how the victim is affected and can become desensitized to the effect of their behaviour.

⁶ p 8 [Girl Wars](#) (2003) Dellasega and Nixon

⁷ p 16 [Odd Girl Out](#) (2002) Simmons

⁸ <http://www.violentacres.com/archives/89/how-to-be-a-girl-bully>

⁹ p 4 [The Ophelia Project Information Packet](#) October 2008

When compared to other forms of aggression (e.g. physical) relational aggression is much harder to detect and consequently much harder to respond to. It is easy to dismiss the behaviours as insignificant, petty, trivial and not worth worrying about. Girls who report these behaviours run the risk of being described as neurotic, over-reacting, exaggerating what happened or being “too sensitive” or “too emotional”. Skilled relational aggressors utilize their power through the relationships they form with other girls who then go on to act as facilitators, messengers or aggressors. The girls with the most power are often popular, attractive, successful students who have excellent relationships with adults, which lends them greater credibility when denying the accusations of their victims. By operating through the group they can legitimately say – in their eyes – they didn’t do anything. The term “Queen Bee”, coined by Rosalind Wiseman in her 2002 book, Queen Bees and Wannabes describes this kind of girl. The Queen Bee’s popularity is based on fear and the control she exerts over others. She will use charisma, force, money, looks, will and manipulation to control, she operates to weaken girls’ friendships with others and in so doing strengthen her control over the group.¹⁰

Relational aggression is an indirect form of aggression where the aggressor tries to hide her intention to hurt by acting in a covert way.¹¹ The lack of direct confrontation between bully and victim and the use of intermediaries contributes to the difficulties encountered when trying to manage these situations. When faced with the cry of, “she’s looking at me!” or “they won’t let me play” it is easy to dismiss these complaints with brush-offs such as “don’t be so silly!” or “find someone else to play with”. What these statements fail to address is the messages being conveyed to other members of the peer group about status, position and power. Certainly, one child can look at another and no one should be compelled to play with someone they do not want to. However, if the intention behind these actions and actions like them is rejection, exclusion, humiliation or the reinforcement of one person’s power over another, as adults we are obliged to step in.

Since the term “Relational Aggression” (RA) was first used by Crick and Gotpetler in 1995, there has been great interest in learning more about its unique characteristics and the impact of RA on young people, and in particular girls. In their 2003 book, Girl Wars, Cheryl Dellasega and Charisse Nixon provide a brief summary of what we have learned from research about this area¹². For example:

- Relationally aggressive behaviour is present in all age groups.
- Relational aggression is a stronger predictor of future social difficulties than physical aggression. This is particularly the case in children in grades three to six.
- Gender differences in relational aggression point to girls using it within their current friendship groups while boys use it more outside their friendship groups.
- Girls are more likely to approve of and use relational aggression than boys.

¹⁰ pp 25-27 Queen Bees and Wannabes (2002) Wiseman

¹¹ p 39 Understanding Girls’ Friendships, Fights and Feuds (2006) Besag

¹² pp 9-11 Girl Wars (2003) Dellasega and Nixon

In her keynote address at The Ophelia Project's National Conference in 2008, Dr Charisse Nixon gave the following descriptions of relational aggression:

- A traumatic (emotionally painful, distressful or shocking) experience that disrupts a child's sense of trust.
- A form of discrimination, where "discrimination" is different treatment based solely on membership of a distinct group or category.
- The exclusion of others as a form of maintaining power relationships or control.
- Spreading rumours for the purpose of maintaining an unequal power balance.¹³

We need as a community to begin to work more closely with girls and their families and schools to help them recognise relational aggression and to manage its impact. In its mildest form, we are looking at hurt feelings that can be dealt with through minimal redirection and support and realignment of relationships. In its most profound, we are looking at severe isolation, loneliness, escalation into physical aggression, self-harm, and potentially suicide. If we are going to implement programs and policies to address bullying in our school, workplaces and in society, they need to address all aspects and not just physical, and the behaviours of both genders.

3.3 AIMS

The aims of my study were:

- To investigate range of school and community based programs addressing relational, verbal and covert bullying between girls.
- To participate in training in curriculum delivery and conference workshops identifying strategies to support schools and communities develop safe social climates.
- To visit academic institutions, school communities and community based organizations that are working on developing environments that address relational aggression and assess appropriateness for the Australian context.

¹³ Personal Notes [The Ophelia Project National Conference](#) October 2008 Chicago Illinois

3.4 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

DATE	ORGANISATION	CONTACT
6/10/2008 – 13/10/2008	Courage For Youth	Deb Walker and Allison Apps Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada
13/10/2008 – 19/10/2008	The Ophelia Project's National Conference "The Bullying Crisis: Exploring Dimensions of Relational Aggression"	Hotel Orrington □ 1710 Orrington Ave. Evanston, IL, USA
19/10/2008 – 24/10/2008	Batchelor Middle School Monroe County Schools	Lucy Papier Batchelor Middle School Bloomington, IN, USA
	Monroe County Ophelia Project	Michelle Martin-Colman
24/10/2008 – 1/11/2008	The Ophelia Project National Headquarters The Ophelia Project Erie, PA, USA	Sue Wellman Founder Mary Baird CEO Christine Linkie □ Director of School Programs and Program Development □ Katie Allison Director Of Training
1/11/2008 – 7/11/2008	Center for Social and Emotional Education	Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D. President, Center for Social and Emotional Education New York, NY, USA
7/11/2008 – 14/11/2008	Owning Up Training The Washington Plaza Hotel □ Washington DC, USA	Rosalind Wiseman, author and educator Shanterra McBride, Director PLOT – Preparing Leaders Of Today Julie Baron, Clinical Social Worker Candace Nuzzo Director of Professional Development Emily Bartek Director of Events & Media Relations
14/11/2008 – 20/11/2008	The Ophelia Project and Boys Initiative - Tampa Bay Tampa, FL 33609	Norraine L. Russell, Ph.D. Chief Executive Officer Nikki Stokes Vice President of Programming Anna Abella Program Director for Schools
20/11/2008 – 30/11/2008	NM Commission on the Status of Women	Kathi Brown NM Girls Institute Coordinator NM Commission on the Status of Women Albuquerque, NM USA
	Social Empowerment New Mexico	Emily D. Moore, Ph.D. □ Louise Adelstone, LPCC Albuquerque, NM USA

4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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4.1. AIMS

- To investigate range of school and community based programs addressing relational, verbal and covert bullying between girls.
- To participate in training in curriculum delivery and conference workshops identifying strategies to support schools and communities develop safe social climates.
- To visit academic institutions, school communities and community based organizations that are working on developing environments that address relational aggression and assess appropriateness for the Australian context.

4.2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Courage For Youth Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada	Deb Walker - Founder Allison Apps – Board Member Dr Marvin Krank (Board Member and Professor of Psychology and Dean of Graduate Studies at University of British Columbia, Okanagan Kim McCrea (graduate student and coordinator of the VOICES program)
The Ophelia Project's National Conference	"The Bullying Crisis: Exploring Dimensions of Relational Aggression" (Cyberbullying, School Programs, Media Influences, Safe Schools)
Batchelor Middle School Monroe County Schools Bloomington, IN, USA	Lucy Papier Assistant Principal Batchelor Middle School

Monroe County Ophelia Project	Michelle Martin-Colman – Project Director Gary Plaford – Author Ingrid Skoog - Non-verbal Communication Trainer Leslie Skooglund - Youth Outreach: Alternative to Expulsion Coordinator
The Ophelia Project National Headquarters The Ophelia Project Erie, PA, USA	Sue Wellman - Founder Mary Baird - CEO Christine Linkie - Director of School Programs and Program Development □ Katie Allison - Director Of Training Dr Charisse Nixon - assistant professor of developmental psychology at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Director of Research and Evaluation for The Ophelia Project
Center for Social and Emotional Education New York, NY, USA	Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D. President, Center for Social and Emotional Education
Owning Up Training Washington DC, USA	Rosalind Wiseman, author and educator Shanterra McBride, Director PLOT – Preparing Leaders Of Today Julie Baron, Clinical Social Worker Candace Nuzzo - Director of Professional Development Emily Bartek - Director of Events & Media Relations
The Ophelia Project and Boys Initiative - Tampa Bay, FL, USA	Norraine L. Russell, Ph.D. - Chief Executive Officer Nikki Stokes - Vice President of Programming Anna Abella - Program Director for Schools
New Mexico Commission on the Status of Women	Kathi Brown – New Mexico Girls Institute Coordinator Mary Molina Mescall - Executive Director
Social Empowerment New Mexico	Emily D. Moore, Ph.D. □ Louise Adelstone, LPCC

4.3. SUMMARY

- The problems we are encountering with relational aggression in schools are universal and being experienced in many communities around the world. We need to learn from places that have had programs in place for a number of years in order to ameliorate the damage that such behaviours can cause if left unchecked.
- The peak ages for incidents of relational aggression are 10 to 14, although it is prevalent in children as young as four and well into adulthood.
- There are a wide range of well researched and established programs currently being implemented in schools and communities across North America that are suitable for use in the local context.
- We need more information about what the Australian experience of girls is concerning relational aggression. Very little local information exists or is available about this area. We need to more accurately map the population most affected by this, explore and learn from the experiences of older women, investigate how

these behaviours are inculcated and embedded in girls as young as four and use this information to plan and deliver appropriate interventions.

- The role of school/community culture and climate must be investigated alongside any program delivery. Long-term positive change can only be accomplished if it is embedded in a supportive culture that maximises the involvement and ownership of all.

4.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to fight the pervasive belief that relational aggression, victimisation, exclusion and rejection are acceptable behaviours from girls and that it is a stage that all girls (and most boys) have to go through. If we believe this, we will continue to condemn our daughters to suffer in silence with no support from those charged with the responsibility to care for their health and wellbeing.

- Girls need help, support, strategies and advice about how to manage relational aggression and its effects. They need to know what they are dealing with, how to access support and why what is happening to them is unacceptable. These programs can be offered through schools or through organisations within the community. There are many excellent resources available that can easily be adapted to suit the needs of the diverse population that exists in our state. What is most needed is a mechanism to deliver these programs to girls in their local context and provide follow up support as girls implement what they have been shown.
- It is vital to look at changes in terms of the entire school or community and not as a tagged on program. Programs must be looked at in the context of the entire school culture and take into account the unique aspects of each location. Through embedding what is needed into the fabric of the school or community, there is a more valid buy in to the process; there is ownership by the people most affected and a sense of alignment with other successful practices within the organisation. Of course, it may also be important to assess and re-evaluate the entire school or community culture, particularly if the prevailing structure is contributing to the harmful behaviours and perpetuating unhealthy beliefs about behaviour, bullying and what is acceptable.
- That a series of “Town Hall” meetings/focus groups be held at all schools in the City of Armadale. These sessions will collect information from girls - aged between 10 and 18 - and their families and carers, and will collect information about the issues facing girls and their families, program needs and shortfalls, resources currently available, resources required and information about what they see as the most important things they need help with. This process will be based on the model used in New Mexico (see section 5.8 in the report) and will provide a model that can be replicated in other locations.
- That information is provided to schools and professionals within the education community about relational aggression and its impact on girls and boys. There is very little current information on relational aggression as a subset of bullying and consequently schools are under-prepared to manage its impact. More work needs

to be done equipping teachers – particularly those working with girls aged 10 to 14 – in ensuring that they feel suitably prepared to handle these turbulent years.

- Parents need more information about how they can practically manage things such as cyberbullying, relational aggression, exclusion, victimisation and harassment as it impacts on their sons and daughters. They need to know what is “normal” and what they need to be worried about. They need to know where they can get support and how that support will help. Currently, there is nothing available because no one has made available all the excellent information that currently exists in a form that is easy to disseminate. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about these issues works against anyone seeking advice. People don’t know what they don’t know and feel powerless to do anything to change situations or take back the role of “parent”.
- We need to explore in detail the value of mentoring programs to support girls in transition from primary to high school, high school to work or tertiary studies, and tertiary studies to the workforce as adults. Research shows that a major protective factor for young people is the support of one trusting, caring adult who believes in them. This “adult” role can be taken by someone a few years removed who has lived through the same experiences. We need to implement programs that train women and girls how to mentor effectively and make a real difference in the lives of others. Programs such as “VOICES”, which was developed by university students to assist girls in transition from middle to high school, are an excellent example of meaningful mentoring.
- A key protective factor in reducing early sexual activity is a close and loving relationship between a father and daughter. Unfortunately, many fathers are unsure about how to relate to their daughters as they transform from little girls into young women. Programs need to be developed and implemented that help fathers understand what is happening to their daughters as well as helping girls communicate meaningfully with their fathers.

5. PROGRAM

5.1. KELOWNA

Courage For Youth is an “opheliate¹⁴” operating in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. It was established in 2003 as a non-profit organization focussing on the building of a community that is supportive of the physical, emotional and social development of young people. The initial target group was young people between the ages of 12 and 15 or what traditional comprises a middle school cohort. An organization reliant on the active support of volunteers, it works directly with parents as well as young people and has operated a diverse range of programs throughout the Okanagan Valley.

From its inception, Courage For Youth hoped to fill an identified gap in service and support to “not at risk” teenagers, who still face challenges but have no identifiable supports outside the family, as well as for families wanting to safeguard their children. In this way, Courage For Youth offers a *proactive* rather than a *reactive* model of support – instead of waiting for problems to occur, young people are given strategies that aim to “future proof” them so that if/when issues arise they already have strategies and supports in place to assist them.

As an organisation, Courage For Youth has three goals:

1. “To develop a strong organization that attracts and utilises the combined talents, wisdom and expertise of our community to create a safe social climate for children and families.
2. To present programs that raise awareness of the challenges faced by youth in our media-drenched culture, in particular, about peer aggression
3. To help youth deal effectively with peer aggression, make safer choices, and remain connected to their families. Specifically, to partner with schools and community organizations to create a safe social climate in schools and to work toward systemic change in the social norms of youth.”¹⁵

Through targeted research and surveying of the community, it became apparent that the issue concerning the majority of the youth population and their families was bullying and specifically, bullying of a covert nature – namely relational aggression. Bullying is a significant issue at all levels of the school system and schools are required to implement policies and proceeds to manage and address this area. Bullying will never go away as it is based on an individual’s need for power. What schools try to do through education and process is to equip students and their

¹⁴ “A National Opheliate™ evolves from a few committed individuals who mobilize a volunteer effort to create safe social climates in their community with the guidance and resource sharing of The Ophelia Project national office.

The approach of our National Opheliate™ volunteers brings families, schools, social agencies and community leaders together in collaboration to support CASS™ and other initiatives of The Ophelia Project.

Each National Opheliate™ is unique, offering a variety of programming, from Ophelia clubs and high school mentoring programs, to collaborative projects with their local YMCA.” <http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/opheliate.htm>

¹⁵ p 3 [Courage For Youth Profile](#) Courage for Youth Association

families with the best information and tools so that they can deal effectively with incidents of bullying. What is most effective is when school and community work together to deliver clear, consistent messages about what is appropriate, reinforce and recognise appropriate behaviours and empower the people most affected by bullying behaviour. While there are many programs in use to address bullying, as seen in the 2003 Report from the British Columbia Safe Schools Task Force, these programs generally do not:

- Address relational aggression, only verbal and physical aggression;
- Utilise the bystander as an agent of change, but concentrate on the bully and the victim;
- Provide training and support for parents and adults; and
- Address the need for creating safe social climates in schools and communities by changing and challenging social behavioural norms.

Schools and communities hoping to address the issue of bullying need to tackle the problem holistically, utilising a range of tools and, most importantly looking at the prevailing culture and norms that support the behaviours.

My aim in visiting Kelowna was to meet with Deb Walker and other members of her group to see how they operated, what the issues they encountered were and what they had identified as the needs for their community. As with everyone I met while completing my fellowship, Deb, Alison Apps (board member and volunteer), Dr Marvin Krank (board member and Professor of Psychology and Dean of Graduate Studies at University of British Columbia, Okanagan) and Kim McCrea (graduate student and coordinator of the VOICES program) were all incredibly helpful and supportive.

With Deb and Alison, I visited Vernon Middle School and observed them in negotiation with the deputy of a regional middle school. The purpose was to outline how Courage For Youth could work with the school to support girls in transition from middle school to high school, utilising high school and university students as mentors. An example given was the VOICES program that had been developed collaboratively by Kim McCrea and Deb Walker through Courage For Youth. Kim is a university student and Deb is the founder of Courage For Youth. The program was developed to assist girls in the transition from Middle to High school. It was developed by the university students who would be delivering, in collaboration with Deb, it and was delivered in the school holidays. The program was 4 sessions, each about 2 hours in length, with 6 to 15 girls. It built on the knowledge and recent experiences of the university students in managing relationships and the changes that occur from middle to high school. There is also a pre-program session for parents, run by an adult facilitator. The four sessions cover topics that are critical for girls in managing themselves as they transition through adolescence and into adulthood. They are Media, Friendship, Self Respect and Communication. Each session is a combination of information and discussion to assist the girls as they identify what their own values are, how the values and practices of others can impinge upon their lives and how they can belong but at the same time view critically what is happening around them and respond appropriately.

The issues raised and what I learned will be covered later on. However, one very significant point needs to be made here. As a child develops through childhood and into adolescence, one very important protective factor is the need to have one caring and responsible adult who is there exclusively for you. What is equally important, as a protective factor for girls is her father. Many men find the change of their daughter from a little girl to a young woman difficult to adjust to and may withdraw slightly. It is vitally important to the long-term development of girls that fathers maintain a close, loving and protective relationship. This can be a major protective factor in decreasing promiscuity, as if a girl feels loved and valued by her father, there is less need to look for this validation elsewhere.

5.2. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The 2008 Ophelia Project National Conference was held in Chicago, Illinois in October 2008. As well as attending the conference, I also completed a train-the-trainer Cyberbullying program that enables me to work with schools in developing responses to issues surrounding cyberbullying and cybersafety.

The theme of the 2008 conference was “The Bullying Crisis – Exploring Dimensions of Relational Aggression”. Through the conference, I was able to participate in a number of workshops, hear inspirational keynote speakers, connect with educators and other professionals working in this area, and learn more about how schools and communities are working together to support girls.

Stan Davis delivered the first keynote, entitled “Schools Where Everyone Belongs”. Stan has worked in the area of human rights for a number of years and in a variety of ways. This includes work in the Civil Rights movement, as a social worker and therapist working with abused children and as a school counsellor. He is the author of Schools Where Everyone Belongs (2004) and Empowering Bystanders in Bullying Prevention (2007).¹⁶ The keynote discussed how our current knowledge of effective, caring schools is built on years of acquired knowledge about how humans should treat one another. He elaborated on the power of words in framing and re-framing behaviour and encouraged us to conceptualise a more caring and generous school structure that was both inclusive and endorsed high expectations of all.

As I was participating in the Cyberbullying train-the-trainer program, my first workshop was “A Culture of Overconnecteds: Cyberbullying and The New Frontier of Aggression”. Erika Dauber presented this session. Erika is a National Consultant with the Ophelia Project in the area of Communications. She is a Masters student in the Learning Design and Technology program at Stanford University where her research interests are empathy and moral development and social media technologies. The workshop was an overview to the on-line world of today and an exploration of the tools that are used to communicate within it.

¹⁶ http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/about_stan.htm

Jane Bluestein delivered the next keynote, entitled “Creating Emotionally Safe Schools”. This was an incredibly engaging presentation from someone with wide ranging experience within the education system. The keynote emphasised the importance of emotional safety to learning, how we create a “safe world” for ourselves, the creation of safe school cultures and the role of positive school cultures.

From her web biography...

“Dr. Bluestein specializes in programs and resources geared to provide practical and meaningful information, training and hope in areas related to relationship building, effective instruction and guidance, and personal development. Much of her work focuses on interactions between adults and children, especially children at risk. Her down-to-earth speaking style, practicality, sense of humour, and numerous stories and examples make her ideas clear and accessible to her audiences.

Jane is an award-winning author whose books include Creating Emotionally Safe Schools; High School’s Not Forever; 21st Century Discipline; Being a Successful Teacher; Parents in a Pressure Cooker; Parents, Teens, & Boundaries; The Parent’s Little Book of Lists: Do’s and Don’ts of Effective Parenting; Mentors, Masters, and Mrs. McGregor: Stories of Teachers Making a Difference; and Magic, Miracles & Synchronicity: A Journal of Gratitude and Awareness. Dr. Bluestein’s latest books include The Win-Win Classroom and a companion facilitator’s guide.

Formerly a classroom teacher (in inner-city Pittsburgh, PA), crisis-intervention counsellor, teacher training program coordinator, and volunteer with high-risk teens at a local Day Treatment Program, Dr. Bluestein currently heads Instructional Support Services, Inc., a consulting and resource firm in Albuquerque, New Mexico.”¹⁷

The next workshop I attended was “CASS – Creating a Safe School[®]: The Ophelia Project School Program”. This session was presented by Mary A. Baird, President and CEO of The Ophelia Project, Christine Linkie, Director of School Programs and Program Development, The Ophelia Project and Chivon Fitch, Assistant Director of Research, The Ophelia Project. CASS is a program developed by The Ophelia Project aimed at creating long-term, positive systemic change in school cultures. The program is delivered by trained consultants and consists of quantitative and qualitative data collection, school consulting, teacher professional development, focus groups, parent information sessions, curricula and training of student mentors. The program is delivered exclusively by The Ophelia Project and is currently in use in schools across the USA as well as Bermuda.

¹⁷ <http://www.janebluestein.com/jane/bio.html>

The next keynote was “Relational Aggression: Health Risks and Protective Factors...Where do we go from here?” This session was delivered by Charisse Nixon, Ph.D. Dr Nixon is an expert in children’s emotional and social development. She is currently an assistant professor of developmental psychology at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College as well as Director of Research and Evaluation for The Ophelia Project.¹⁸ The keynote looked at reconceptualising relational aggression and the development of specific strategies that act as protective factors that enable children to stand up against aggressors. It also looked at the crucial role of mentors as a protective strategy.

The second compulsory workshop was “Cyberbullying Prevention and Response”. This was delivered by Dr Sameer Hinduja and Dr Justin Patchin. “Dr Hinduja is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida Atlantic University. He studies various forms of computer-related deviance and crime from both social and technological perspectives, and works with school districts, law enforcement, and the private sector towards its understanding and response.¹⁹ Dr Patchin is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He has presented on various topics relating to juvenile justice, school violence, policy and program evaluation, and adolescent Internet use and mis-use at academic conferences and training seminars across the United States.”²⁰ This session looked at how schools need to become more proactive at managing cyberbullying, what schools are responsible for, how to develop a policy, how schools can assess their performance in this area, educating the school community, define appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and the role of school culture and school climate in managing cyberbullying and cybersafety.

My final workshop was “Relational Aggression and Television: Is Disney Dangerous For Our Girls?” The session was presented by Laura Hammel, Assistant Professor at the Ursuline College in Ohio and looked at the role of TV in perpetuating relational aggression as a valid form of aggressive response for girls. The session raised some very interesting points about children learning aggressive behaviours, disguised as humour and presented by attractive characters on popular programs. On average, relationally aggressive behaviour is seen 18.46 times per hour on American TV. The more a child or adult watches television, the more likely it is they will witness someone being relationally aggressive towards another person. The workshop also looked at ways children could be educated to recognise and respond to relational aggression that they saw.

The final part of the national conference was the Cyberbullying Train the Trainer sessions. This was delivered by Erika Dauber and Katie Allison, Director of Training for The Ophelia Project. The package that we were trained to deliver had been developed by The Ophelia Project in response to the increasing prominence of cyberbullying as another tool in the repertoire of the bully. With increasing access to

¹⁸ <http://www.imom.com/ispecialist/bio/index.php?id=5>

¹⁹ <http://www.cyberbullying.us/aboutus.php>

²⁰ <http://www.cyberbullying.us/aboutus.php>

technology comes an increased vulnerability to exploitation, harassment and victimisation if the appropriate mechanisms are not put in place to protect and educate the vulnerable. Technology is a wonderful tool, but, just like the “Stranger Danger” programs of the past, it is now vitally important to educate schools, communities and children in how to negotiate “Cyberia” safely. The tools I have acquired through this training will enable me to effectively lead schools through the process of identification of the issues, clarification of the needs of the school, training of relevant personnel and delivery of appropriate curricula.

5.3. BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

The Ophelia Project of Monroe County is another opheliate. The Program Director is Michelle Martin Colman who became involved with the organisation in 2003. The Monroe County Community Relational Aggression Prevention Task Force was established through a *Community Alliance To Promote Education* Grant in 2003, in partnership with the Monroe County Community School Corporation and has worked in the three local middle schools to implement a raising awareness program. Michelle is passionate about the importance of recognising and responding to relational aggression and the need for community action to make a difference. “Through my work with The Ophelia Project, I’ve become increasingly committed to the idea that relational aggression starts with adults and is perpetuated by adults through their children. I saw too, that RA has no religious or ethnic boundaries.”²¹ In her role as Monroe County Ophelia Project Director, she has worked tirelessly with the local community to highlight these important issues and create an awareness of the need for safe social climates for all. The Task Force also develops resources and promotes collaborative resources and partnerships that can be adapted and shared across the wider Bloomington community.

I was very keen to work with Michelle as she represented a different perspective, in that she sees the role of adults in modelling and promoting relationally aggressive behaviour as important. The time I spent with her was incredibly valuable in a number of ways. I connected with Lucy Papier, Assistant Principal of Batchelor Middle School and was able to visit the school and meet with Lucy to gain a perspective of middle school culture and how one school manages this issue. I spent time with a student at Batchelor and was able to hear first hand how she manages the myriad of interactions and situations she encounters. I met with Gary Plaford, author of [Bullying And The Brain: Using Cognitive and Emotional Intelligence to Help Kids Cope](#). Gary is a former director of social services for the Monroe County Community School Corporation and we spoke of the role of the brain in managing and modifying behaviour. I met with Ashley Flora, an Indiana University senior and Advocate for Community Engagement (ACE) who had created and delivered a workshop for girls exploring self-portraiture as a way of building self-esteem and self-expression. An interesting aspect was a shoe-painting activity where the girls personalized their own shoes. The project of painting shoes was significant as the

²¹ p1 [The Ophelia Project Newsletter](#) June 2004

girls discussed how shoes represent identity; a person can't wear shoes that are a poor fit, in the same way that we can't honestly behave in ways that are not comfortable for us.

Ingrid Skoog is a practitioner in the use of non-verbal communication, made famous through the 1970's in the work of Marshall Rosenberg. Non-Violent Communication is also known as Compassionate Communication and is a set of tools designed to help promote compassion and understanding. These tools are designed to be used to improve all forms of communication. While in Bloomington, I completed an introductory session on the principles and use of NVC as a way of giving people strategies to deal with relational aggression.

In the Monroe County Community School system there is the facility to withdraw students from mainstream settings to an alternative program if they are in danger of being excluded from the school system. This program is called Youth Outreach: Alternative to Expulsion and is run by Leslie Skooglund. The program supports students in years 7 and 8 and offers a way back into the system. Students are enrolled in the program for a range of reasons, most commonly behavioural. The program has capacity for eight students. It is intensive and currently has only girls enrolled. These girls are all major behaviour problems in their home schools and are extremely relationally aggressive. Students can be in the program for up to one semester and the aim is for them to transition back to one of the three middle schools in Bloomington. Highly structured individualised sessions, combined with one on one counselling and life skills training provide structure and support for the students as they are part of the program. As with all programs of this kind, it is highly over-subscribed with a large waiting list. For any effective change to occur there needs to be partnerships built between the school and family and support for change must be present at home. Transition back into the wider school context is also problematic – the small group structure is highly supportive and responsive to student needs. This is not always the case in the larger school context.

I also met with a parent – “Sarah”. This parent had had significant conflict with the school board over the treatment of her daughter and the lack of any action to support her child in the school system. The matter was so serious that legal action was considered. One of the issues that this parent raised was that relational aggression is not just something that happens in adolescence or childhood. Entire organisations are constructed on relationally aggressive principles. Adults working in these organisations perpetuate relationally aggressive behaviour in their work either to protect themselves or because they are comfortable using relational aggression. These behaviours are reinforced and rewarded by a structure that fails to clearly articulate and acknowledge the effect of relational aggression or seeks to minimise or trivialise its effects.

Working with Michelle was incredibly valuable as it gave me further opportunity to see the challenges of establishing a grassroots organisation and how one person could make a difference. Michelle operates collaboratively with a range of

organisations. She utilises her skills, knowledge and experience of the local community to match people to programs and has strong links with the University Of Indiana campus at Bloomington. When becoming involved in making a difference in your community, it is necessary to have a very clear understanding of your capacity and the capacity of those you will need to support you. Based on what I have heard from people who have been in this situation, the following points are relevant.

- Unless you have access to funding sources/grants, most of the work will need to be run through volunteers. This will require access to people who share the vision of what you are hoping to achieve, have the time and energy to commit, can be trained to deliver what ever information you have and are prepared to work for no money!
- If you are able to link with an existing organisation (school, government department, other not for profit, church, university, etc) and can utilise their existing resources in return for inclusion in your project, you will save time and money. For example, linking with a university that has students who do a community service component and using the students to deliver a mentoring program to adolescent girls, is one way to accomplish a number of shared goals.
- This is not a task for someone who has no desire to communicate. In order to get a venture such as this off the ground you will need to network, self-promote, identify opportunities and generally get out there. This can be a problem if you are more interested in delivering content. However, through using a focus group or small committee of people who share your vision it can be possible to utilise the skills of others.
- Creation is time-consuming, particularly if you are doing it on your own. There is a continuing need to invent new, fresh content and identify new ways of disseminating it, as well as maintaining ties with earlier groups for follow-up. And ultimately, you need to become what you want to give away.
- It is important to recognise your own passion, strengths and skills and to be clear about what you can achieve. If you are the only person doing this, what can you achieve on your own?

5.4. ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA

Erie is the national headquarters for The Ophelia Project. The Ophelia Project is a national (US) based non-profit organisation that was established in 1997. The founder, Sue Wellman, started the group with the help of a team of volunteers who shared her interest in this issue. The group came about due to the interest created following the publication of Mary Pipher's book, Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls and was inspired to provide support to adolescent girls and their families within their local community. Through connecting directly with girls and hearing from them their fears and concerns and the ways they were negotiating the transition from childhood to adulthood, it became apparent that one issue more than any other was at the root of the girls' concerns – relational aggression. This issue,

while appearing more dominant for girls is also a major concern for boys and the effects and behaviours carry on into adulthood.

Sue Wellman is a dynamic person. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet with her while I was in Erie. Sue believes passionately in the need for schools, families and communities to work together to improve the outcomes and opportunities for the youth of today. She sees that there is a need to look at relational aggression as early as possible and “future proof” girls to recognise, name and address aggression wherever they see it. Her own background as a mother and an educator has convinced her that the dangers facing our children are real and complex and require a collaborative effort to address. She sees schools as the key agent of change but working alongside them are “passionate, caring parents” who are prepared to work to bring about the necessary changes to the culture.

While initially a community organisation based in Erie and supporting the local community, The Ophelia Project is now a significant national organisation, supporting schools and communities across the United States. The need to create safe social climates resonates widely and the organisation promotes itself widely in an effort to reach and support as many people as possible. Through the production of educational resources, programs, awareness raising, research and building sustainable practices, the Ophelia Project aims to “reduce aggression and promote a positive, productive environment for all”²².

After attending the National Conference in Chicago, and meeting many of the staff from the National Headquarters, I was keen to meet up with them in Erie. I was familiar with a number of their programs but was keen to see the programs at work in their local context. In the time I was there I had the opportunity to meet with Sue Wellman, Founder of The Ophelia Project; Mary Baird, President and CEO; Katie Allison, Director of Training; Christine Linkie, Director of School Programs and Program Development, and Charisse Nixon, Director of Research and Evaluation and assistant professor of developmental psychology at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. I was also able to see some of their programs in action in local schools and community centres as well as spend time in the head office finding out more about their operation.

The Ophelia Project works with organisations to bring about change. They are keen to collect and provide evidence regarding the success of their projects and are currently involved in validating CASS as an evidence based tool supporting school climate reform²³.

²² From The Ophelia Project Mission Statement 2007

²³ To illustrate the effectiveness of CASS: Creating a Safe School™ programming, a research team from The Ophelia Project team surveyed five schools. Surveys were taken before the CASS: Creating a Safe School™ programs were implemented and then again one year after the students participated in CASS: Creating a Safe School™. The study included four schools in the north-eastern part of the U.S.; one school in the southeast.

- 537 students were included in the study including 393 6th graders, 80 7th graders and 64 8th graders.
- 62% were male; 38% were female.
- 24% were considered regular users of relational aggression.

- **CASS: Creating a Safe School**[®]: This program combines the skills, knowledge and experiences of a “community of caring adults” with the skills, knowledge and experiences of students to bring about sustainable change to the social climate/culture of a school or district. The main goal of the program is to “to positively impact the social norms in a school community by addressing the hurtful, covert behaviors of peer aggression and identifying, teaching and modeling a more positive set of normative behaviors for educators, students and parents”²⁴. CASS is made up of a number of components that can be used as stand alones or as an integrated package. The components are:
 - **Assessment:** CASS Assessments collect a range of data, both qualitative and quantitative to get an accurate, overall picture of the school climate. Following the aggregation of data, a report is provided with recommendations.
 - **Consulting:** Project consultants work with school staff to refine the data collected. At this stage consideration is given to a number of areas such as identification of key issues, appropriateness of policy and procedure, programming and strategies to suit the school community
 - **Mentor Programs:** Training focuses on increasing the skills of the bystander, and mentors in providing lessons to younger students. The use of close in age mentors is a key to this program. Adults work with mentors, providing strategies, support and encouragement. Based on the needs assessment, suitable programs, resources and strategies are tailored to the needs of individual schools.
 - **Teacher Training:** In order to implement the programs that have been identified, staff may need training in managing and responding appropriately and confidently to certain situations. Staff from The Ophelia Project provide the training necessary for staff to feel more confident about a range of topics connected to building safe school communities including but not limited to relational aggression, classroom norms and strategies, adolescent development and accountability
 - **Parent Involvement:** Because it is vital to include the entire school community in bringing about change, workshops are provided for parents and caregivers on topics similar to those presented to teachers but with a more home based emphasis. Parent involvement may also include book groups and CASS participation as a facilitator.
 - **Curriculum:** At a class level, it is necessary that schools have suitable curricula to deliver. The Ophelia Project has developed a range of curriculum documents that will support the change process.

The CASS study demonstrated that in the short term CASS programming had a direct impact on reducing relationally aggressive behaviour. After a year of involvement in CASS relationally aggressive behaviour used by aggressive students was reduced by 23% in girls and 10% in boys. In the sixth grade classes (the largest single-grade sampling), aggressor’s use of this behaviour was reduced by 16.7%.

²⁴ <http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/cass.htm>

- **RAPS: Relationships are Pathways to Success**: RAPS links college students with middle school students through school and community based after-school program. RAPS runs for a year and aims to develop trusting, connected relationships, encourage personal growth and opens up new worlds of opportunity for both the mentees and the mentors. This program operates in a number of schools in the Erie area. The mentors all come from the local university and commit to working with the mentee for a year. A range of activities is provided by a facilitator who attends all the sessions. The activities encourage the developments of the relationships as well as provide strategies to develop self-esteem, confidence and coping strategies.

- **All the R.A.G.E.: Relational Aggression Girls Empowered**: All The RAGE is a study guide designed to educate parents about relational aggression. The study guide includes information about the challenges faced by kids in today's culture and resources available to reduce relational aggression. It would also be a valuable resource for awareness raising with staff and has the flexibility to include a range of issues, not just the ones listed below. The five sessions included in the guide include:
 - The Language of Peer Aggression
 - Identifying the Roles in Relational Aggression
 - Danger Signs for Parents
 - Media and Today's Youth
 - Collaborating to Create Safe Social Climates.

- **It Has a Name - Relational Aggression**: This is a curriculum for girls that introduces relational aggression. There are lessons for Pre-Primary, Year 1, Year 2/3, Year 4/5, Year 6/7 and High School. The lessons cover six topics at grade appropriate level:
 - The Language of Peer Aggression
 - Normative Beliefs
 - Developing Healthy
 - Inclusive Friendships
 - Popularity and Leadership
 - The Role of the Bystander
 - Cyberbullying

- **STAR – Self Esteem, Teamwork, Attitude, Respect**: This program is currently being delivered through The Art House a community drop in centre opened in 1994 by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania. The Sisters run the centre as a community resource bringing the arts to their local community. The STAR program involves students in Grades 1 to 3 with college students, in a similar way to the RAPS program. It is run after school within the community rather than as a school based after school program.

5.5. NEW YORK, NEW YORK

When I started my plans and preparation for my fellowship, my focus was on relational aggression and programs in place to assist schools and communities in managing its impact. I was not long into my work, when it became apparent that what is needed is a change in the culture of the school and community, rather than dropped in programs. It is essential that any effort to improve the situation for people being bullied or discriminated against considers the environment within which this occurs, the attitudes and beliefs of people in this environment, the structures that support/promote bullying, the appetite for change and challenges that such change will create.

I was extremely fortunate to make contact with Dr Jonathan Cohen, President and Co-founder of the Center For Social and Emotional Education (CSEE) in New York. The CSEE is an organisation that works with schools and education districts to help them bring together social, emotional and academic learning. By addressing the whole child, student performance is enhanced, retention is facilitated, students are more engaged and there is appropriate preparation for adult life.

The Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE) was established in 1996 at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. CSEE's mission is to develop leaders in the field of social and emotional education. The goal of the organisation is to "promote positive and sustained school climate: a safe, supportive environment that nurtures social and emotional, ethical, and academic skills."²⁵ CSEE consult and collaborate widely across the education community and in 2007 consulted with over 50 schools, districts and states to support social and emotional learning. As part of its work, the organisation has collaborated with the Ohio State Department of Education to create a School Climate Assessment Tool. This tool was administered in 2007 to over 70 middle and high schools in Ohio, reaching approximately 27,000 students. The survey measured areas connected to the quality of school life, physical and emotional safety, relationships, support for diversity, teaching and learning and the institution itself. As a tool, it enables educators at all levels to assess school strengths and weaknesses, identify needs, allocate resources appropriately, provide benchmarks and help set targets for future improvement.

As part of our conversation, we looked at aspects of the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI). This is a tool that I can see having great application in my own school as well as across the system as a way of collecting information from the three constituent groups that make up a school: staff, parents and students. This tool supports school improvement initiatives, is evidenced based and involves a wide range of people.

The CSCI looks at 12 dimensions that are necessary for a healthy school climate. These are:

²⁵ <http://www.csee.net/climate/aboutcsee/>

Safety

1. *Rules and Norms: Clearly communicated rules about physical violence; clearly communicated rules about verbal abuse, harassment, and teasing; clear and consistent enforcement and norms for adult intervention.*
2. *Sense of Physical Security: Sense that students and adults feel safe from physical harm in the school.*
3. *Sense of Social-Emotional Security: Sense that students feel safe from verbal abuse, teasing, and exclusion.*

Teaching and Learning

4. *Support for Learning: Use of supportive teaching practices, such as: encouragement and constructive feedback; varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; support for risk-taking and independent thinking; atmosphere conducive to dialog and questioning; academic challenge; and individual attention.*
5. *Social and Civic Learning: Support for the development of social and civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions including: effective listening, conflict resolution, self-reflection and emotional regulation, empathy, personal responsibility, and ethical decision-making.*

Interpersonal Relationships

6. *Respect for Diversity: Mutual respect for individual differences (e.g. gender, race, culture, etc.) at all levels of the school—student-student; adult-student; adult-adult and overall norms for tolerance.*
7. *Social Support—Adults: Pattern of supportive and caring adult relationships for students, including high expectations for students' success, willingness to listen to students and to get to know them as individuals, and personal concern for students' problems.*
8. *Social Support—Students: Pattern of supportive peer relationships for students, including, friendships for socializing, for problems, for academic help, and for new students.*

Institutional Environment

9. *School Connectedness/Engagement: Positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families.*
10. *Physical Surroundings: Cleanliness, order, and appeal of facilities and adequate resources and materials.*

Staff Only

11. *Leadership: Administration that creates and communicates a clear vision, and is accessible to and supportive of school staff and staff development.*
12. *Professional Relationships: Positive attitudes and relationships among school staff that support effectively working and learning together.²⁶*

²⁶ <http://www.csee.net/climate/csclassessment/>

The CSCI is used as part of an integrated plan to improve school climate. In our conversations about bullying and relational aggression, it became evident that if an organisation is genuinely committed to changing attitudes and behaviours that support aggression in all its forms, it is necessary to systematically address the entire school culture and climate through a valid process. An example of such a process is the 5 Stage School Climate Improvement Model, advocated by CSEE.

The model is based research done by CSEE to create a cyclical five-stage breakdown of best practices and organizational tips. This information comes from research conducted by CSEE as well as best-practice guidelines drawn from successful educational organisations. The 5 Steps are²⁷:

“Step 1: Planning

- *Create a leadership team that is truly representative of your school community and elect a School Climate Coordinator to oversee the assessment process.*
- *Make sure you have adequate resources to best assess your school. Lack of time and energy will compromise the effectiveness of your campaign before it even begins.*
- *Share your mission with your school community, then develop a plan for introducing and gathering input from these critical school groups.*

Step 2: Evaluation

- *Gather the data and evaluate over-arching strengths and weaknesses with a sound measurement tool that meets your community's needs.*
- *Examine your school group perceptions and make note of where these perceptions align and diverge.*
- *Share the results with your school community.*

Step 3: Action Planning

- *Dig deeper to truly understand your survey findings. Ask specific questions, and consider focus group discussions, weekly leadership meetings and opportunities for anonymous comments and suggestions.*
- *Develop an evidence-based action plan to promote social and emotional learning and start improving your school climate. This should grow from your survey findings.*

Step 4: Implementation

- *Set a realistic and adequate time frame (3-5 years) for your improvement plan.*
- *Ground your plan in the 2 essential processes that characterize school improvement efforts: promoting students' social, emotional and cognitive competencies; and creating safe, caring and participatory schools.*

²⁷ <http://www.csee.net/climate/schoolimprovement/>

- *Involve members of your community, and make sure they feel part of the process.*

Step 5: Re-Evaluation

- *Gather reliable and valid assessment data at 9-24 month intervals.*
- *Discover what has changed and how. Discover what has not changed, and learn more about barriers to school climate improvement in your school.*
- *Celebrate your successes and integrate your learning into your school improvement plans. Continue to re-evaluate, implement and reflect.”*

What I got out of meeting with Jonathan Cohen and CSEE was the feeling that it is possible to engage in systematic action that will improve the climate and culture of a school, or in fact, a community. The most important things to keep in mind is the need to operate collaboratively, the need to use valid and reliable tools to assist in planning, the importance of looking at long-term solutions, not short term fixes and the incredible importance of recognising a problem exists and then doing something to address it.

5.6. WASHINGTON, DC

A number of years ago I read Queen Bees and Wannabes by Rosalind Wiseman. Since that time, I have owned about five copies of the book, as the messages the book had for me I had to share with friends, family and colleagues. Through reading this book, I became aware of the destructive impact of relational aggression, the harsh ways in which girls treat other girls and became convinced that I needed to do something about this in my own life and in my own community. I have shared the messages from the book with many men and women and without fail, all the women I have spoken to can relate to what is happening. This is the main reason I chose to apply for a Churchill Fellowship.

I was keen to meet with Rosalind Wiseman and arranged to do so as part of planning my fellowship. Additionally I was able to secure a place in the training for the curriculum that Rosalind had developed based on her years of research in this area. As can be seen from her biography, taken from her website, Rosalind has a deep personal connection to this topic and is committed to making a difference:

Rosalind founded the Empower Program, a national violence-prevention program, in 1992. Since then, she has gone on to work with tens of thousands of students, educators, parents, counsellors, coaches, and administrators to create communities based on the belief that each person has a responsibility to treat themselves and others with dignity.

*She is the author of **Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends**, and Other Realities of Adolescence published by Crown in May 2002. Twice a New York Times Bestseller, Queen*

Bees & Wannabes was the basis for the 2004 movie **Mean Girls**. Other recent publications include contributions to *Parade Magazine* and *Town and Country*. Her most recent book **Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads** was released in 2006 and she is a monthly columnist for *Family Circle Magazine*.

Ms. Wiseman speaks to boys and girls, parents, and educational professionals throughout the world. Her presentations on social justice transcend cultural and economic boundaries, and her speaking engagements take her to public, private, and religious schools, as well as non-profit organizations and major corporations. Audiences have included the American School Counsellors Association, Capital One, National Education Association, Girl Scouts, Neutrogena, Young Presidents Association, Independent School Associations and the International Chiefs of Police.

The national media regularly depends on Wiseman as the expert on ethical leadership, bullying prevention, and school violence. She is a frequent guest on the Today Show and been profiled in the New York Times, People, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, USA Today, Oprah, Nightline, CNN, Good Morning America, and National Public Radio affiliates throughout the country.

Rosalind is a recipient of the Lanterns Social Justice Award from the Black Women's Bar Association of Los Angeles. She is an advisory member of the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence and Liz Claiborne's Love is Not Abuse Campaign. She was a liaison to the American Bar Association's Domestic Violence Committee and a member of the Violence Against Women Act's Subcommittee on Girls and School Violence. She is certified through the Program for Young Negotiators at Harvard University and has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Occidental College.²⁸

The Owning Up[®] program training took place over 2 days in Washington, DC. Educators and school support staff had come from all over the USA to participate in the training. Rosalind ran the training herself, in collaboration with Shanterra McBride and Julie Baron. Shanterra founded and is a director of PLOT (Preparing Leaders of Today). This company focuses on inspiring young people to exceed expectations. She is also a Master Trainer for the Owning Up[®] program. Julie is a Clinical Social Worker who has worked with children, adolescents, and families for the past 15 years.

The basic premise behind the Owning Up[®] program is that social cruelty, degradation, and violence can be better understood through the process of exploring the ways in which culture educates boys to be men and girls to be women. At the same time, children are taught the skills to speak out, act with dignity and treat others in the same way. The role of the bystander is explored along with looking at group dynamics and their impact on behaviour. The classes use a range of tools to inform

²⁸ http://www.rosalindwiseman.com/html/about_bio_formal.htm

and educate the participants and are conducted on single sex lines for most lessons as boys and girls have different issues. Some classes are conducted as mixed sessions. The teacher's role is to direct and guide the group while ensuring that all are safe and treated with dignity.

The training was valuable for a number of reasons. The sessions on the construction of "Girl World" and "Boy World" helped me to clarify the situation within my own school and community and highlighted the need to clarify the messages that youth and adult culture convey. The importance of sincerely engaging with young people about what they feel is important, as well as learning about the music, literature, films, television, etc, that they value, in order to communicate respectfully with them about the messages that are conveyed through these forms was also highlighted. The necessity to work with young people, rather than lecturing them about what they should/ought/could be doing differently as a way of helping them to find ways to do things differently. The role of biology in affecting emotional and intellectual responses to situations and people and why we need to be aware of the role that gender plays beyond the social-construction model. This was exemplary training, and has given me the opportunity and practical tools necessary to work with young people where they are at, rather than telling them what is wrong with them and why they should change.

Following on from the training, I met with Rosalind and her staff – Emily Bartek and Candace Nuzzo at her office in Washington. This gave me an opportunity to continue the conversations from the previous days training and to explore the work that she is doing, her books, completing the Master Training at some stage in the future and how we can continue to collaborate following my return home. This was an extremely valuable session as it enabled me to clarify points concerning the issues raised in training from a whole school culture perspective as well as being able to learn from one of the noted experts in this area.

5.7. TAMPA, FLORIDA

The Ophelia Project and Boys Initiative of Tampa Bay (OPBI) is another example of the different forms "opheliates" have taken. Based in Tampa Bay, Florida and established in 2002, OPBI offers a wide range of services and programs throughout the Tampa Bay area. Initially a community-based initiative targeting girls and issues related to peer aggression, bullying and relational aggression, the organisation has grown to cover all issues affecting the social and emotional development of girls. The group expanded service delivery and programming in 2006 to include boys following numerous requests for support in this area. Since becoming an incorporated body in 2007, the Initiative has assumed responsibility for a wide and diverse range of partner projects. OPBI works closely with its community, focussing on issues related to boys and girls as well as assisting in the establishment of similar models of delivery.

I arranged to visit Tampa Bay and OPBI as it represented yet another way in which a community had responded to the needs of girls. Unlike the other two opheliates, OPBI is a large partner organisation with many staff, offering a wide range of programs. In many ways, OPBI has outgrown its original parent body and provides access as a conduit to programs developed through other organisations, such as Girls Circle and the Owing Up training. By expanding into working with boys, they have maintained their intention to deliver gender specific programs and have diversified and expanded the reach of their organisation. They work alongside schools, delivering programs as part of the school curriculum, as well as collaborating with other community groups and organisations to expand the scope of their organisation. OPBI's mission is simple and direct: to work with our community to meet the gender-specific needs of youth.²⁹ This is achieved through the following 4 areas of expertise, which can be found on their website at http://www.opbi.org/opheliatampa/aboutus_missionandvision.php:

- **Violence Prevention** efforts focus on understanding and preventing relational aggression, teasing, and bullying among girls and boys of all ages.
- **Leadership Development** efforts focus on developing the leadership potential and skills of teen girls and young women through experiences designed to promote personal growth as well as community advocacy for all girls.
- **Self-Esteem and Positive Peer Relationship** efforts are designed to help girls of all ages develop a sense of empowerment, self-efficacy, and caring peer relationships.
- **Girls' Health and Well-being** efforts are designed to raise awareness of specific health issues that affect girls' long-term physical and psychological hardiness.

In conversations with Nicole Stokes, Vice President of Programming, and Anna Abella, Director of School Programs, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the work OPBI do within the Tampa Bay area to engage with girls, their schools and their families. Interestingly, as well as working with younger girls, OPBI also runs programs for women, offering opportunities to meet and discuss issues relevant to women today. For, example, Nikki has established "Conversations and Cocktails". This program offers a support group setting for young professional women. The groups are designed to provide opportunities in a structured way, to maintain connections with other women and to establish supportive networks through conversation and mentoring opportunities. The model provides scope for a wide range of topics to be discussed; it can be tailored to meet the needs of different age groups and as it uses a structured approach to conversation and discussions avoids the risk that many support groups face of going nowhere fast.

²⁹ http://www.opbi.org/opheliatampa/aboutus_missionandvision.php

I had initially planned to spend my time in Tampa Bay exclusively with the staff of OPBI. However, I was very lucky to be able to participate in training as a facilitator for the Girls Circle Program. OPBI use Girls Circles in schools and through the community to help build self-esteem, assist girls building connections with other girls and women in their community, manage self-doubt, and provide opportunities for girls to express themselves through talk and creative activity. The program is used in juvenile justice settings and with girls in crisis care and hostel accommodation. Participants in the training included parole officers, school psychologists, social workers, faith based organisation workers, educators and people from other not-for-profits. The training covered 2 days and the outcome for participants was being able to facilitate Girls Circles in their own workplace or communities.

Girls Circle is a strength-based program developed by Giovanna Taormina and Beth Hossfeld. The organisation was founded in 1996 and the first facilitator training sessions were held in 1997. The Girls Circle model provides a structured support group for girls from 9 to 18 years. The process supporting the group brings together a range of theories and practices (including relational theory, resiliency practices, and skills training) in a format that seeks to build connections between girls, identify and develop personal strengths and create a sense of competence in girls. The concepts built and developed through the circle process, work to deflect the negative and harmful social and interpersonal issues that can stop girls working to be their best. The model provides a safe setting for girls to work on their feelings and gives a structure that is supportive and caring.

I completed the 2-day Girls Circle Facilitator Training - Promoting Resiliency in Adolescent Girls, which is the entry-level training workshop. This introduced the model and sufficient training to run groups. The content of the two days was extensive with participants being given many opportunities to role-play and to experience the model as participants. Over the course of the training the following topics were covered:

- Philosophy & Rationale of Girls Circles
- Six-Step Circle Format – How and Why It Works
- The Primary Role of the Facilitator: your role
- Principles of Group Communication: Nine Basic Principles of Communication
- Methods for Handling Group Dynamics
- Effective Facilitation Skills – Get Kids Talking
- Co-Facilitation as an Option
- How to Shape and Hold Lively Group Discussions

The beauty of Girls Circle is that while there are resources to accompany the training, once you know and understand the model and the principles behind it, you can apply the model to any topic. This makes it extremely flexible to the needs of the group. The facilitator's role is to guide and support – not instruct. This is not therapy for the facilitator, nor is it therapy for the girls. It is an opportunity for girls to work on developing positive relationships with other girls in a safe and supportive context.

In an increasing environment of accountability, the issue of whether or not Girls Circle is evidenced based came up during the sessions. This issue is handled succinctly on the website:

Is Girls Circle an evidenced-based program? We are a “promising program,” committed to research to show scientific evidence of the effectiveness of Girls Circle programs. Our goal is to become an evidenced-based, gender-specific, best practice program for adolescent girls. Simultaneously, our research design is female-responsive. We are eager to compare data in programs that do and do not utilize Girls Circles, while not denying Girls Circle services for girls where they are accessible.³⁰

And

Girls Circle is recognized as a “promising approach” in the Model Programs Guide of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Outcomes showed significant increases in self-efficacy, body image, and social connection.

(Promising programs display a strong theoretical base and have been demonstrated to prevent delinquency, and /or reduce/enhance risk/protective factors for delinquency using limited research and requires further experimental study.)³¹

After participating in the training for this model, I am enthusiastic to see how this program would be received by girls in my own community. While I have yet to work out the logistics, the potential for this program to help and support girls for 9 to 18 is very promising and I believe well worth the effort to implement

OPBI is a wonderful example of how the original ideas of The Ophelia Project have been taken and shaped by dynamic and engaged women and men to provide programs to support their community. The wide range of multi-faceted programs ensure a broad coverage and diversity of involvement and the expertise that has been harnessed is amazing. It would be easy to underestimate the time, effort and energy that have gone into building this organisation in such a seemingly short period of time. Any attempt to replicate or build a similar organisation would be challenging, but certainly, the benefits for the community would be immense.

5.8. ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

The final part of my fellowship took me to, Albuquerque, New Mexico where I met with Kathi Brown, Coordinator of the New Mexico Commission on the Status of Women Girls Institute and with Dr Emily Moore and Louise Adelstone, founders of Social Empowerment Programs of New Mexico. Both groups represent a further

³⁰ <http://www.girlscircle.com/research.aspx>

³¹ <http://www.girlscircle.com/research.aspx>

community response to addressing the issues I am interested. Kathi works through the state government and legislative process embedded in government to bring about change. Louise and Emily have established a small, community-based group that operates through schools and in collaboration with other similar groups. And at the same time, the two agencies work together and support each other.

I met with Kathi Brown and the Executive Director of the *New Mexico Commission On The Status Of Women*, Mary Molina Mescall, at their offices in New Mexico. The Commission was established in 1974 with the mission "to increase the knowledge of the rights, responsibilities and interests of women and girls in New Mexico and to preserve women's history and contributions to our state"³². The Commission has responsibility for:

- Conducting state-wide studies on the status of women
- Acting as a clearinghouse and referral service on the issues that impact women
- Recommending methods of overcoming discrimination against women in public and private employment
- Promoting methods of enabling women to develop their skills, continue their education, to be retrained, and to assume leadership roles
- Collaborating with public and private entities working with women
- Conducting periodic state-wide conferences to apprise women of their rights and opportunities, and to learn about their needs and problems
- Securing recognition of women's accomplishments and contributions to New Mexico³³

The New Mexico Girls Institute was established to provide a direct service to 15 to 18-year-old girls. Its aim is to provide girls with opportunities to develop skills safely, in a supportive environment to equip them for the future. One of the first steps undertaken in 2003 by the Institute was to implement a survey that investigated programs and issues throughout New Mexico for teenage girls³⁴. Kathi very kindly shared this information with me and explained the methodology and the results. The first task was to develop a profile of information collected from the girls that gave a true account of what was of concern to them. Surveys were received from over 1200 girls and from this information a report, *Dreams and Sorrows: Young Women in New Mexico* was released. The findings in the survey contained information from all cultural and demographic areas within the state and clearly demonstrated that concerns were shared by all girls, regardless of background.

Kathi showed how one question asked the girls to list their top three issues. While the comments were widespread, most responses fell into the following categories:

1. Drugs
2. Teen Pregnancy

³² <http://www.womenscommission.state.nm.us/index.htm>

³³ <http://www.womenscommission.state.nm.us/index.htm#>

³⁴ [Believe in NM Girls 2007: On The Road Project](#) NM Commission on the Status of Women Final Report August 2007

3. Sex (in general)
4. Alcohol
5. School/Grades/Teachers
6. Appearance (including body image)
7. Boys
8. Peer Pressure
9. Rape/Sexual Assault/Molestation
10. Issues with Family/Parents/Home

What is interesting about these issues is the apparent absence of bullying as a stressor. Girls in New Mexico responding to this survey identified pressures in a more diverse range of areas, perhaps more reflective of the broader community than of the educational context. What was apparent from the survey was the need to respond proactively to its findings. In 2005, the Year Of The New Mexico Girl: Believe in Me Conference was held. This was the first conference, funded by the state, exclusively targeting girls. At the same time, the Commission ran a health awareness-raising program targeting girls across the state. The conference was a huge success and girls from all over New Mexico attended. In 2006, a second conference was held, this time attracting twice the number of participants. Subsequently, a DVD, GIRLS: CHOICES/CHALLENGES highlighting the realities of life in New Mexico for girls and involving girls from 5 schools was produced. The DVD also included filming of Town Hall meetings, some of which were aired on TV.

The Town Hall meetings provide an interesting model for engaging with girls within their communities and are a tool that can be easily applied in the Australian context. Through the New Mexico experience, the following topics were covered:

- Body Image,
- Dating Violence,
- Depression/Suicide Prevention,
- Substance Abuse,
- Teen Pregnancy.

An additional item Dealing With Difficult Family Situations was also included.

The communities who participated were chosen for a variety of factors, drawn from a range of demographic and sociological tools. The sessions themselves were structured to firstly find out first hand what was of concern to girls locally within their own communities and secondly to provide opportunities for the development of leadership within the cohort. The goals for the Town Hall meetings were:

- To provide a platform for girls to have their voices heard on problems in their communities
- To provide informational and inspirational presentations on core issues
- To facilitate solution-based conversations with girls on their needs and ideas
- To connect girls to community resources
- To share feedback with service providers as a way to improve service delivery

in their respective communities

- To record participant's comments on challenges and solutions to identified problems.³⁵

Based on the process, the girls produced a number of recommendations for action at a state and community level. These recommendations provide a compelling picture of what these girls need to feel safe and empowered to cope with their lives and its complexities. Making contact with Kathi and the New Mexico Commission for the Status of Women was incredible valuable. Through them, I was able to see how a state government could respond to the social, health and emotional challenges facing young girls and women and a way to offer support and programs that can help address these issues. It is a model worth consideration here in Australia.

I had met Emily Moore at the Ophelia Project National Conference following contact I had made with her in preparing for my fellowship. Along with Louise Adelstone, she established Social Empowerment Programs New Mexico to provide programs and support to young people to enable them to deal with and manage social aggression in the variety of forms and contexts in which they operate. Louise and Emily believe that through the identification of peer aggression and the development of skills to respond appropriately, people can take responsibility for their own actions while at the same time manage the effects that the behaviour of others may have on them. The service is provided in a range of ways and settings including curriculum-based and experiential workshops, classes and after-school programs for children and youth, faculty in-service training, programs for parents and community groups, and working with school administrators, agencies, and volunteer organizations.

Emily and Louise are still in the early stages of establishing their organisation. Both have other jobs and commitments, yet still find the time to offer programs. They work collaboratively, usually in the evenings. The sessions have two foci - Louise works with the children, usually primary aged, discussing topics such as friendships, cliques, bullying etc and Emily provides a parallel program for parents. Their intention is to expand their program and client base to meet the demand for their services as time and work commitments permit. What was most interesting about working with these two women was to hear their passion and commitment for what they are trying to achieve. The establishment of a new program base is time consuming and requires great commitment and energy. These two women, as do all the wonderful people I was fortunate to meet, have an abundance of both.

³⁵ P 6 Believe in NM Girls 2007: On The Road Project NM Commission on the Status of Women Final Report August 2007

6. ISSUES

The assumption that relational aggression is in some way a natural aspect of girls' interactions with other girls needs to be challenged. Similarly, the assumption that relational aggression is somehow less dangerous than physical aggression and does not need as much effort put into dealing with it is also faulty. We need to address relational aggression from a number of fronts. We need to teach children how to recognise it and how to respond appropriately when they encounter it. We need to teach children to recognise who their friends are, how we measure friendship and how to deal with situations where friendship is difficult. We need to build a culture of trust between adults and children so that even if the culture of the other group seems mysterious, there is still respect for and understanding of what is important.

Schools and parents need to teach children to recognise the variety of roles that they play, how these roles can be viewed by others and the consequences of adopting a particular role. Children need to be empowered to understand the choices they have when taking on a particular role or persona and the implications these roles have for their future relationships. We need to look at all participants in bullying acts and empower both the victim and the bystander to be able to act to get support. Bullying will never go away. There is too great an investment in the power that being a bully brings for it to ever be completely eradicated. However, we can minimise the impact of bullying by working to build up the competencies of all students and providing real support.

How we do this requires a highly individualised approach. The issues underpinning one girl's behaviour can be quite different to those affecting another girl. Programs must address the culture in which they occur as well as how best to bring about the change that is necessary. One of the key points I learned while away was that in order to change behaviour it is necessary to look at what is currently in place that supports that behaviour. It is impossible to bring about meaningful change in an entire class, population or community without addressing the issue of culture and climate and why people need to "buy in to" the change that needs to occur. Change must come from within, based on the knowledge that change is needed to improve the situation for all. And how do we change culture – by changing the social norms, beliefs and behaviours that support it.

This area is one where schools, families and the community need to work together. But schools can take the lead in establishing a safe and supportive environment, free from harassment and discrimination. We all as adults need to respond to technological and cultural change in order to better understand and communicate with young people. As adults, we need to set clear and consistent guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. While it is always possible to accomplish this in collaboration with young people, sometimes adults have to draw the

metaphorical line in the sand. And we need to take the lead in getting the information out into our local community.

Technology is perceived as both a blessing and a curse. It allows almost unfettered access to an infinite amount of information. It facilitates immediate communication with a huge number of people and brings the world into our homes in ways that are unprecedented. Our children are digital-natives – not necessarily all of them, but all born into a world where technology and the ability to use it is taken for granted and always part of their lives. Adults, on the other hand are digital-immigrants. This does not mean we are any less skilled at utilising technology; rather it is a language, an operating system we have had to acquire and fit into our existing cognitive framework.

What this has meant for our children, accessing technology as another tool in their social repertoire, is another avenue with the potential for exploitation as well as information. Cyberbullying is increasingly prevalent, with bullies able to reach into every aspect of their victim's lives at any hour of the day or night. Cyberbullying is growing rapidly in Australia. Figures quoted in an article in *The West Weekend Magazine* report that a 2008 study showed that 10% of children aged 10 to 14 reported being cyberbullied in the previous term, as opposed to 2% three years earlier. In Canada and Britain, the 25% of the same age group reports being cyberbullied, while in the USA, the figure is closer to 50%³⁶. Schools need to develop appropriate safeguards and policies to protect children both in and out of school. As educators, we cannot take the position that if it happens at home it is not our responsibility – the consequences follow the victim into school along with the bully and in order to manage the learning that needs to take place, teachers have to manage the trauma and displacement associated with the cyber-attacks first.

Parents, as well as schools, are often at a loss to know what approach to take. Some take an overly permissive approach, allowing unrestricted access, day or night, in the privacy of the child's bedroom to everything that technology has to offer. Some take the complete opposite, denying any and all access, and ultimately making it even more attractive to the child. Some parents feel intimidated by the ease in which their children can use technology and are reluctant to set limits on access or content due to lack of knowledge or apprehension about invading what they are led to believe is their child's privacy. The reality is there is no such thing as a guarantee to privacy on the web. And certainly, where your child's safety is concerned, there is no guarantee to privacy at all. It is vital that parents learn as much as they can about what their children can do and access via technology. They need to acknowledge and accept that dangers do exist as well as many wonderful opportunities for communication, engagement with others and education. They need to see unfettered access to technology as the danger that it is. For example, would they allow their ten year old daughter to go out at night, unaccompanied by an adult, able to meet and go with anyone she encountered? Then why would they enable the same degree of freedom

³⁶ p 11 "Space Invaders" [West Weekend Magazine](#) February 7 2009

in her own home? The information below is paraphrased from The Ophelia Project's Cyberbullying Project. This is information for parents and schools about what they can do to help manage the effects of Cyberbullying in the home and the school:

The Essential 8 for Parents

- 1. DO emphasize that cyberbullying is everyone's problem.*
- 2. DO role-model positive interpersonal relationships every day.*
- 3. DO teach empathy by asking your child or student to describe how it might feel to be the target of cyberbullying.*
- 4. DO talk about privacy.*
- 5. DO hold children accountable when he/she is aggressive, both on and off-line.*
- 6. DO show your child that you value and encourage off-line activities and social interaction.*
- 7. DO show children that you know what you're talking about.*
- 8. DO assert to your children that there is no difference between "real life" and "online life."*

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The Essential 8 for Schools

- 1. Take a stand on cyberbullying.*
- 2. Emphasize that cyberbullying is a problem: everyone's problem.*
- 3. Educate your staff and parent body about cyberbullying.*
- 4. Get young people involved from the get-go. They are the experts!*
- 5. Hold children accountable when they are aggressive, both on and off-line.*
- 6. Identify at least one cyberbullying expert in the school.*
- 7. Know your legal responsibilities and options.*
- 8. Assert to teens that there is no difference between 'real life' and 'online life.'*

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We need to educate adults and children alike to the potentials that exist through access to technology. Children need to be equipped with the full range of strategies to cope with cyberbullying, predatory behaviour and harassment in the same way we teach them about strangers and dangers in the "real world". Parents need to be parents – they need to set limits, be educated, be aware of what their children are doing and who their children are meeting. And the need to work alongside their children to learn about technology first hand and become comfortable with this world.

Girls (and boys) are caught in a clash between the culture of the family and the culture of their peer group. Shrewd advertisers are making money and businesses through the exploitation of this clash, as well as playing on the feelings parents may have regarding their ability to parent and to provide for their children. At the same time, products such as Bratz[®] Dolls are promoted at younger and younger girls, adding to a distortion of childhood and the sexualisation of children as a tool of market forces. Despite feelings to the contrary, there is pressure on parents to provide products for their daughters that for the most part may be completely inappropriate. This is due to pressure being placed on their daughters through

advertising to buy and from their peers encouraging their purchase in order to belong. This starts at an increasingly younger age with each year.

The distortion of images of femininity, female power, sexuality and relationships is everywhere. It is so pervasive that for many girls and their families it is the norm; not the exception. Shows that promote exclusion, nastiness and cruel behaviours rate so well that new ones seem to pop up everyday. Images such as those seen in songs by artists such as the Pussycat Dolls - whose songs have lyrics purporting to be positive and affirming - are completely undermined by the images conveyed in their videos. Advertising reinforces the importance of brands and links success in life, love and relationships to the right clothes, accessories, toys, games...the list is endless. And it is hardly surprising that bullying in all its form is rampant in society when we celebrate revenge, victimisation, exclusion, rejection in our culture through what we read, watch, say and allow in our lives and the lives of our families, schools and children.

We need, as adults to engage with the culture of our children and through understanding it, create opportunities for meaningful communication. We need to be aware of the messages contained implicitly and explicitly in what they see, hear and read and educate ourselves in order to communicate with respect with our children. We need to be the grown-ups. Our children do not need any more friends; they need us to clearly articulate and maintain our values as a family or as a school, be consistent in our behaviour, set clear and logical parameters for behaviour from an early age and to help them navigate the increasingly complex world of the child in the 21st century.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

We need to fight the pervasive belief that relational aggression, victimisation, exclusion and rejection are acceptable behaviours from girls and that it is a stage that all girls (and most boys) have to go through. If we believe this, we will continue to condemn our daughters to suffer in silence with no support from those charged with the responsibility to care for their health and wellbeing.

- Girls need help, support, strategies and advice about how to manage relational aggression and its effects. They need to know what they are dealing with, how to access support and why what is happening to them is unacceptable. These programs can be offered through schools or through organisations within the community. There are many excellent resources available that can easily be adapted to suit the needs of the diverse population that exists in our state. What is most needed is a mechanism to deliver these programs to girls in their local context and provide follow up support as girls implement what they have been shown.
- It is vital to look at changes in terms of the entire context and not as a tagged on program. Any program must be looked at in the context of the entire school culture and take into account the unique aspects of each location. Through embedding what is needed into the fabric of the school or community, there is a more valid buy in to the process; there is ownership by the people most affected and a sense of alignment with other successful practices within the organisation. Of course, it may also be important to assess and re-evaluate the entire school or community culture, particularly if the prevailing structure is contributing to the harmful behaviours and perpetuating unhealthy beliefs about behaviour, bullying and what is acceptable.
- That a series of “Town Hall” meetings/focus groups be held at all schools in the City of Armadale. These sessions will collect information from girls - aged between 10 and 18 - and their families and carers, and will collect information about the issues facing girls and their families, program needs and shortfalls, resources currently available, resources required and information about what they see as the most important things they need help with. This process will be based on the model used in New Mexico (see section 5.8 in the report) and will provide a model that can be replicated in other locations.
- That information is provided to schools and professionals within the education community about relational aggression and its impact on girls and boys. There is very little current information on relational aggression as a subset of bullying and consequently schools are under-prepared to manage its impact. More work needs to be done equipping teachers – particularly those working with girls aged 10 to 14 – in ensuring that they feel suitably prepared to handle these turbulent years.
- Parents need more information about how they can practically manage things such as cyberbullying, relational aggression, exclusion, victimisation and harassment as it affects their sons and daughters. They need to know what is

“normal” and what they need to be worried about. They need to know where they can get support and how that support will help. Currently, there is nothing available because no one has made available all the excellent information that currently exists in a form that is easy to disseminate. Moreover, the lack of knowledge about these issues works against anyone seeking advice. People don’t know what they don’t know and feel powerless to do anything to change situations or take back the role of “parent”.

- We need to explore in greater detail the value of mentoring programs to support girls in transition from primary to high school, high school to work or tertiary studies, and tertiary studies to the workforce as adults. Research shows that a major protective factor for young people is the support of one trusting, caring adult who believes in them. This “adult” role can be taken by someone a few years removed who has lived through the same experiences. We need to implement programs that train women and girls how to mentor effectively and make a real difference in the lives of others. Programs such as “VOICES”, that was developed by university students to assist girls in transition from middle to high school, are an excellent example of meaningful mentoring.
- A key protective factor in reducing early sexual activity is a close and loving relationship between a father and daughter. Unfortunately, many fathers are unsure about how to relate to their daughters as they transform from little girls into young women. Programs need to be developed and implemented that help fathers understand what is happening to their daughters as well as helping girls communicate meaningfully with their fathers.

8. DISSEMINATION

- I have been invited to be a Guest Blogger on Rosalind Wiseman's new Website, giving my perspectives on Relational Aggression and related issues from an Australian perspective. This will be starting in April 2009 and I have been asked to make regular contributions. In this way, I will be able to share my findings from my Fellowship with an international audience.
- I am a member of the *Owning Up Advisory Board*, also through Rosalind Wiseman. This board will be a group of educators who will periodically be asked to complete surveys or join focus group conference calls. The questions will pertain not only to *Owning Up* but also to topics and trends in education generally. The board is based in Washington, DC, and I will be participating via teleconferencing.
- Copies of my report will be provided to my Line Manager and through her to the Director General of Education, Sharyn O'Neill. I will also request that a copy be provided to the Honourable Dr Elizabeth Constable, Minister for Education.
- As many of my recommendations pertain to needs within the City of Armadale, I will provide a copy to the Mayor of Armadale, Cr Linton Reynolds AM JP, the Honourable Alannah MacTeirnan, local Member for Armadale and the Honourable Don Randall, Federal Member for Canning.
- I will be promoting my findings through a diverse range of professional associations (including Catholic Education Office, State School Teachers' Union, The Western Australian Secondary School Executives Association, The Western Australian Primary Principals' Association, Western Australian Education Support Principals' and Administrators' Association, Western Australian Institute for Educational Research, Western Australian College of Teaching, Western Australian District High School Administrators' Association, School Psychologists Association, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, The Western Australian Secondary Teaching Administrators' Association) as well as parent groups such as the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations. I will also be writing workshops and information sessions that will be able to be presented at professional development opportunities for parents, people within the education system and community members.
- I will provide a copy of this report to Rosemary Greenham, who is the producer of the Morning Program on 720 ABC Perth. I was interviewed for this show before commencing my Fellowship and was asked to keep in touch about my findings.
- I will be implementing the programs I have been trained in through my school. This will involve information sessions for parents and interested community members that I will promote through local schools and the local media.
- I am creating a website that I will use to promote programs and resources I have used, heard of or recommend. This will link to other agencies, resources and websites that I believe will be of value.

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Charisse Nixon, PhD: <http://www.imom.com/ispecialist/bio/index.php?id=5>
Cheryl Dellasega: <http://www.cheryldellasega.com/home.php>
Club and Camp Ophelia: <http://www.clubophelia.com/clubophelia/home.php>
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