

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by Kristian Wale

2009 Churchill Fellow

The Park Family Churchill Fellowship to research methodologies and techniques used in alternate education - Ireland, Canada, USA

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Signed _____

Dated _____

Introduction

I have been working with young people deemed to be at risk now for 20 years and have always been interested in alternate education programs that have been developed in an attempt to assist those who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. While I have been trained as a primary school teacher, I have previously worked in a variety of positions as a youth worker in educational settings and have had the opportunity to work directly with many students who never really fit into the classroom. Over the years I have focused on getting skills in a variety of areas including Outdoor Education and have completed a Certificate IV in Abseiling & Rock-climbing as well as gaining accreditation in facilitating canoeing and high ropes courses. I have worked hard to acquire knowledge in areas of managing small groups of students and group counselling and have coordinated extensive camping programs and 'boot camps' for students in a variety of settings.

Over the last 3 years, I have worked extensively in developing programs for young people who have disengaged from schools prematurely and have 'fallen through the cracks.' In 2008, I helped to establish an Independent School about 15 minutes north of Brisbane called Arethusa College that specifically caters for boys aged from 12-17 who don't really fit into the classroom. One of the goals that I hoped to achieve through my fellowship was developing a broader understanding of different programs across different cultures so that a new direction could be established in programs that are developed in the future.

I would like to thank the Park Family for their generosity in sponsoring me to research methodologies and techniques in alternate education as a fellow of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. It has been a privilege to represent the Trust both here in Australia and abroad. Through the fellowship I have made some excellent friends, and have been inspired by the creativity of both teachers and their students.

Executive Summary

Kristian Wale
Po Box 30, Spring Hill Qld 4004.
Chief Executive Officer, Shaftesbury Citizenship Centre
Ph (07) 3831 0727

The Park Family Churchill Fellowship to research methodologies and techniques used in alternate education - Ireland, Canada, USA

Highlights

- Participating with students who have psychosis in the classroom at the Central Toronto Youth Service's New Outlook Program
- Visitation to the Oasis Arts & Social Reform School in Toronto, Canada
- Sharing and learning with teachers from New York City schools who work in alternate education programs with some very high-risk young people
- Visiting youth justice programs and spending time with some of the incarcerated youth in Dublin.

Recommendations

- There is a need for a national consensus and discussion on methods for effectively dealing with disengaging youth.
- The allocation of staff per student in Australia needs to be increased to mirror the overseas models, which operate extremely successfully.
- Overseas teaching methods need incorporating into Australian education systems.

Program

Dublin, Ireland (19th-29th November)

Visitation to;

- Oberstown Girl's School
- Oberstown Boy's School
- Finglas Adolescent Centre
- St Patricks School
- Department of Education & Science

New York City, United States (29th November-10th December)

Visitation to;

- Manhattan Alternate School
- Suspension Centre District 79
- New York City Department of Education
- St John's Residential Facility (Queens)
- St John's Residential Facility (Brooklyn)

Toronto, Canada (10th-20th December)

Visitation to;

- Central Toronto Youth Service's Day Program
- Central Toronto Youth Service's New Outlook (Section School)
- Oasis Alternative Secondary School - Skateboard Factory
- Oasis Alternative Secondary School – Arts & Social Reform School
- APPLE Program
- Toronto Catholic District School Board

There have been some significant reforms to the way that education is facilitated in Australia over the last 10 years. In Queensland, young people are encouraged to either 'Earn or Learn' – that is either continue in some form of full-time education with a school or Registered Training Organisation (RTO) or get a job of at least 25 hours a week. Some students (due to a variety of reasons) find it difficult to remain in a traditional classroom and some find it nearly impossible to find or keep a job. The alternate education programs in Queensland that I have previously worked with nearly all offer some sort of additional support or extra help outside of providing classroom learning opportunities. These additional services normally can encompass anything from work experience placement to teaching life-skills such as cooking, communication skills etc.

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Oberstown Boy's and Girl's schools

Mission statement

Oberstown Education Centre (OEC) is a special national school/special school administered by the special education section of the DES/Country Dublin VEC. OEC provides for the educational needs of all the young people residing in both Oberstown Boy's and Girl's schools. The school celebrates the uniqueness of each young person as expressed in his/her personality, intelligence and potential for development. The school seeks to cherish and challenge the young people in a safe, structured and caring environment. The aims are to provide quality learning experiences that are engaging and enriching through a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

The school sees itself as an integral part of the Oberstown campus and works in partnership with all other disciplines involved in the education, care and reintegration of the young people. This ethos is exemplified through the quality of relationships in the school, which are based on respect and dignity for each person. At this school they strive to provide an inclusive environment responsive to the needs of all students.

They value most highly the relationship between care-staff and other disciplines and seek to continue to work in partnership with all staff to ensure that the best interests of the young people are provided for.

Aims:

The Oberstown curriculum aims to enable each student to:

- Learn in a safe and secure environment
- Achieve the goals of his/her IEP
- Experience increased self worth
- Prepare for further education and lifelong learning
- Develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others
- Maximise his/her learning potential

Multi-disciplinary approach

Oberstown Education Centre not only provides the young people with education but also focuses on the rehabilitation process. Oberstown subscribes wholeheartedly to a team approach in an effort to create a warm, accepting and healing environment where the individual needs of extremely disadvantaged boys and girls are met.

Teachers and care staff work closely together to create a positive environment within which

young people can fulfil their potential socially, emotionally and academically. This interdisciplinary approach is essential in order to deliver the highest standard of care and education. A high level of co-operation, support and good will, combined with an understanding and tolerance of each other's professional roles makes for effective team work and a highly successful program.

Curriculum

Assessment:

Each teacher carries out a baseline assessment specific to their subject, which will cater for the short term and long term goals of the student.

Education programs:

Following the baseline assessment, the teacher will determine the best course of study for the individual student in their subject. In all subjects offered in OEC, students may have the opportunity to pursue certification in FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) or Junior Certificate.

Record keeping:

A daily record referring to the student's work, attendance and behaviour is maintained by each teacher. A brief report is written and then collected at the end of each month which is then placed in the student's individual file.

Classroom management:

OEC employs the use of standardised class rules, a daily point system, therapeutic crisis intervention and constant consultation and co-operation with units and care staff.

Finglas Adolescent Centre

The Finglas Adolescent Centre is a children's detention centre and a remand centre for the detention of young offenders. This school was once an industrial school which assisted young boys placed there for welfare reasons as well as young offenders. The centre provides residential facilities to the courts for boys who have been committed into custody after conviction for criminal offences. These boys are between the ages of 10 and 16. The centre also carries out assessments for the courts on the improvement of the boys in the first 28 days of remand.

Three Main functions:

1. The facility has an eight bed committal unit for boys sentenced to a period of detention

in a detention school.

2. They provide a remand function for boys remanded in custody by a criminal court.
3. The school also provides an assessment of each of the boys who are remanded in custody by a criminal court and in respect of whom the court has requested an assessment of his behaviour.

FAC is managed by a board of management appointed by the minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This board oversees the direct governance of the school in accordance with the policy guidelines laid down by the Irish Youth Justice service. The selection of vetting, appointment and dismissal of staff (subject to the Minister's approval), financial management and control and the maintenance of the premises are some of the responsibilities of the board. They are also in charge of the provision of the annual report on the operation of the school and such other reports, statistics and information the Minister may require.

St Patrick's Institution

St Patrick's institution operates in association with the Irish Prison Service, which is an exclusive agency within the Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Mission Statement:

- Provide a safe, secure and human custody system for people who are sent to prison. The service is committed to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners in their endeavour to live law-abiding and purposeful lives as valued members of society.

The Irish Prison Service provides education through St Patrick's institution. The aims of the education service are:

To provide a high quality, broad and flexible program of education that meets both the individual and group needs of those in custody through helping them:

- Cope with their sentence
- Achieve personal development
- Prepare for life after release
- Establish the appetite and capacity for lifelong learning

The objectives aspired to by the management and staffs of those employed within the education services in Prisons are as follows:

- To design and deliver relevant programmes that cater for the needs of the whole person
- To widen access and increase participation in education
- To ensure that those with basic education needs are prioritised

- To adapt programs to take into account the diversity of the prisoner population, their views and the complex nature of prison life
- To promote the principles of adult and community education
- To support a multidisciplinary and partnership approach within the prison system, and to promote positive sentence management for all those in custody

Curriculum

In providing education services, every effort is made to tailor programs and courses to meet the individual education needs of those who access the service. The education profile of many prisoners is characterised by limited previous engagement with formal second level school systems. Those who have attended second level tend to have negative experiences of the education system and thus are more reticent to engage in the learning process. The traditional education model which is based upon an individual participating in one or more subject areas for an academic year, culminating in a terminal examination is only appropriate to a small percentage of the prison population.

For increasing numbers of prisoners, the requirement is for a more flexible curriculum which has multiple entry and exit points (depending on the nature/type of engagement with the education system to date.) The use of FETAC accredited programmes predominates in all education units. The nature and type of subjects available using this certification option are more appropriate to adults and teaching/learning methodologies appropriate to the level at which the learner is able to function. Assessment is not by terminal exam but via portfolio compilation - which is a more appropriate and successful method for the adult learner.

St Patrick's Institution has 204 offenders aged from 16 to 21. The main Education Unit has twelve classrooms, including Home Economics Room, Art Room and Computer room. This school offers a variety of subjects up to Junior Certificate and leaving Certificate standard and usually an average of thirty sit for their Junior Certificate in June. A long and ever-expanding list of FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) courses is on offer. Literacy work, both as an end in itself and as an element of almost everything else done at St Patrick's continues to demand a large amount of time.

Subjects such as Pre-release, Art, Home Economics, Crafts, Music and Pottery are offered and much appreciated by those in rehabilitation. Teachers also operate in the C base where a room is made available. On occasion their work may even extend as far as the prison cells themselves.

Department of Education and Science

Mission statement:

The purpose of the Department of Education and Science is to provide education of a high quality which will achieve two purposes; a) enable students to reach their full potential and participate fully as members of society, and b) contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development.

This department is focused on the promotion of equality and inclusion as well as quality outcomes and life long learning. They plan for education that is relevant to personal, social, cultural and economic needs. They aim to enhance the capacity of the department for service delivery, policy formulation, research and evaluation.

In order to achieve these goals, the Department involves itself in several activities covering the key elements of policy planning, quality assurance, resourcing, regulating and evaluation, as well as providing a broad range of support services for the education sector.

Manhattan Alternate School

The Manhattan Alternate school is a learning centre set up by the New York City Department of Education. This "Referral Centre" is available to students who have fallen behind academically in high school or who are in need of extra support. They provide students with an alternative to high school and specialist guidance to create a successful education and career plan.

The aim of the Referral Centre is to:

- Assist students with understanding school options and enrolment procedures
- Assist students and families with academic and non-academic needs through the large number of guidance counsellors, social workers, and academic intervention specialists available

The Department of Education recognises that many students who are dropping out of school or who have disengaged from successful integration at their current school, need guidance and support in order to complete their education. There are also a number of young people who need non-academic support to ensure they graduate, such as childcare or accommodation. Therefore the Department has established referral centres such as the Manhattan Alternate School.

The Manhattan Alternate School assists students with:

- Working out how they can get back into school
- Evaluating and explaining high school transcripts
- Applying to a transfer school in order to earn a diploma and graduate
- Learning about vocational and career options
- Understanding what is needed to get into college
- Figuring out where to receive help if the student is experiencing difficulties outside school
- Understanding how a parent can stay in school
- Receiving childcare and other support
- Planning to overcome any barrier that prevents a student from studying

Suspension Centre District 79

Vision:

The vision on Suspension Centre District 79 is that all their students would succeed academically while developing socially and emotionally to become confident and productive members of society.

Mission:

To empower their students through rigorous instruction and quality support services. As a community of education leaders, District 79 serves as a model for innovative and replicable strategies to engage students.

Purpose:

1. Offer programmes of a high quality which help students stay focused on a high school/ GED diploma, and support their post-certification, college and/or career plans.
2. Advocate for and connect students who have experienced significant obstacles with educational options upon release.
3. Assist students in involuntary settings (incarceration, drug rehabilitation centres, etc) to improve academically, socially and emotionally and ensure smooth transitions to educational options upon release.
4. Pregnant/parenting students - encourage them to stay on track towards graduating, and ensure they become successful parents by providing childcare, support services and advocacy.
5. Provide adult students with high quality educational and vocational/career opportunities.
6. Encourage students and their families to take responsibility for their education and future.

Core Beliefs:

1. Achievement - all students can achieve at high levels, if they are provided with rigorous academic programs with excellent instruction.
2. High standards - Suspension Centre District 79 hold themselves accountable to ensure each student receives a HS or GED diploma for college admission and employment.
3. Integrity - operate with truthfulness, honour and reliability.
4. Solutions orientation - value innovative solutions to meet individual students' needs. At the Suspension Centre they persist to find solutions to even the most difficult challenges.
5. Community - The diversity of the learning community is considered one of the greatest strengths of District 79. They recruit, develop and retain innovative and effective team members committed to each other and every student's success.
6. Respect - they value professionalism and treat each member of the team and beyond with respect. They believe they must take responsibility for their actions as public service leaders.
7. Commitment to learning - committed to ensuring the growth and success of each student, family and community. They are open to feedback and change to develop their strengths and address their weaknesses.



New York Department of Education

The New York Department of Education is a branch of municipal government in New York City that manages the city's public school system. It is the largest system of public schools in the United States, serving about 1.1 million students in over 1,600 schools.

Mission statement:

To ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve a high school or General Education Development Diploma. To provide support in order to succeed in their current school or find alternate pathways to complete their education.

This department developed an approach to curriculum and instruction that mandates certain core practices but generally provides school level autonomy to develop programs that match specific students needs.

In 2002-03 NYCDOE reformed their curriculum, improving their mathematics and literacy teaching methods. By adopting a core curriculum they were taking the first step towards

achieving better results from their students as it began a process of truly managing curriculum to produce better outcomes.

Statistics

- 1.1 million students
- 1,600+ schools
- 335 new schools since 2002
- 80,000 teachers
- \$21 billion annual budget

Part of the NYCDOE is the Referral Centres. These centres are high-school alternatives available for students in need of support due to a range of special circumstances or simply because they have fallen behind academically.

At these centres, students are able to gain assistance with understanding their options and the procedures for opening up new opportunities for their future. There are also several guidance counselors, social workers and academic intervention specialists available if a student needs assistance academically and/or socially.



Saint John's Residence and School for Boys

With a long history of reaching out to the needs of young men with learning and social difficulties, St John's considers education as vitally important in preparing young people for life. Through constant encouragement and support, residents are taught to communicate effectively, interact appropriately, and engage in focused academic learning programs. Preparing for the future is the hallmark of their learning program which is administered and staffed by the New York City Board of Education. Some residents also attend public and special-schools.

Social and case workers are assigned to each resident to offer one-on-one treatment and build relationships with family members. Often, these family relationships may have been fractured or in some way struggling, and case workers assist residents to develop healthy and constructive ways to reunite these family ties.

The St John's campus compliments its highly successful educational program with a recreational and sports component. Football, soccer, baseball, basketball, volleyball, and table tennis are just some of the sports activities available. Also, off-campus athletic events

assist in keeping the boys active and engaged in behaviour patterns which assist in their development of healthy social interaction.

The St John's facility offers residential units for housing the boys which is preceded by a comprehensive assessment service, allowing appropriate diagnostic methods to ascertain the most effective treatment programs. The staff keep direct oversight of the whole behaviour management program and the results are highly successful in educating and building constructive behaviour patterns into residents.



Central Toronto Youth Service

Central Toronto Youth Service is a children's mental health centre which serves the youth of Toronto. They aim to give young people the chance to recreate their lives in an environment where they are challenged and empowered. This service provides effective programs that assist youth, young adults and their families to resolve the social and psychological challenges they face. They assist young people who are struggling with their sexuality, gender identity, discrimination, depression, drug or alcohol problems, HIV/AIDS issues, sexual assault and abuse, school problems and family concerns. They also provide assistance to youth who have committed crimes and are dealing with both mental issues and criminal offences.

The work at the Central Toronto Youth Service includes helping youth deal with issues they are struggling with and constructive ways to get their life back on track. They give high risk youth a chance for a brighter future with a balanced approach to social responsibilities. The environment is supportive and non-judgmental, helping young people to cope better with their problems. Instead of emphasising their problems, counsellors take the time to listen and then determine what is troubling the youth. Many clients see the service as an opportunity to begin a better future, rather than as some form of punishment.

Day Program:

One project of the Central Toronto Youth Service is the day program. This program brings together recovering youth in a group setting to gain life skills and a better understanding of their needs. Here they provide life and social skills training, recreation and academic studies in a structured supportive environment. Within the program there are wellness and recovery groups, drama workshops, and visits to the YMCA. Each young person sets their

own personal goals in collaboration with the program staff. There is also an on-site teacher who provides an innovative special education program that allows clients to earn high school credits.

New Outlook Program:

This program offers services to young people from age 16 to 24 also with serious mental health issues. The agency provides a safe and nurturing environment where youth can seek help without fear of being negatively stigmatised. It was funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and provides the best in client-centred treatment to support recovery. They are very focused on building relationships and client networks. They offer inspiration and hope to young people struggling with a variety of mental health issues.



Oasis Alternative Secondary School - Skateboard Factory

The Oasis Skateboard Factory represents the best of educational programs to reintegrate students in need of special assistance into a mainstream social agenda. The OASIS is dedicated to offering their students subjects with a skateboard-design and street-art focus. It would be difficult to overstate the success and effectiveness of this brilliant program. Students are not



only engaged in processes that they see as socially acceptable but where they learn highly valuable skills which equip them to participate in real-world work and social interaction. Students are encouraged to earn grade 9, 10 and 11 compulsory and elective high school credits over 1 or 2 semesters. This is done through social justice and community focused entrepreneurial business. They learn hands-on how to build skateboards, design original custom graphics, work with local artists and community partners, market and display their work, and have an opportunity to receive an honorarium. The Skateboard factory began as a project of the Arts and Social Change Program of the Oasis Alternative School. With funding from the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Foundation for Student Success, an art room at Oasis Alternative Secondary School was transformed into a skateboard design studio where students were given the opportunity to run a skateboard building and graphic design



cooperative business. In September 2009 the program was extended, becoming one of the world's first skateboard design high school sites where students earn credits in this unique way.

Oasis Alternative Secondary School - Arts and Social Reform

The Arts and Social Reform is a program established by the Oasis Alternative Secondary School where teachers organise field trips, guest speakers, and meetings with local artists, with a particular focus on the arts and social change. The school is unique in Canada and caters for various social needs and learning styles including:

- Co-op program - mixing hands-on work placement with academic courses for those students able to work relatively independently.
- Triangle - catering to various sexual preferences and engaging students with relevant support groups.
- Small Classroom Setting - held outside of a traditional high-school environment and specially designed to allow teachers to develop closer teaching relationships with fewer students, typically only across 1-3 classrooms per location.
- Personal Support - a program highly concentrated towards close primary teacher support and mentoring in academic subjects.

Credit recognition across all the Oasis programs means that students will receive full course credits for work attained before coming to Oasis. The program has a 'continuous registration' feature, allowing students struggling at other mainstream facilities to cross-over at any time to begin with a fresh start at Oasis.

This program offers students, 16 years and older, academic and applied level programs. They are able to enroll in a selection of Grades 9 and 10 courses using a mix of guided independent study and month long courses and learn through experience and active learning in the community.

<http://artsandsocialchangeprogram.blogspot.com/>

APPLE (Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expelled students)

Students who are accepted into this program are engaged in an alternative and flexible learning style which is characterised by a highly individualised attention. Its main focus is on youth 16 years and older who are at risk and disengaging from the mainstream secondary school system. Students exit the program with academic high school results, relevant practical life-skills training and where necessary re-entry to mainstream schools. An extract from a 'letter to students and families' outlines some of the core goals of the wider program:

This is a time of tremendous change and opportunity for those of us involved in education – parents, students and educators. All students are now required to complete forty (40) hours of community service as a graduation requirement outlined by the Ministry of Education.

This community involvement is intended to develop a sense of social awareness, boost self-esteem, and help students

accept social and civic responsibility. These goals complement academic and work experience programs that are currently taking place in our schools.



Toronto Catholic District School Board

The TCDSC is a publically-funded education group providing high-quality education in Canada for nearly 170 years. The Board serves the needs of over 93,000 students in 201 schools. As well as the mainstream schools, the TCDSC provides world-class alternative education for those with special needs such as APPLE (Alternative Pupil Placement for Limited Expelled students) catering for students 16 years and more, described above.

Also SALEP (Supervised Alternative Learning for Excused Pupils) which caters to students under the age of 16 with similar focused programs to APPLE. This program equips students to either return to mainstream schooling or enter the workforce.

SECTION 23 is another alternative program offered and has been formulated to address the needs of students requiring intensive intervention. This system places students into classroom settings which work in conjunction with outside agencies such as hospitals, and caters for other factors affecting a student's life and circumstances.

The TCDSC's programs are excellent models for other schools wishing to serve the needs of kids at risk.

Conclusion

I count myself as being very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to travel as a Winston Churchill Fellow to the United Kingdom, United States and Canada to observe and participate in a variety of alternate education programs. I would like to again recognise the generosity of the Park family for sponsoring my fellowship and allowing me to learn so much in such a brief period of time. It would have certainly been much more convenient to travel to all of these countries in the middle of their summer to witness how their programs were facilitated, however in saying that, travelling in winter allowed me to see how educators adjusted their curriculum to encourage students to attend class. It was wonderful to see the creative ways in which teachers encouraged disengaged students to engage with the curriculum and attend lessons when temperatures outside went down well below freezing point.

While some of the schools in the places I visited were obviously different to what we have in Australia, there were a lot of similarities in relation to student attitudes and behaviours as well as the reasoning for why students disengage from educational settings in the first place. There were also many common factors facing administrations in different schools, issues such as teacher burn-out, lack of resources, inadequate funds were all common amongst the different schools.

One cannot help but make comparisons between what we are doing in Southeast Queensland and what is happening in alternate education sites abroad. Overall, I think that the alternate programs that we run here in Queensland are staffed with wonderful teachers who are committed to seeing young people re-engage in a school setting. I was impressed with some of the diverse programs that were established to help students to learn, skateboard factories, African drumming classes and many other methods that were used to encourage students to participate in a classroom and engage in different types of learning.

A former Churchill Fellow mentioned to me prior to my departure that the Fellowship allowed for a sharing of ideas between like-minded professionals from different cultures. I must admit that when I travelled to observe other schools, I was more interested in getting a greater understanding of how other nations work with young people struggling in a mainstream educational setting in contrast to sharing how we do things in Southeast Queensland. I was amazed to see the expressions on some of the teacher's faces when I mentioned that the school that I work in is based on a 78 acre property - in somewhere like New York City, this model is an impossible dream. The Fellowship certainly did encour-

age an equal amount of sharing ideas between myself and other teachers. I would like to think that there are certain components of the educational programs that we run here in Queensland that might be implemented in different parts of the world due to some of the discussions and some of the teaching that I did with young people overseas.

Recommendations

- Focus on smaller class sizes permitting closer interaction with students.
- Great need for schools and school programs which cater for specific groups rather than a 'broad-brush' approach attempting to cater for many vastly differing needs in only one class setting.
- Increased focus on specific programs that cater for youth with mental-health issues, and building on these in Australia from the highly successful programs which exist in these overseas countries.
- Increased staff and personnel to facilitate targeted programs - in contrast to the current poor state of this relatively neglected area of education in Australia.
- Develop training programs to encourage more professionals to work in this field to bridge the current shortfall in qualified personnel.
- Explore a wider range of curriculum options including:
 - a) More innovative and creative ways to engage young people
 - b) More flexible timetables and learning delivery methods
 - c) Greater working relationships between government departments such as Dept of Child safety and Dept of Youth Justice and Independent schools catering for 'kids at risk'.