

# **THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**



**Report by**

**- IAN DAVID WILSON -**

**- 2002 Churchill Fellow -**

**Title**

**To gain awareness of programs supporting youth at risk  
and community collaboration – USA, UK and South Africa**

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Signed .....

Dated .....

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The award of this Fellowship has given me the opportunity to experience valuable and enlightening insights into the unique and naturally occurring relationships between schools and their communities in the United States of America, Great Britain and South Africa.

I have been able to investigate a range of international best practice in school community relationships in a variety of contexts that support and nurture a productive, caring and stimulating environment for the development of children particularly for children at risk, in both the early childhood and adolescent stages.

The main aspects of the study that I investigated were those which influence successful school community collaboration and support strategies for youth at risk; structures, resources, training, interagency (joined-up) cooperation and inclusive practices

The Fellowship provided further opportunities to study and observe the challenges involved in service delivery in geographically isolated bi-cultural indigenous settings and in inclusive multi cultural settings.

I would like to acknowledge the following organisations and individuals for their support in enabling this Fellowship to occur.

- Mt Paul Tys, Chief Executive Officer, The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and his extremely friendly and helpful staff for the generous financial assistance and support.
- Dr Ken Boston AO, Former Director-General, New South Wales Department of Education and Ms Jan McLelland, Director-General, New South Wales Department of Education and Training for their strong support and encouragement of the Churchill Fellowship program.
- My wife, Margaret and family, Jay, Fiona, Kylie, Catherine, Bart and Michael and parents, Mary, Ruby and Ted for their patience, support and encouragement to me to pursue my interests.

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*'Communities are endangered. Schools are one of our last hopes for rescuing and reinventing them'*

*Prof. Andy Hargraves, International Centre for Educational Change, University of Toronto, Canada.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

Succinctly, everyday was a highlight, It was a great privilege to be part of this incredibly motivating and stimulating experience. I am indebted to the Churchill Trust for the opportunity to expand my horizons with the view to being a better practitioner in school and community development and more importantly contributing to the development of young Australians. I expect this experience to influence me for a long time to come.

The opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other school, local government and private practitioners in school and community development and witness the achievements of initiatives on an international level is priceless. Not only the learning has been valuable but also access to the depth of professional capacity of the numerous contacts I made and opportunity to expand my network of practitioners and professionals and the friendships that have been established as a consequence of the fellowship.

The following initiatives were particularly impressive:

### **Miner County Community Revitalisation, Howard, South Dakota, USA**

This Annenberg Foundation funded initiative has given great purpose to this county in rural America who are committed to building sustainability and resilience by connecting small communities through loosely coupled networks that nurture creativity and entrepreneurship through schools and their collaboration with community groups.

The program aims to provide a quality of life and services to small communities in the face of the consequences of change in rural America. Federal, state and local government policies and the programs coupled with advancement in technology and mechanisation have collectively and incrementally reshaped life in rural America. This is very similar to life in rural Australia. Unfortunately the impact of these gradual policy shifts coupled with the unexpected impact of natural disasters and significant world events have had unintended consequences for the quality of rural life.

The program has seeded many initiatives through lateral thinking. This reflects the adage about human nature that out of adversity flows survival and creativity. Through the generation of a supportive and symbiotic culture between public schools, their students and community organisations the schools and communities can develop simultaneously and provide a genuine base for local leadership, ownership, pride and connection to the local community. Quite impressive in America is the strong feeling of association, continued contact and support that adults have for their school and hometown. There is a strong sense of appreciation for the school, teachers and community for supporting the development of each adult and a feeling of wanting to give back something of themselves for their successful childhood.

The Miner County Community Revitalisation Plan has capitalised on this unique association and is developing the social infrastructure of local leadership through a rural learning centre that is a hub for productive relationships and networks across the many small villages in the county. The aim of the learning centre is to develop informed local leadership, to build social fabric and infrastructure that facilitates collaboration, shared learning, and leadership development between people. An important notion of the learning centre is that development 'of' the community is the greatest need because it is the resource enabling development 'in' the community. Successful community development places a premium on being well informed about what is happening locally. American research has shown that successful economic development has occurred where communities have strong local leadership and have developed an ability to cooperate among themselves to achieve community goals. Community development is becoming appreciated as an effective strategy for rural economic progress.

### **Full Service Schools, Children's Aid Society, New York, USA.**

This program, funded through the generosity of the philanthropic corporate sector of New York, assists to provide support services to students and parents in the low socio-economic areas of New York city. The services provided are physical and mental health, counselling, after-school and adult education programs. The programs are run along side the public education services provided by the school. The Children's Aid Society operates its services in unused space of schools using the school facilities for both before and after school as well as the in-school delivery of specialist health and counselling services. The schools are primarily, Hispanic, South American or Black American in population

This innovative, symbiotic relationship created between school administrators, teachers and the specialist staff of the Children's Aid Society complements each other, providing a rich fabric of local networks and connections, including an impressive web of services and support for the students. Additionally it also serves as an early warning system that focusses on students of high risk/unstable families experiencing difficulty through poverty, youth crime and poor health and enables appropriate preventative action and connections to be engaged as early as possible. The Children's Aid Society staff at each school centre were extremely enthusiastic and energetic, full of smiles and extremely caring for each child and parent engaged. The staff are people who find their work a calling, translating their nurturing and caring responses into everyday life for students and then building in, through modelling and repetition, sustainability and replication of caring behaviours. These folk are doing great things for young people in New York city.

A significant feature of the full service school is the subtle, yet powerful influence that other professionals have on school administrators and teachers. This influence allows a reflection on practice to occur in the spirit of cooperation and support and has delivered better classroom strategies, student welfare practices, and co-operative decision making. The overall outcome has been improved student achievement and learning as well as children who feel loved, cared for and successful. Other benefits are the maximized use of school facilities, and more productive use of leisure time by students. Other consequential benefits of this

program are less vandalism of schools and communities and an avenue for the employment of specialist staff from the community who are not trained teachers, but are specialists in their own field, to have an impact on and contribute to the development of young children. These people had a tremendous impact on students, acting as informal mentors as well as instructors. Anecdotal comments from students indicated that they appreciated the less formal and restricted approach to afternoon and before school lessons as opposed to the boredom and routines of regular school. Comments by the staff indicate that they appreciate the opportunity to work with children and enjoy the opportunity to contribute to their development.

Research by Dreyfus indicates that Full Service Schools are maximising the available contact time with students and utilising available resources to an optimum level. The Full Service provision, while not a totally system wide joined-up delivery approach, but a local joined up initiative that acts as a catalyst in marshalling a range of support services for at risk students, could be tried in the NSW public education system.

### **The New Community Schools Initiative, Scotland**

This initiative of the Scottish Executive is similar to the Full Service Schools initiative of the Children's Aid Society, New York, USA. The Scottish Executive have taken action politically to bring about more effective service delivery through joined-up agency operations. The initiative is funded through new money with the view to achieving: raised educational attainment; reduced school exclusion and raised attendance; and promoting social inclusion. This program was piloted in 3 areas in Scotland: Dunoon; Clydebank; and Hawick. Each community had extreme social dislocation through unemployment, shifting trends in industry and the impact of global markets. Each area was significantly under-privileged with high numbers of vulnerable families. Dunoon was a coastal community; Clydebank an inner city industrialised community and Hawick a rural community.

This approach by the Scottish Executive respects Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory where a child's development is not simply an outcome of their own individual development, but is influenced by a process of social factors. In the case of the Dunoon Program the Nurture Group initiative would become part of a child's everyday experience, their microsystem. The way that microsystems interact is the mesosystem. The New Community Schools Initiative at Dunoon aims to strengthen the links between the microsystems of each child, in this case the child's home and the school, case managing positive experiences through joined-up government service provision. The exosystem is a step removed from the child, but does affect the child. Close involvement with parents is necessary to have appropriate role models in place. The macrosystem is the overall state of society. In this case the political will is there in the form of legislative reform and new funding. Social inclusion is a priority for central government. The Scottish parliament has identified minimizing child exclusion from school as a priority. This is the main difference between the new Community Schools initiative in Scotland and the Full Service Schools initiative of the Children's Aid Society, New York, USA. The Nurture group initiative adopts a holistic approach to education and has become an accepted

philosophy of early intervention for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties within mainstream schools in England and Wales.

The programs were driven by a cooperative of local government, education, health and community service groups. Because of the funding model and guidelines the operation of the Local Education Authority local government held a significant role in promoting inter-agency cooperation and the development of integrated services. There was a real sense of urgency in all staff that I spoke with in the 3 sites across Scotland to break down the barriers and opposition to genuine cooperation among service providers. Logically, schools became the centre of operations for the initiative. Wright's research into 'The integration of Social Work into New Community Schools' highlighted the additional support provided for 'at risk' students through joined-up service provision. This is commendable considering the extensive barriers of custom and tradition that had been built up by the individual agencies operating independently over the years.



Participating in a Nurture Group Activity, Kirn Primary School, Dunoon, Scotland.

This initiative also had a considerable impact on infiltrating the closed door approach of the teaching profession. By having health, community service and other government agency representatives working in schools there was a greater flow of information both ways about the students and about effective ways of handling issues with particular families. This occurred as a matter of course and

became, through an unstructured and informal process, an important network and change generating mechanism, exchanging information between different service providers and learning new methods of operating and achieving closer relationships with students at risk. There was a positive impact on the school personnel who were previously, really challenged in the management of the children.

Overall this initiative demonstrates that joined up government operations can work and make a difference. In fact, as reported anecdotally by the personnel working in the programs, it has the potential to achieve better service delivery more effectively and achieve improvements in student outcomes. It also demonstrates the need to be committed to finding effective ways of service delivery when existing methods are not achieving the desired outcome. Managers reported the need to take specific action to embed these joined-up processes into the culture of the school and other agencies.

### **Michigan Communities in Schools, Life Services Systems, Parent Information and Resource Centre and Learning Communities, Carmen-Ainsworth Community Schools.**

Michigan State Department of Education has a distinct focus on community development through school-community relationships in schools. These 2 programs were very impressive and had won national awards for their comprehensive approaches to strengthening the relationships between parents, school business and the community. What is recognised and championed in Michigan is that public schools are the best developers of economic activity that you can have. There is a call for the whole community (state) to support the efforts of schools as the nursery of the future of Michigan. The outcomes for students and parents are a rich array of support programs for at risk students and families and a strong presence of connection between agencies and schools to work cooperatively to case manage issues emerging in students. This cohesive approach was extremely effective and enabled students at risk to be well managed.

The Life Services Systems, Parent Information and Resource Centre is a non-profit organisation that has made great use of the USA Federal grant system for early childhood and parenting services. National grants and local philanthropic funds have been combined under the leadership of Deanna Depree, an inspirational and visionary person. Deanna's dream is for all children to be cared for and nurtured appropriately so they can develop to achieve their potential. In order to achieve this she has built a parent resources, information and training centre that caters specifically for younger parents and youth at risk. Through this centre is an intriguing network of support for young parents and students. The centre aims at connecting parents with appropriate cultural support networks and information. This is a great resource for Michigan.

Again, here the staff find their work a calling. They work with this organisation because of the contribution they can make to the development of youth and in turn, the community and nation.

## City of Leicester Council Education Service

Education services for Leicester are run through the auspices of the City of Leicester Council. The education service covers early childhood, school and adult education as a seamless delivery. I was particularly impressed by the joined-up delivery of education where schools would be used by all levels of delivery in a very cooperative, non tribal manner. There was open acceptance of a cooperative approach to the use of facilities and the re-use of facilities that were previously unused for school education for adult and community education and community purposes. Leicester's population is highly ethnic. The influence of the different cultures from Asia and Africa is accommodated with little disruption. There appears to be very little inter-racial tension and a high commitment to making a new start in a new land. High emphasis is placed on acceptance of individuals, giving them a sense of purpose, a connection with a social group and a sense of ownership and contribution and achievement to a community facility. There was a huge sense of cohesion within the community facilities.

Many individual government initiatives were in place to support joined-up operations. These initiatives were offering financial incentives (new money) to change cultures and ways of delivering services. The Sure Start program to link providers in the area of early childhood service delivery. The New Deal for Communities and the Single Regeneration programs to fast track community development in extremely disadvantaged and high unemployment areas. The School and Community Regeneration program, the Excellence in Cities program and Education Action Zones to initiate cooperation between schools and between school and their communities appear to have been very successful. What is evident in all these programs is the trend by the Blair Government to reduce government service delivery in isolation and maximize the value of joined-up operations of service delivery and build in community ownership. From what I saw these initiatives seem effective and were delivering excellent results, not only in capital improvements but also in changes in culture and ways of thinking about delivery of services. In particular the Linwood Community Centre was an excellent example of government services working closely with the community, listening to community desires, and then recruiting local ownership and commitment to the operation of the centre. The centre has been operating for over 15 years very effectively utilising the unused school buildings to great advantage.

Baunstone Community Centre is an example where the blend of management expertise and local ownership and decision making appeared to be ineffective. A higher emphasis on local management without an adequate balance of professional support has seen this community experience many failures in its initiatives, consequently there is continual social turbulence and dislocation in the community, the schools and in the adolescent population generally.

## **Western Cape Province Education Department, South Africa (Cape Town Metropole South District and George District)**

This visit was an excellent opportunity to witness and discuss the outcomes and change processes in education resulting from the Mandela reforms. The groundswell of support for change from Apartheid to democratic government that led to Nelson Mandela being released after 28 years of imprisonment has had a liberating effect on the people of South Africa. The education system was a powerful resource in the original change process that culminated in the successful dismantling of the Apartheid regime. The ready access to the grass roots of communities and to large numbers of students provided useful tools in mobilising and sustaining anti-apartheid support. Anecdotal comments from teachers and administrators indicate that in the last 2 years prior to 1995 very little real teaching occurred in the public school system.

Now there is a focus on addressing the deficiencies in property management, pedagogy, administration and student outcomes that are as a result of the Apartheid regime. The current policies of the South African Government are aimed at addressing the disadvantage that exists in education in terms of access to schools, resources, overcoming disadvantage and poverty and raising student achievement through literacy.

The redistribution of funding is occurring slowly to schools of high disadvantage and is being done in the context of addressing competing priorities such as introducing new pedagogies, curriculum reform and outcomes based education across the work force. This has caused some tension from schools and communities that are predominately white and who have previously received considerable financial support. Additional to this is the restructuring of education to a district model of management within the 7 states of the country. There is considerable change in South African education at the present time.

In the rural context, there is considerable disadvantage in quality of housing, transport, services, employment and living standards. Despite the obvious hardships that people suffer there is a strong spirit of survival among the adults and children. Most impressive was the commitment and attitude to break out of the cycle of poverty and contribute to the development of a new South Africa, the 'Rainbow Nation'. Schools were run on a very traditional model. A small amount of food was provided daily to the students by the government, in general the disadvantaged schools in both rural and metropolitan areas were of a very low standard. Schools are still reflective of the colour based demarcated living areas of the community. While there is no segregation in the broader community the ideals of the Rainbow Nation have not yet translated into a truly mixed society because of the disparity in the distribution of wealth across the community. In the better public schools where traditionally high levels of support were received there was a need to use school fees as a method of raising operating funds to maintain staffing levels. This practice has unfortunately prevented students from underprivileged families attending the better public schools and by default perpetuates the segregation of students on the basis of socio-economic status.

In the curriculum emphasis was placed on the rich cultural diversity of South Africa. The demands of the wide range of languages and cultures caused difficulty in achieving high levels of literacy, particularly comprehension. Support services were scarce and any technology that existed was generally rudimentary and funded by the local community through the resourcefulness of the principal. A significant feature of the Directors, principals and staff was their determination to succeed in contributing positively to the lives of the children. Many of them, working in circumstances of extreme disadvantage, saw issues as challenges and expressed a strong determination to make a difference.

## **SUMMARY**

From all the programs across the countries that I visited common threads emerged about school and community collaboration that promotes resilience and builds capacity for youth at risk in both the early childhood and adolescent years. Each program had a strong commitment to service delivery that is seamless between agencies and that is focused on establishing and securing enduring partnerships between providers, schools and communities. Rethinking current ways of operating, sharing information and expertise between agencies and building stronger connections between providers and youth at risk will assist to produce better service delivery and consequently greater connectedness and resilience in young adults.

Other key factors came through in discussions with both administrators and workers in the schools and allied agencies. Firstly, a solution focused, not a deficit focused approach is necessary. The solution focus is a pathway to gain commitment from the community to a process for action. Secondly, that there is no real training for joined-up service delivery, it is a 'try it and see approach' from committed staff in the different agencies prepared to make things happen together. Thirdly, persistence, being prepared to continually try new strategies till the right mix of agency support is in place and the desired outcomes are achieved. Collaborative service delivery means creating a climate of trust between providers, blurring the edges of responsibility, communicating effectively and timely between providers, dealing with complex and unanticipated problems and celebrating success. Fourthly embedding the successful processes in to the culture of interagency collaboration. There is no end to the amount of rhetoric about joined-up service delivery; successfully operationalising the rhetoric is the difficult part. There is a huge need for government agency officials to be permeable to the influence of parents and local people and the need to have faith in local solutions. Local people need to have success and this needs to be experienced through their own decisions, actions and achievements, no matter how small. As well there is need for independent agency officials to be permeable to other agencies contributions, advice and knowledge. The collective sum of the parts is greater than isolated and individual contributions. Just as building connections between youth at risk and their families and communities is important, there is a need to build connections between agencies to maximise the power of the support that can be provided.

Schools could do well to adopt the language of families, validating feelings, creating a climate of trust and build on the expertise that is made available through the interagency contact. Families are good at things, no matter how desperate and at risk they are. Schools can daily recognise this then utilise subtle techniques and stealth to link in parents to support networks. Succinctly, they could be far more inclusive and nurturing in their communication and actions to promote greater cohesion among the community.

## **DISSEMINATION**

Presentations will be made to groups of school principals and senior officers of the NSW Department of Education and Training and the NSW Premier's Department's Regional Coordination Management Group of New England/North West area. Arrangements have been made to make presentations to Service Clubs, Church Groups and interagency forums.

Some dissemination of findings and promotion of Churchill Fellowships were made during the fellowship itself to principal forums in Birmingham, Cape Town and George.

It is expected to that a summary of the report and associated article will be printed in the NSW Department of Education and Training's magazine, 'Inform'.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

There were many great ideas and initiatives that I saw in operation and had the opportunity to discuss at length with the personnel involved. Many of the initiatives have attributes that are transferable to the NSW context, either in part, in full, or modified to suit the particular situation. Great benefit will come from challenging ways of thinking and operating through discussion with colleagues and administrators. In particular, finding local solutions based on what is achievable locally within the context of 'working with what we have got' in terms of the capacity of local people and then building on that capacity. The international best practice to which I have been exposed will provide a benchmark for levels of quality and assist to set goals of achievement.

There are excellent opportunities to strengthen our practices, particularly in the NSW Premier's Department Regional Coordination Management of government services and in the joint agency programs Families First and Better Futures. The place management projects that I have been involved in at Boggabilla-Toomelah, Goodooga, Coonamble, Gwabegar-Pilliga and Walgett each have their own unique characteristics, no one model for operation of place management would be successful across these sites. Any amendment to current practice in New South Wales place management needs to take into account the existing unique features and to be accepted and endorsed by the local community.

## PROGRAM

### ORGANISATION

San Diego County Office Of Education

San Diego School Leadership  
Development Centre

San Diego City Unified School District

Calserve Program  
(California Service Learning)

Encinitas Union Elementary School District  
(California Service Learning)

Heartland Center for Leadership  
Development , Lincoln  
Nebraska

Miner County Community Revitalization  
Howard, South Dakota

Lower Brule Reservation  
Elementary School, Lower Brule, South Dakota

Crow Creek Reservation Elementary  
School, Fort Thompson, South Dakota

Michigan State University,  
College of Education. Leadership  
Development Program

Michigan State Department of Education

Michigan Communities in Schools  
Life Services Systems  
Parent Information and Resource Centre

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Learning Communities, Carmen-Ainsworth  
Community Schools, Flint. Michigan

Alternative Schools and programs  
New York State Education Assistance for  
Homeless Youth

Full Service Schools  
Children's Aid Society  
4600 Broadway, New York NY10040

New Community Schools Initiative, Scotland  
Dunoon New Community Schools

Clydebank New Community Schools

Hawick New Community Schools

City of Leicester Council Education Service  
[www.leicester.gov.uk](http://www.leicester.gov.uk)

Sure Start Program  
New Deal for Communities  
Education Action Zones  
Single Regeneration Money  
Excellence in Cities

Birmingham City Council Education Services  
Centre for Research in Early Childhood

Community Education Development Centre  
[www.cedc.org.uk](http://www.cedc.org.uk)  
Schools and Community Regeneration  
Initiatives  
2002 Community Schools Network Conference  
'Community Engagement in Sustainable School  
Better Together Project

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Improvement' Bright Sparks Program  
Schools Facing Challenging Communities  
program

2002 Community Schools Network Conference  
'Community Engagement in Sustainable  
School Improvement'

Western Cape Province Schools, South Africa  
South Metropole EMDC ( Mitchell Plains)

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## CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Service delivery for youth at risk is causing concern for governments in all areas of the world. There is no easy or quick solution. What I found that does exist is a desire in communities to care for and assist in the development of youth. The motivation for this is extremely broad but underpinning it is a trait of human nature to care for our fellow being and to protect our future. To effect this nurturing and development it is evident that programs that support youth at risk are high on connectivity. They are quintessentially pragmatic and opportunistic in approach, seeking to capitalise on, and extend the human dimension of the experiences they offer. Many of the programs that were successful in turning children around had these features.

They accepted the individual for what they were.

They built on the skills or knowledge that the individual already had.

They involved liaison with family and extended family members.

They built support networks from the individuals' community or interest area.

They maintained high, but realistic expectations for the individual.

They adopted the language and actions of families.

The programs should be administered in a climate of cooperation and support that encourages and builds independence within the context of seeding resilience in the social infrastructure of the community. It should be noted that in working in this area it is essential to be positive and hopeful when things around you do not appear that way and in general, everything is difficult before it gets easy.

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