

## **BOYS IN TROUBLE**



### **A SIGN OF THE TIMES?**

The world is not any easy place for boys growing up today.

Almost every indicator of “success” at school - be it literacy and numeracy competency or positive social and citizenship behaviours, show girls leading the way.

A steady stream of media articles confirms the mounting concern over the achievement levels of boys in our education system.

It's not just an education issue though, many boys today are having a tough time knowing where, how and if even if they belong in the wider society.

The alienation many our youth, in particular boys, feel is potentially one of the biggest social crisis we are facing.

At a Community level, the number of young men not embracing our society and its values is reaching disturbing numbers.

Too many are journeying to manhood with inappropriate or confused messages about what society hopes for and expects from them, as a male.

Too many come to adulthood with a sense of social alienation lacking hope, optimism or long term future goals.

Consider the figures on violent crime, motor vehicle accidents, road rage and youth self harm (including suicide) rates.

Overwhelmingly it is males who are involved in suchlike risk taking behaviours. (At a ratio of 9:1).

Other male dominated behaviours, such as vandalism and random acts of graffiti are manifestations of that sense of detachment from society.

These are rejection indicators of the "values" we hope our kids will adopt.

(You don't damage something you value, have a positive emotional attachment towards, a sense of ownership for or a sense of belonging to).

What are we offering our youth to promote that sense of belonging? There is an urgent need to develop initiatives that foster sustained community involvement and most importantly- engagement.

Despite the possibility of it being seen as forced work, the proposal to introduce Community service is one initiative that has the potential to create for participants, a deeper sense of what goes into creating a community.

It is an opportunity to gain some life skills; particularly if the sorts of projects envisaged provide the chance to build or create something in the community (This is particularly relevant to young men who generally prefer doing to talking).

Simply getting out of your own comfort zone, being involved and interacting with a diverse range of people in the community, potentially can build greater understanding, tolerance and often acceptance of others in society.

This is where Community groups have a role to play. The opportunity for intergenerational exposure is a key element for success in assisting all people involved gain a greater understanding of each other.

In Education, governments, both Federal and State, are beginning to recognise the urgent need for schools to address the concerns for boys and their progress.

The Western Australian Department of Education for example, have a current initiative aimed at attracting male undergraduates to consider a career in teaching.

The take up rate however is somewhat disappointing though.

A significant number of boys are denied a positive male role model or male support group throughout their formative years.

It's an unfortunate spin off from the fragmented family and community situations we currently experience.

Proposals aimed at attracting men towards considering a career in Primary School teaching and to involve male adults in mentoring should be encouraged.

What keeps surfacing is the need young men have for encouragement, support for their positive efforts and guided redirection when they get it wrong.

A lot of kids could do with a consistent and trustworthy role model / mentor.

The Education

The media have a vital role to play here by highlighting the value teacher's play developing children generally- and boys in particular toward being positive citizens.

Another pilot initiative currently being evaluated is the gender based classroom, early indicators suggest it has influences outcomes in a positive direction for both girls and boys.

For its part, the Federal Government is currently implementing a \$19.4 million dollar project "Success for Boys" across Australia with the aim of improving learning and social outcomes for boys.

This project will provide professional development for teachers to accommodate a shift in thinking about the of teaching boys, understanding and acknowledging the way males think and learn to provide them with a more positive “boy friendly” learning environment.

I am a primary school teacher and I don't claim to have the answers.  
I and many of my colleagues are constantly searching for ways to foster engagement of boys.

One initiative I have seen make a significantly positive impact for boys (and girls), is the Rock and Water program.  
Edu Solutions are proud to be part of it's introduction into Western Australian Schools.

Far too many young male students in particular, feel disengaged and lost, as they transition to high school.  
They unsure of what lies ahead in that crucial move to the next stage of their “journey”.  
There is a definite need to look at the transition event and work towards developing a “rights of passage” support process.  
How an emerging adolescent responds to their first experiences at high school has a significant bearing not only on their immediate but also their long-term future.

For many there is an air of disillusionment as they see the goals they set themselves start to look unattainable. It is at this very point; young men in particular, need significant support.

Many males are relatively poor at expressing feelings, fears and concerns.  
We have to create opportunities to listen to our young men.  
We need to hear what they would like from Society and what they think they can offer back to it.  
The notion of mutual obligation needs to be explored.

It is our responsibility to confirm their self worth, encourage and help them set and achieve their dreams and aspirations for taking a positive role in society.  
Not to do so will further disenfranchise them with potentially catastrophic implications for the whole community.

Bill Johnstone  
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