

## **Introduction**

The following information is provided by the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills Inc.

Our submission is targeted to the key area of Prevention. It focuses on the value of education to bring about the prevention of domestic violence.

Teaching the building blocks of respect in relationships early is an essential ingredient in the strategy to eliminate Domestic, family and sexual violence. However, it is not the task of formal educators alone, it is a whole community responsibility.

The education strategy presented by the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills involves schools and the wider community. It is delivered specifically to younger primary school age children. We believe this approach makes a difference by teaching children to respect themselves and other people.

### **Existing Initiatives:**

The emphasis in recent years has been on awareness campaigns aimed at adults. While this may have been effective in communicating the issue to the wider community and perhaps shaming those with poor behaviour, recent history suggests it does not change learnt behaviour and entrenched attitudes. (If it was easy to change the mind of a perpetrator then we would see far fewer victim-survivors.)

### **Education:**

To understand how education can undo negative attitudes, we need to unpack the way violence and control becomes the action of choice for perpetrators.

It begins with thoughts forming into theories which become entrenched attitudes persisting through generations. Beliefs are promoted through bullying, intimidating actions and sharing hate speech. Abuse and violence grow and gain acceptance. The easy transmission of opinions via social media in recent decades has exacerbated this and exposed negative behaviours to a broader and younger cohort.

Through education we can correct this negative learnt behaviour to change thoughts and attitudes and promote positive social behaviours towards others, women, and girls.

It is acknowledged by many commentators including victim-survivors (*Rosie Batty, Guardian, Dec 3 2015, Grace Tame Australian Press Club March 2021*) that education is important and currently overlooked. Why is this? Education is an effective strategy to achieve enduring social change in the hearts and minds of the next generation and through young people into the future. Those same commentators also emphasise the importance of educating our children as a significant factor in effectively changing attitudes and behaviours.

The Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills, being very concerned about domestic violence in our community wanted to address the issues. In 2011 we developed a project call Expect Respect in consultation with Mt Barker Police Crime Prevention Unit. We have presented the Expect Respect program for 13 years working with primary schools in our local area to promote skills and understanding around what healthy relationships are and how to develop them.

Through the development of the project and by facilitating Expect Respect we have learnt much about how certain strategies can work well with schools, students, teachers and families but also what the inhibiting factors are. A brief review of the Expect Respect project may be useful to highlight benefits and challenges in this approach and provide useful data for other initiatives.

## Our Story:

Our Club had been involved with supporting women at risk in Mount Barker with duress alarms and the monitoring of them to help with emergency safety in the early 2000s. Our contact with the local Police (SAPOL) led to the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU) suggesting to us to look for opportunities which may help young people improve their social attitudes. Police had increasing concerns about the number of young people living with family and relationship issues and a noticeable increase of disrespectful behaviour by young people in the community. (*letter of support from Superintendent John Bruhn, Officer in Charge, Hills Fleurieu Local Service Area*) They found that their engagement with high school aged students showed strongly entrenched poor attitudes towards community and family.

Further investigation and consultation with educators also pointed us to educating much younger children. Junior primary teachers recommend that students in year three (aged 8 to 10) have the capacity to understand quite complex social interactions and this is the best age to introduce respectful behaviours.

Shortly after, we found a project being run in Queensland by a Zonta Club (*Beaudesert Zonta Club, 2010*) and a school which involved awareness training in respectful behaviour presented through the fun of a public art exhibition. The project had a strong community element.

We developed the project in consultation with the Mount Barker CPU, local community health workers, Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the local Domestic Violence Action Group (DVAG). After approaching the two state schools and further refining the model\*, we began the Expect Respect project in 2012 with one class of 30 year three and four students.

The project began the following guidelines:

1. SAPOL would deliver an initial educational talk which focused on the child's rights and responsibilities, what Police can do to help young people, awareness about civil behaviour and bullying. Topics would be selected to suit the current class cohort in consultation with SAPOL.
2. The lessons were run over a term by the class teacher and messages would respond to local conditions and focus on current student attitudes and understandings about healthy relationships.
3. There would be a counsellor or mental health professional attending to ensure student safety and support.
4. Students would then investigate concepts of tolerance, respect, personal safety and responsibilities in class during a full school term. This would be appropriate to their age and address current issues which were affecting them.
5. Students would then use art to demonstrate their understanding of what they learnt during the term. We used the art to create calendars which the students kept and were also circulated in the community.
6. All students' work would be displayed in a public place where the local community could observe it and share their thoughts.
7. Parents and community would be involved. We chose to hold a celebratory event and include High school students, Police, Community Leaders and guest speakers to address the students.
8. The Zonta Club would be responsible for promoting the project to the local community.
9. Ideally students should do the project on two consecutive years to embed the learning.

The project was well received by the school in 2012. In four years, it was being run in two Mount Barker schools and the Eastern Fleurieu Schools (run by another Zonta Club) with 120 students participating. A group in the Riverland also ran the Expect Respect project in 2019 with modifications for early high school students.

Our club has received acknowledgement by our Zonta peers for this work (*international awards for service and advocacy, Zonta International Convention 2014, 2024*), and our local community (*Premiers Awards for community education initiatives, 2014, 2015*). This tells us that the initiative is seen as valuable to both the South Australian community and the Zonta International community.

#### **What we see as positive:**

- In the second year of doing Expect Respect the students were much more engaged in the work and often stepped up as mentors to other students.
- Teachers found it beneficial, and it fits the wellbeing/health curriculum.
- Students were able to reflect on the lessons and appreciate how they can improve their behaviours. (Feedback based on the questionnaires filled in by students at the conclusion of the project.)
- Local media and community leaders are very supportive and attend the Community event.
- Students enjoy the celebratory event, and we observe that there is always a moment when they realise what they had just learnt was important and mattered to the adults in their world.
- With more awareness and media focus about DV we have noted increased interest from Community leaders (Mayor's, local MP's, Politicians) to attend the community event.
- Interest from high schools has been positive and ideally the project would grow and include units to support learning throughout all school years, with mentoring and collaboration between ages included in the mix.

#### **Experiences observed:**

- Police educators bring gravity to the issues of rights, responsibilities, the law and consequences to the students; the school brings health and wellbeing learning, communication skills and a place to learn and practise tolerance of others. These beneficial learning experiences, however, can be a bit generic and easily put aside by young people as 'things I learn at school'. We have found that adding the community element brings it all together in a village context. In this environment clubs such as ours (and other community groups) can demonstrate to the young people that what they have learnt is important to their families, their community and for their futures. They see leaders in their own community expressing the importance of tolerance and respect.
- Not every community conducts the project the same way. For example, the Eastern Fleurieu schools Expect Respect is run across senior primary and middle years students. It was embraced by the school Principal who put in place teacher development and now has dedicated teachers who run it annually in-house with the local Zonta club providing funding and awards. This model is less visible in the community but conducted annually.
- Several additional schools in Mount Barker were keen to run the project however our Club could only accommodate two schools per year.
- We have been invited to speak and present the project to other organisations including Anglican Mother's Union, Neighbourhood Watch (recommended and introduced to us by Police) and in the Zonta community where the concept is widely appreciated. This shows interest in the project but has not contributed greatly to its growth.

## Challenges for the future:

**We have found that it is becoming harder to attract funding, and that Police have distanced themselves from the project.**

- In the initial years, Zonta Adelaide Hills would meet with local Police from the Crime Prevention Unit prior to the project to ascertain what the community needs were and to hone the most appropriate messages to be introduced to the current student group. Over time SAPOL has developed educational presentations targeting a range of topics which can be chosen by schools. This is an efficient and valuable resource however it now lacks the flexibility to address specific issues which the students are facing in that year and weakens the local context. The opportunity for our community group to engage with SAPOL to ascertain what messages are of most use to the students and their families is an important one for the project to ensure it is authentic and relevant to the students. This is the basis of effective education. (*Letter from Commissioner Stevens 16 August 2021 and follow up discussion with Community liaison Officer*). Our interaction with SAPOL is now through the Community Engagement Section.
- The financial resourcing of this project is made more difficult by grant funding criteria which often will not fund the same project over consecutive years.
- For educational initiatives such as Expect Respect to thrive they need to grow and spread to other schools. Volunteer clubs such as ours are unable to support more than a few schools each year. This points to the need for greater collaboration between community groups.
- Combining 'clusters of schools' would create a consistent community message and thus strengthen the learning in the one geographic region. It is important, however, to keep the learning relevant to the student cohort and the local social situation.
- The closing of local newspapers has made it difficult to get our event recorded and disseminated to the local community. A reduced capacity of local newspaper circulation has meant we do not get a reporter to the event and need to provide text and images to the press ourselves which affects the rigour of independent reporting.

## Summary

Societal Change through education requires consistency and commitment by educators underpinned by community support. It is the best strategy for an enduring social change in the hearts and minds of the next generation and through young people their families and future families.

Our extensive experience and active involvement with the education of young people through the Expect Respect project could be used to explore ways to broaden and deepen the education options for change. Our imperative is that it starts with young students.