

To: Margaret Hendriks  
From: Ian Hunter  
Re: PACT Conference Report  
Date: 31.3.09

## REPORT

The Protecting All Children Today (PACT) Conference 2009 was held at the Sebel & Citigate in Brisbane 25-27 March 2009. Major sponsors included: Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian; Department of Child Safety; Department of Justice and Attorney-General; and Community Benefit Fund. PACT09 continued with the 2006 conference theme, "From little things, big things grow" as it facilitated the exploration of a diverse range of issues associated with the protection and well being of children and young people.

Three main themes were addressed:

- Justice: contemporary research and practice relating to children in the justice system.
- Proactive Education: proactive child protection approaches and preventative programs.
- Therapeutic Intervention: models of therapeutic support and intervention.

Keynote addresses alternated with choices of workshops in each of the theme areas. My choice was to mainly attend the Proactive Education workshops.

I found the Conference to be extremely interesting, challenging, relevant and worthwhile. A copy of the program is attached. Conference presentations will be posted on the PACT09 website in due course. Apart from the benefits of networking with other participants, some key insights and learnings are listed below:

- **New Protective Behaviours Program:** Kim Jackson (QPS Project Officer) is finalizing details of a new Protective Behaviours program *Empowering Children to be Safe – vital information for parents, teachers and other concerned adults* which is due for release June 2009. From Kim's presentation this looks to be an excellent program reflecting the latest approaches to protective behaviours. Key concepts used include: I am special, so are you; Safety is my right; My body belongs to me; and I can get help. Kim has promised to send me an advance copy of the program.
- **Mandatory Reporting for Child Abuse and Neglect:** This panel discussion debated the strengths and weaknesses of mandatory reporting and its effect on child safety protection for children. Much of the discussion reflected issues raised in my ACU assignment on Mandatory Reporting. Some points discussed included:
  - Great variety in mandatory reporting requirements between countries and between States in Australia;
  - Legislation, training, compliance and organizational cultural are all significant;

- Mandatory reporting only works if there is a receptive, resourced avenue for reports to be processed ie. QPS and Dept of Child Safety;
  - Increased support services are needed for families;
  - “People protect children – not just Mandatory Reporting”
  - It remains to be seen if online SP training is effective – adults need interaction/discussion for deciding on sensitive, complex issues;
  - What constitutes “significant harm”? What is “risk” of significant harm?
  - NB: one panelist made reference to a “school near Brisbane” where a child was abused by a teacher at the school and reported it to the Principal who promised he would act but did nothing about it. 12 months later it was discovered that 12 girls were abused when another girl went straight to the police. This is evidence to show that Mandatory Reporting is important.
- **An Unholy Church:** In a one-hour presentation, Amanda Gearing spent the first 45 minutes documenting the Toowoomba Prep issue from several years ago focusing on the cover-up and denial of school leadership and the Anglican Diocese. For the remaining time Amanda focused on the ‘Catholic School in Toowoomba’ which has been the subject of recent media coverage alleging that this was another case of cover-up and denial. A line from a school newsletter was displayed – “...a great year with some difficult times..” as an inappropriate response. Other accusations: there were no parent meetings; there is no care for victims; there is only concern for self reputation; the offender should have been named publically from the start; I have organized parent support group meetings as parents need help to write letters and get things moving – they are too distressed to do it on their own. A parent from the school in the audience claiming that: the CEO has completely shut down any communication on the issue; parents can’t get information; there is no one to talk to; it is a typical institutional response; there is a church monopoly on communication.  
A police officer in the audience challenged the proposition that the offender should be named immediately as natural justice means that someone is innocent until proven guilty and how would other male staff feel when the legal process has not been completed. John Browning also challenged by pointing out that it would be an offence for the alleged offender to be named.
  - **Teachers reporting child sexual abuse:** Kerry Walsh has undertaken a comparative study of teacher reporting across States. Some key points:
    - Teacher knowledge of legislation: 53.4% Yes 46.6% No
    - Teacher knowledge of policy: 70% Yes 30% No/unsure
    - Teacher reporting practice: 25% never made a report 12% suspected but did not report
    - Reasons for not reporting: not enough evidence; cause more trouble to student; lack of faith in police/dept. system; retaliation
    - In NSW, the Wood Inquiry has led to over-reporting because of a lack of a “significant harm” definition in the NSW legislation
    - How to form a ‘Reasonable suspicion’ – use scenarios and practice to assist staff
    - Effectiveness of on-line Vs face-to-face training yet to be determined
    - CSA very difficult to identify in younger student.

- **Ethical Leadership at the frontline:** Susan Gill (Department of Child Safety Manager)
  - What makes people stay? Individual and organizational values and culture aligned
  - What is really valued? Behavior, symbols, system
  - Children are organic, not mechanic therefore there is a need for collaboration across services
  - True character comes under stress: stay committed to core values; courage to face situation together; safety for all; openness to resolving issues; integrate experience; return to trust
  - Connecting behaviours: valuing clients; positive attitude; supervision/mentoring; reward programs; delegation; reflection/training/supervision; “whole of team meetings” not “staff meetings”; culture always wins over strategy
- **Whole school antibullying and resiliency program:** Tricia Chandra (Goodna Primary)
  - Why do some children survive adversity and others don't?
  - What is bullying and what is not bullying?
  - Is it: icy isolation; roving random (acts of aggression); crazy conflict (equal power – give as good as get); or bully bulldozer?
  - Overuse of “bullying” accusation – if not bullying then not victims (poor me)
  - Parents naturally want to protect, but, “Are you sure it's bullying?”
- **Risk factors for women who kill their children in Australia:** Jenny Mouzos (Fed. Police)
  - Psychopathology; poverty; unemployment; family isolation; no partner
  - Policy development needed: role of mental health deterioration; role of limited support for young mothers
- **Managing Vicarious Trauma:** Penny Gordon (Organisational Psychologist)
  - If we don't look after ourselves then over time we will compromise our ability to continue our work effectively.
  - Burnout is the end state
  - Vicarious trauma:
    - Working with those traumatized produces secondary trauma in worker, especially if you care about the people involved
    - May trigger memory of your own trauma
    - Cumulative stress/trauma
    - Inevitable
    - Developmental (changes as we change)
    - Modifiable
  - Psychological impacts:
    - Safety: caution or risk taking
    - Intimacy: withdrawal or over involved
    - Self esteem: self doubt or bravado
    - Control: under control or over control
    - Trust: suspicious or naïve
  - Organisational strategies:

- Team culture of self and group care (strategies appropriate to culture and team)
- Planning and working for the long haul
- Creating a safe environment to express feelings
- Valuing socializing, fun, humour
- Education and workshops re VT
- Ensuring some non-trauma component of work
- Individual strategies of self care:
  - Physical
  - Psychological
  - Emotional
  - Spiritual
  - Workplace/professional
- Emotional intelligence (EQ not IQ):
  - Knowing one's emotions – self awareness
  - Managing emotions
  - Motivating oneself
  - Recognizing emotions in others
  - Handling relationships
- Why self care?:
  - Because I can get hurt
  - Because I matter
  - Because my client matters
  - Because the work I do matters
- Remember:
  - You are not alone
  - One day at a time
  - One change at a time
  - Variety of self care strategies
  - Don't forget and don't give up
  - What are my self care strategies – 1 page plan
  - Organizationally – check on self care plans of workers
  - Listen but practice not visualizing trauma

**Trade Display: Open Leaves Books Brisbane – excellent books and resources on child protection issues for schools and parents. Invite to Student Protection in-service sessions? Resources for school libraries?**