



Education and Homelessness



The arts also represent a form of activity requiring the presence and the integration of both playfulness and seriousness:

Likewise art was found to be a way to express feeling without words, facilitate concentration, control the expression of emotions and give self-confidence.

Kivnick and Erickson conclude by stating that they believe that these wellbeing effects can be accessible to all who engage with art.

Aronkand Erikson, (1983, p.602) John Q. Kivnick and Joop M. Erikson, "The Arts as Healing," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 53, no. 4, 1983, pp. 602-618

Audio Transcript - Grounding Exercise

This two minute exercise was taught to me during an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) course, as a grounding tool to help with emotional control. ACT is a unique empirically based psychological program that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies, together with commitment and behavior change strategies, to increase psychological flexibility.

Notice five things that you can see.
Notice five things that you can hear.
Notice five things that you can feel.
Notice five things that you can smell.
Notice five things that you can taste.

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The Albury Project — From Schools' Perspective

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Albury is a regional city about as far as it is possible to be from the centre in Sydney, and conjoined with Wodonga, our Victorian sister city just across the Murray River on the New South Wales-Victorian border. The Albury community has learned to be self-reliant and assertive about the needs of its young people. The Albury Project (TAP) is about a bottom-up collective effort. The bottom-up approach has been critical to our success. As a collective of schools and the lead agency, we have driven this work. We own the Albury project ... it is not just another program. Together we faced up to the challenge that things were not working well enough for our young people, and we have actively sought to change this, to find a better way.

As principals of the three participating Albury Project schools, we have taken the opportunity in this issue of Parity to share our experience of some of the challenges and successes of our implementation of the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model in Albury.

The COSS Model

The COSS Model brought us the architecture and methodology for making many of the changes that we so needed and wanted in our community. It gave us the 'how to do it'. Without the COSS Model we would be nowhere ahead of where we were three years ago.

The research and data component of the COSS Model has been important. The research and data approach means that we are using data to drive and inform what we are doing with our most vulnerable students and their families, and also to measure our progress. We receive useful reports from Upstream Australia as part of this data and

research component. We use these reports beyond practice; for example, we have used these reports to support requests for additional funding and resources. The TAP reports give us a greater sense of what is going on in our schools and with our young people. The fact that we have skilled researchers working with us and with our data has been a key component of our success — it has become a fundamental component of the work.

Schools-agency: Practice and Learnings

We have been fortunate to have a passionate lead community agency (YES Unlimited) to work with, which is a big win. The agency works with us. We (the schools and the agency) have come together to create new expectations and practices for service delivery.

The willingness of both schools and agencies to communicate and to have 'hard conversations', when necessary, has enabled us to get where we are today. It has been a challenge, but we are in a good place now.

A key driver for our joint practice and desire to work together is that we are all working to the same goal - we all want to achieve better outcomes for your young people and the system and practices that were in place before the Albury Project were not working.

Different Roles

It took a while to define our respective roles.

As schools, we are in many ways the first responders, dealing with young people as they present with crisis issues and family issues. But as educators our core business is teaching and learning. Of course, we care about the students and want

to support them, but our business is not care and protection nor is it responding to crises. We also need to be clear that in-school welfare is limited in many ways to inside the school-gate — which is not where most young people need this type of support.

Clarifying our roles has involved articulated that community agencies and schools do things differently — down to basic understandings that agency workers and school workers have different awards, different roles, different rules — and this is not only okay, but in our case is now complimentary.

This clarity has enabled us to work together in a more integrated fashion to better meet the needs of young people and families.

Different Cultures

There are many differences between school and agency culture.

In schools we need to move fast. Kids in crisis need a quick response and our resources are limited. We do our best and to support students with complex needs, often beyond our capabilities, but specialist support is often needed. Sometimes, we can be overwhelmed dealing with multiple issues on a number of fronts.

Agencies however don't generally work at this pace. They take time to work with young people to unpack their issues and address their trauma. Also, workers in agencies are probably better at taking care of themselves and have good practices for specialist supervision and support for themselves (something that we in schools should learn to do more!).

However, it took time for each of us to understand the other's culture. The COSS Model governance structures, in particular the regular operational meetings, have been fundamental to making this work. These meetings have created a space for discussions, for sharing, and for working out issues and there is community representation from health and the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) that further helps the strategic planning for students in our care.

There has been progress as schools and agencies better understand each other's culture. We are now in a place of developing a new joint culture.

Better Responses for Our Young People

We love having the Albury Project staff working in our schools with our young people. They do things we can't do. They can work outside of the school-gate. A harsh reality is that some young people don't trust teachers. Sometimes young people don't want to work with teachers or school staff as there may have been issues with a teacher or a government department. We also need to face up to the limitations of our roles — we are educators, our hours are limited, we are not available during holiday periods. Our work conditions don't allow this flexibility. But through the Albury Project our schools are becoming well-being hubs – and we want this.

We have always wanted and needed to collaborate with external services but in the past, this has never been achieved sustainably and effectively in practice. Different departments just focus on their own issues, even if these issues are connected on some level. The Albury Project is the bridge that we needed to be able to work across departments, and between schools and agencies. The COSS Model means that we are doing in this in a consistent methodological way. It is the oil that makes the cogs work better.

As schools we have limitations to what we are supposed to do — our work is really limited to what we can achieve inside the school gate. Before the Albury Project, if we had an issue with a young person that required an 'outside of the school-gate' response,

we would make a referral to DCJ or some other agency. This was a slow process. Sometimes we wouldn't hear anything back.

TAP workers being based in the school — as part of the school — is crucial. This means that TAP workers are part of the schools' wellbeing teams. Our picture is now complete. We now have a seamless workforce with complimentary but different skills, roles, and abilities. We now have a workforce that can work both inside and outside the school-gate and with families and undertake roles and supports that are outside the purview of school staff.

Here are two case studies which illustrate what now happens:

Case Study 1

We had a young person who was suicidal. The young person went in an ambulance to the hospital for mental health support. There was family breakdown. The parent couldn't cope. The young person had multiple complex co-morbidities. The Albury Project worker accompanied and stayed with the young person to hospital and then supported the young person into appropriate accommodation upon discharge. TAP worker supported the family to work through their issues and successfully reconcile. In the end the young person was able to safely return home.

Without the Albury Project, a school worker would have needed to accompany the young person to hospital, even though we are not supposed to do that.

Through the Albury Project this young person and their parent received a seamless response.

Case Study 2

A young person with some family issues needed support to access a medical appointment. There was no family support.

As school staff we are not legally able to do this. Through TAP, the young person was able to access the medical support they needed.

Opportunities to Bring in more Partners

We would like to explore bringing DCJ 'care and protection' workers into our schools and the Albury Project. They are the workers who respond to mandatory notifications and often play a crucial role supporting families and students. Bringing them into the program has the potential to further improve communications and to better coordinate positive outcomes for students.

We also need a specialist mental health partner embedded with the Albury Project on a day-to-day basis. The increased demand on local mental health resources for youth has created long waiting lists for services. Being able to coordinate services again will result in better services by all concerned.

We know services are stretched, and resourcing is always an issue. There is also a cross-border issue. But we need to find a way to work past these issues. We need to build the mental health capacity and service options in the Albury Project. We need mental health outreach in our schools and more mental health group work with the young people identified through the COSS population screening process.

Conclusion

The Albury Project is a great example of how we, as a group, came together, thought differently, and then faced the challenge of acknowledging that the old way of doing things was not working well enough for our young people. We faced that challenge and though the COSS Model have begun to build something new. As one of us said while we were writing this article: *'this is the most important work that I have ever been a part of'*. We are succeeding. We are beginning to make a real difference. We don't ever want to go back to how it was before.