

Speech

17 October 2007

## Speech From ASG's Managing Director, Mr Terry O'Connell at the ASG Student Social and Emotional Report Launch

Thank-you Professor Rickards and thank-you ladies and gentlemen for coming to the launch of the ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report this evening.

The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) has commissioned and funded the ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report as part of our ongoing contribution to children's education.

The Australian Scholarships Group is a not-for-profit friendly society specialising in education benefits programs. Formed more than 30 years ago by a cooperative of parents wanting to provide education opportunities for their children. **Helping children fulfil their education potential** remains a driver for the organisation today.

Our mission in the broadest possible sense is to support children and families. To this end, we undertake a number of initiatives, including research, to raise awareness of education issues, and contribute to the fabric of Society.

ASG has for many years, been calling on families, governments, schools and the community to enable more children to fulfil their education potential because it believes that education provides a major foundation, it provides a means for children to pursue their dreams and prepares them for success in life.

Education enables children to fulfil their potential as human beings – the outcomes of unfulfilled potential are felt not only at the individual level but also the family, community and national level.

Education is at last on the agenda – particularly in the lead-up to the Federal Election, now thankfully called for November.

And we are being reminded that the unemployment rate is the lowest in over three decades, however the raw facts mask the grim reality that 60% of those still locked out of the workforce have education levels of Year 10 or lower – so how does this happen in a wealthy developed country like Australia?

We know that the schooling years are of critical importance to the development of our children but statistics show that there are large numbers of young people still not being fully engaged in education.

Young people who aren't learning or working experience more financial and personal stress and lower levels of participation and integration with the community. They are less satisfied with their lives, which is completely understandable.

Currently there are between 45,000 and 50,000 'early education exits' every year – young people not going into full-time work, full-time learning or a combination of work and study.

Furthermore, six months after leaving school, of the 46,000 in 2005 early school leavers, 45 percent of Year 11 leavers and 48 percent of Year 10 or below were either unemployed, not in the labour force or working part-time but not studying – this represented slightly more than 26% of the school leavers in that year.

This translated into 526,000 young Australians in May 2007 aged 15-24 not in full time work or study.

This is an unacceptable waste of human potential and it should be the number one issue to tackle for whichever party wins the upcoming Federal election.

Now, thanks to the ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report we have one of the most in-depth analyses of what makes our students 'tick'.

... More / Page 2

With more than 10,000 students surveyed across Australia spanning thirteen years of schooling, the Report makes a valuable contribution to the expansion of collective knowledge on the topic of student social and emotional health.

The Report reveals large percentages of students experiencing social and emotional difficulties. It also shows that as students move from primary to secondary schools, there is a decrease in their social and emotional health.

This fact - coupled with statistics on the numbers of early school leavers who are not moving into work or education - paints an alarming picture on the social and emotional state of young people in Australia.

**The ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report tells us:**

The importance of supporting not only students but the people who influence them – their educators, families and the community cannot be underestimated.

In 2005, Access Economics analysed the economic impact of increasing the retention of young people in education and training. It estimated that boosting the proportion of young people completing school or an apprenticeship to 90 percent by 2010 would increase workforce numbers by 65,000, boost economic productivity and expand the economy by more than \$9 billion by 2040.

One of the many benefits of the findings is that we know what a young person with strong social and emotional health looks like - and we have the knowledge and tools to put in place the support mechanisms needed to help those students lacking in this area.

Armed with this know-how, we can start to tackle the issues thereby vastly improving not only children's educational experiences, but their experiences across all facets of life.

The *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report* is the culmination of six years of development and research for the authors of the report, including international researcher Professor Michael E Bernard, and Andrew Stephanou and Daniel Urbach from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Professor Bernard, who I have had the pleasure of personally dealing with for over a decade now, has been teaching for more than 30 years and is the author of over 30 books as well as many research articles that focus on supporting the learning and social and emotional health of young people.

He continues to be an active researcher and, I believe, an important innovator in this very critical area. I congratulate ACER (The Australian Council of Educational Research) and the authors on the quality of the report and I am very pleased to officially launch the report (*ASG Student Social and Emotional Health*).

To take you through the findings, implications and recommendations outlined in the report I have much pleasure in inviting Professor Bernard to the podium.

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The complete *ASG Student Social and Emotional Health Report*, along with a number of additional resources, including summaries and images is available for download from ASG's website at: [www.asg.com.au/socialemotional](http://www.asg.com.au/socialemotional) or can be requested by telephoning ASG's Corporate Communications on 03 9276 7775.

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