

Monsignor David Cappelletti AO

ICAN Works

Northern Sound System, 73 Elizabeth Way, Elizabeth

16 September 2008

ICAN Works Launch

In attendance:

Premier, Mike Rann

Minister Paul Caica

Minister Jennifer Rankine

Minister Jane Lomax-Smith

Thank you it is a pleasure to be here with you today to launch the *ICAN Works* initiative.

Six years have passed since the Premier Mike Rann asked the Social Inclusion Board to consider the issue of school retention in South Australia. This was one of very first requests made of the Social Inclusion Board back in 2002.

Over the six years since then, we have put long held beliefs on how learning should be delivered to young people under the spotlight. By doing this we have been able to change the learning landscape for young people for the better.

Through the *Making the Connections* strategy we have been able to prove what works in making education meaningful to the most at risk young people, young people who previously would have fallen through the cracks in our education system. These are the young people whom at the end of the day end up in our unemployment lines, or at best caught in the cycle of low paid jobs that offer few opportunities.

By being able to demonstrate what works for young people through joined-up working, that we are here today to celebrate the launch of *ICAN Works*.

ICAN Works marks a new phase of what we call our joined-up work, the coming together of three of the most successful School Retention Action Plan initiatives: the Innovative Community Action Networks, the Alternative Learning Options Program, and the Assertive Management for Young People under the Guardianship of the Minister program.

All three programs have underpinned the success of the Social Inclusion Board's School Retention Action Plan. Critical to their success is having a young person centred focus that provides young people with the necessary support and flexibility to meet their individual learning needs. They have been at the forefront of demonstrating what works in reengaging young people who have dropped out of school early and keeping those young people most at risk of leaving school early connected to learning.

Central to *ICAN Works* is the Innovative Community Action Networks, commonly referred to as the ICANs. The ICAN concept was conceived on the simple premise that local communities have a good understanding of the issues facing their young people and have the most to gain in addressing these.

During early 2005 the ICANs were launched locally across 4 regions in South Australia. From the very beginning ICANs have maintained a focus on bringing together young people, families, schools, the community, businesses and different levels of Government to address local issues that prevent young people from completing their education. ICANs have functioned as mechanisms to nurture community innovation. They have fostered environments that have allowed the creation of innovative individually tailored responses specifically designed to meet young people's unique needs.

Since their inception the ICANs have gone from strength to strength. They have become one of the Social Inclusion Board's most significant and successful innovations, and have been a shining light in championing the importance of broad-based joined-up partnerships involving government, communities and business.

To date, over 6,000 young people across South Australia have participated in ICANs. Twelve months after the commencement of each program, over 82% of participants were either earning or learning after their ICAN involvement, the results are indicative of the program's ability to connect with young people.

I cannot overstate the value in young people completing 12 years of school or the equivalent. Most of you gathered here today would be all too aware how poorly young people with low educational outcomes fare over their life course. This is why it is so important to understand that a one size fits all approach to education simply hasn't worked in the past and will not work in the future.

This understanding is particularly important when addressing the needs of young people who are struggling with the mainstream school system.

In developing a broader approach to education the Social Inclusion Board wanted to see more young people actively participating in decision-making. For young people to be positive about their future and enthusiastic about where their learning might take them in life, it is clear that they need to be given a voice. It is also clear that this voice needs to be listened to and valued; this voice is critical to meeting the needs of young people on the margins of the education system.

From the very beginning of the school retention work, it was understood that many of the young people struggling with the education system had extremely complex lives. Many of these young people were burdened with issues that placed them at higher risk of early school drop out and poor educational outcomes. Issues which include things like poor emotional and mental wellbeing; family transience; homelessness; teenage pregnancy; family dysfunction/domestic violence; contact with the juvenile justice system; and, carer responsibilities just to name a few.

Fortunately the Innovative Community Action Networks, the Alternative Learning Options Program, and the Assertive Management for Young People under the Guardianship of the Minister program have demonstrated that it is possible to engage and maintain young people grappling with such issues in learning.

Since the Alternative Learning Option Program commenced in 2004 as one of the School Retention Action Plan pilots, it has managed to re-engage 2,700 young people who were struggling with the mainstream school system, through providing support to young people and choice in learning.

Similarly the Assertive Management program for young people under the Guardianship of the Minister has demonstrated positive outcomes can be achieved for the most disadvantaged of all students. By providing intensive support to this group of young people 'wrapping around' the necessary services, barriers to their learning have been overcome.

This program is making a real difference to young people's lives, young people who face some of the most significant of challenges, and improving their future opportunities.

What is noticeable about all three programs is that they have incorporated and promoted thinking outside of the square, adopting a 'whatever it takes' approach to ensure the educational success of young people. None of these programs could have employed the 'whatever it takes' approach and achieved the level of success without the commitment and enthusiasm of a whole range of other sectors. These include business, local councils, youth focused agencies including Service to Youth Council, Mission Australia, Boystown, Anglicare and many others stepping up to be actively involved.

The ongoing effort and commitment by all to the development of joined-up solutions in the community is to be commended.

The programs are contributing to wider community understanding and recognition that meaningful learning can occur within a wider context. Additionally, as I briefly touched upon before, they are contributing to real systems change to the benefit of all young people. The introduction of Flexible Learning Options (FLO) is an example of this system change. Similarly consideration to develop a Certificate of Applied Learning is encouraging news.

Through working in joined-up ways new doors and ways of working have and will continue to be discovered.

The *ICAN Works* marks a new and exciting phase of joined-up working. It will build on the achievements of the School Retention Action Plan. It will continue the 'whatever it takes spirit', challenging existing methods and developing new ones through thinking outside of the square.

I look forward to witnessing the continued improvement in outcomes for young people. Young people who would have otherwise been lost from learning and tied to a future life of disadvantage that all too often comes with this.

Thank you.