

# Rotary and the Community - Maryborough

## An edited transcript of an Interview with David Sutton, Principal of the Maryborough Education Centre.

**Chris de Fraga:** David Sutton, you're the Principal of the Maryborough Education Area. Is that correct?

**David Sutton:** Maryborough Education Centre.

**Chris de Fraga:** Centre. And as also the school Principal, what sort of plan did you come up with to work on family violence?

**David Sutton:** Well we don't deal specifically with family violence. We take a more general approach, one to what we call "Respectful Relationships". And also, we run a values program that explicitly teaches the social skills required for more effective relationships. Plus we also take the notion of restorative practises very seriously, and work at all times in a very calm, and measured approach when working with young people.

**Chris de Fraga:** And of course most of your work would be with young people, through the education system. Now did you have any staff members who also were involved with this?

**David Sutton:** Yes, well our leading teacher at the time in charge of engagement and wellbeing, Eva Julian, had the opportunity, through the Rotary Scholarship, to attend a conference in San Diego on school-wide positive behaviour support, which was a world conference. And as was mentioned earlier, it was looking at the world's best practice in developing appropriate cultures for schools around relationships.

**Chris de Fraga:** And what results have you seen from this so far?

**David Sutton:** Eva came back with a much deeper knowledge of School-wide Positive Behaviour<sup>1</sup>, and we've implemented it as part of our Values Program, which runs from Prep to 12, and in our specialist school as well. it's very explicit and consistent teaching of the social skills that some of our young people - arrive at school and don't necessarily fully understand. So in our Values Program, which runs for 20 minutes a day, we use an explicit approach where we teach the social skills, and model the skills across the school.

We have developed mantras, so if a child swears at school for example, the teachers are all trained to say, "Use your other words," rather than, "Stop swearing!" If a child is running in an area, we don't say, "Stop running!" we say, "Walking feet." So it's a consistent approach that doesn't come from that negative viewpoint that perhaps, when we were at school, teachers could be aggressive and may have used sarcasm or raised voices. Part of the School-wide Positive Behaviours is that that is really not acceptable at Maryborough Education Centre.

**Chris de Fraga:** Are you saying things are changing already?

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**David Sutton:** Oh, there has been significant change. The culture of the school has completely turned around, and that's been through the work of the staff, led by Eva. That has been the most significant change because *the staff set the culture*. And if the staff are behaving in a way that is contradictory to the message, that really undermines everything. So, through the School-wide Positive Behaviours the staff are acting in a certain way that is always modelling to the students how you treat one another.

**Chris de Fraga:** Sounds like it has been a very positive effect.

**David Sutton:** It's been hugely successful for us.

**Chris de Fraga:** And it means that the school is a more pleasant place to be.

**David Sutton:** Yes, most definitely.

**Chris de Fraga:** Now when Rotary came to you, there were some changes that were being implemented. Can you tell us about the sort of changes that you instituted, which produced this effect?

**David Sutton:** Yes. Well, we were having a meeting in the initial stages of the project that I was invited along to, and we were looking at some posters that had been drafted up for, which was going to be the central part of the program.

The posters were traditional in nature, and I think the slogan was something like, "Smash the silence on family violence," and it had a picture of a broken window. To me that seemed an incongruous message where we were trying to address violence and stop violence, but using a very violent message. It was almost saying we will stop violence with violence. And through the school-wide positive behaviours and our understandings that we've developed, I just felt it would be far more effective to use a calmer and gentler, but albeit very honest, approach, but I didn't think using the image of a smashed window and words like, "Smashed," to address family violence would be effective. In fact, it could possibly be counterproductive.

**Chris de Fraga:** And how did Rotary become involved?

**David Sutton:** Well Rotary are the initiators of this initiative.

We have a very effective program in Central Goldfields Shire called "Go Goldfields", which is using the Collective Impact Framework<sup>2</sup> to address a range of issues that this community faces. One of those issues is family violence. So the Rotary project, I think, grew from that work, but far more organic in that it grew from a community group wanting to make a difference.

Rotary showed a tremendous amount of courage, I think, in stepping into a field that

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a service club would not normally step into. It did take a lot of courage, but I think it could do so safely because the Rotary Club was so connected to the Shire, and to the Go Goldfields program.

Family violence and male violence is normally, I guess, tackled by people who have a strong theoretical and academic understanding because it's such a sensitive issue. Yet Rotary are to be commended for stepping into that, but doing so not in a gung-ho, "We're gonna fix it all" fashion, but doing it in a very measured fashion, working with the Go Goldfields group, and being guided by them. Because just to step off the cliff as a Rotary group, there would be some risk involved. But the way that the Maryborough Rotary Club has done it has been particularly successful because it's worked as part of a wider community response.

**Chris de Fraga:** Well, thank you very much.

References : please see <http://www.ragfamsafe.org/rotary-club-of-maryborough/> for links to the articles cited below.

### 1 School-wide Positive Behaviour

Sprague and Horner School-Wide-Positive-Behavioral-Supports

Horner and Sugai School Wide Positive Support

Feinstein School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports on JSTOR

### 2 Collective Impact Framework

Making Collective Impact Work Stanford 2012

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**Note: Chris de Fraga is a professional journalist, a member of the Rotary Club of Balwyn, District 9800, and responsible for Communications and Newsletters for the Rotarian Action Group for Family Safety (in formation) see: [www.ragfamsafe.org](http://www.ragfamsafe.org)**

## Links to more information

Rotary Club of Maryborough website <http://rotarymaryboroughvic.org/>

To contact interviewees after watching the videos, please contact PP Garry Higgins at [pvb1@westnet.com.au](mailto:pvb1@westnet.com.au)