

PACCS - ADC 2006

WORKSHOP REPORT - HEALTH MATTERS FOR TEENAGERS

Facilitator – Kate Fahey

Rapporteur – Margaret Moore

Kate started the workshop by getting all participants to do some relaxation exercises which were enjoyed by all.

We were then divided into three groups and each group had to discuss two topics which were:-

1. What health issues are relevant to teenagers?
2. What health issues are addressed in Secondary School?

Each group had 10 minutes discussing the above topics after which we all rejoined the workshop and Kate led a general discussion with each group reporting back.

Once again we split into the same three groups and discussed:-

1. What can you as parents do to maintain/improve the health of you teenager.

After approximately 10 minutes we once again rejoined the workshop and had a very interesting discussion during which we all participated and learned from each other.

The workshop finished with Kate asking each parent to give a positive comment about our teenage children which everyone agreed was a very nice way to finish off the workshop.

All participants agreed that it was a very worthwhile workshop to do.

Margaret Moore.
March, 2006.

WORKSHOP REPORT – PARENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS IN THE FUTURE

Facilitator - Priscilla Fitzpatrick

Rapporteur - Sean Staunton

Introduction:

This was an excellent, well facilitated and very participative workshop which explored the role of parents associations, their current position as stakeholders in the educational system and what is required to enhance their role in the future. The facilitator, who displayed an in-depth knowledge of the education sector, provided appropriate input and guidance which assisted the learning outcomes of all who participated.

Do we really need Parent Associations?

In small groups participants explored the need for parent associations in any event. The scenario was presented that it would be better for parents to deal with the school on an individual basis; associations had little connection with parents; parents were unaware that they were being represented and often representatives of the parents were unclear about their responsibilities and in any event it was a personal view expressed.

Feedback from this initial exercise suggested that the general consensus was that there was a need for such parent associations. The need for a structure at school level leading up to national level was considered important to input to policy as a coherent group. However, it was acknowledged that the current system is not ideal. A range of issues were identified, for example, parents associations were not listened to and the role played by the key dominant stakeholders. It was felt that the roles of parents associations need to be developed and enhanced. It was essentially time for rejuvenate and modernisation.

Barriers:

The group went on to consider the barriers experienced by parents associations which prevented them from becoming effective organisations. These included:

- *Lack of Knowledge* – the educational system is complex, parents do not have full knowledge of the legislation and policies in place. Often parents lack education and both of these factors lead to a lack of confidence and the inability to articulate their views in a convincing manner.
- *Power and Control* – Parents have a sense that they are at the bottom of the ladder, “the poor cousin” in the partnership. There is little consultation and a sense that parents are not involved in policy making in an appropriate manner. Information flows between Boards of Management and associations are poor with some parent representatives feeling that they have “observer status” only on such boards.

- *Conflict* – Parents are worried about the fear of repercussions on their children if they take up issues with their schools

Overcoming the Barriers:

The group next considered what needs to be done to overcome the issues and barriers noted earlier in the workshop. A number of areas for improvement were identified.

- *Communication* – Communication flows were considered imperative to improving the role and contribution of parent associations. Communication flows need to improve, it was considered that there was a lot of upward feedback but this was not reciprocated from the boards of management. Parents feel that there needs to be better reports from the board through the parent representatives. We also need to improve information flows to our members and some of the current methods were identified including; information evenings, newsletters and social events. Very importantly, we need to encourage and improve upward feedback from the parents in the schools. Some suggestions as to how that might be improved include – a web site, testing, use of local radio and the employment of a company that provides such a service.

With regard to communication it was acknowledged that there was also a need for care and diplomacy. The matter of relationships (with the teachers and school management) versus the legislation and rights of parents needs to be managed. The relationship at local level is very important. Trust must exist between BOM, principle and parent associations.

- *Information* – Parents need to know their rights and understand the basic principles of law, from their role as outlined in the Constitution (as the primary educators of their children) to the rights contained within the Education Acts. A synopsis of the Education Act was circulated by the Facilitator and is considered essential reading for all parents.
- *Structures* – The lack of planning input by parent associations was noted. As identified previously there was a need for parents to be more involved in the consultative process so they would have an opportunity to input on the various policy issues pertaining to the school and education.

This could be achieved by better sub structures at committee level. Parent Associations were encouraged to form sub committees to look at specific policy issues.

Membership of the associations was discussed. Currently, all parents and guardians are automatically members of their respective associations. Would it make for better associations if individual membership was sought? Is it feasible, legal, etc? These are all matters that would require teasing out.

- *Resources* – There is a range of methods by which parent associations fund their activities. These range from purely fundraising to a more systematic system whereby a small fee is levied on each parent and collected very often

through the school system. It is essentially an “ad hoc” system and needs work.

Conclusion:

Overall, it was felt that parents need assistance to develop their associations so that they become “real partners” in education. As one member of the group aptly summarised it – We need “support without interference”

Sean Staunton
March, 2006