

Report of 24th Annual PACCS Conference held in Racket Hall on 7th & 8th March, 2008.

Theme: 'Parents Wanted?'

Tommy Walshe, President opened Conference and Introduced Brian Hayes, T.D., Fine Gael Education Spokesperson

He thanked PACCS for inviting him to open the Conference and said this is an interesting time in Education. The voice of parents is demanding to be heard and if we are to have this voice articulated it is time for national parents to work together and it is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science to give the financial assistance to do this.

He referred to the League Tables. Parents can cope with this information as in his opinion these were here to stay but there is a need to put all the information regarding a school in and not just how many students from a particular school entered 3rd Level. As long as we have artificial League Tables we will never be able to help parents. We need to know all aspects of what is going on in the school in music, sport etc.

He went on to speak about the problems parents were encountering in the area of special needs and how the key promises on reducing class sizes have been reneged on and we are now going into the situation where a cut will be put on the educational spend. The Summer Work scheme has been abolished for this year and this is something we must not accept. What we are getting is not a huge percentage of the national cake and we are spending the same percentage as we did 20 years ago. We are spending far less than other E.U. countries. Education needs to get a better percentage of the national pie.

He then addressed conference on Alcohol and its related problems. The country is in denial on this. There is a dramatic increase in consumption right across the strata of society. Every week-end 70/80% of admissions to casualty are alcohol related. We are paying a high price for this drink culture and now it is out of control.

We have the highest level of binge drinkers and this in turn is leading to cancer, alcoholism and liver disease.

At the moment 40% of Road deaths, 30% of all accidents and we are currently spending 6 billion of personal income which is €2,000 per year for every person over 15 years old.

Politicians must show leadership and nothing short of a total ban on alcohol advertising is needed if we are to turn the tide. €5m in terms of advertising and promotion is the current figure.

Vast sums are being made from advertising and the fact is that sporting bodies while promoting a healthy lifestyle have to go to the drinks industry for their advertising.

He referred to a Press Release which he was making on this issue and said he hoped his party will take a similar position on the devastating affect drink is having on the country. He concluded by saying we can make a positive start on changing attitudes and something has to be done and a good start would be the banning of drinks advertising.

Steve Thomas, Steer Clear then addressed Conference. He outlined the content of this course which is being offered to TY students and the value of such a course. If we reflect on the fact that over a period of one week-end seven people under the age of 21 were killed on our roads, we realise that something has to be done. Our young people are going to drive but if they have all the facts they are more likely to be more responsible. He informed the Conference that the cost of this course will be refunded to the young person when they take out their first insurance providing they complete the course.

The minutes of Conference 2007 were then read by Connie Carolan. They were proposed for adoption by Margaret Molloy and seconded by David Medbury.

John Murphy, Auditor gave a breakdown on the Financial Report after which it was proposed for adoption by Carole Trodden and seconded by Maria Hanley.

Carole Trodden gave the PRO report and reported on meetings which had been held throughout the year with the educational partners. She also referred to special needs, maintenance of school halls, fundraising and the difficulty in getting parents involved in local school parents' associations.

Connie then gave the Secretary's report outlining the work of the Executive during the past year. The importance of having Regions which work well and meet regularly was stressed. The problems which parents encounter regarding suspensions and expulsions were also noted.

Standing Orders were proposed for adoption by Tommy Walshe and seconded by Grace Mooney. The Standing Orders committee were Humphrey O'Riordan, Mary Murtagh and Pat Herlihy, all of whom are past presidents of PACCS. Tellers – Kay Herlihy and John Murphy.

Roll Call and motions followed.

Only one motion was taken at this time which was carried successfully.

This concluded the Friday evening session. A buffet followed.

Tommy Walshe opened the Saturday morning session by welcoming everyone to Conference and introduced Kevin Duffy, Principal, Moate Community who performed the official opening.

He said it was a pleasure to speak to parents and what an honour it was for his school parents' association to have as its chairperson the President of PACCS. He said Tommy

has worked tirelessly on behalf of the parents association in Moate. He went on to say that he has always promoted parents as the primary educators of their children. The school caters for a total of 1070 students. There are 700 following the post primary curriculum and 370 in post leaving courses.

He outlined his teaching career to date and the many changes that have taken place over this time. He spoke of the school's involvement in GAA and musicals and said any successes are down to the parent body. He has always used parents (if use is the correct word) not with suspicion but as an asset and arising out of his experience he would view parents as the stakeholders in schools. Regrettably this resource has remained untapped and undervalued.

He also spoke of the pressures on students to perform, positive behaviour, fundraising, rearing and educating our children, the interest shown by parents and that they have a far greater influence than they realise.

In conclusion he offered one piece of advice and that is to always kiss your children
Good Night.

He then introduced our Keynote Speaker – John Lonergan, Governor of Mountjoy Prison.

He opened his address by saying it was a pleasure to be in Tipperary and have the benefit of the whole air.

He addressed conference on the different stages of parenting with the final stage being pay back time but he said that after 30 years he is still waiting for this and is still waiting for the cheque in the post.

Individuals are all different and everyone is special. We are into an era where perception is everything. Perhaps parents are at fault here rather than the child. Everyone is unique. Formal education is only a tiny part and life is the real education. While academic is important it is not the be all and end all and we must always go back to the person. We would all be perfect parents when our children are reared but we cannot go back and we will have left an impression whether for good or bad.

Health is the most important thing when we think of our children and there is no worse news a parent can get from a doctor than that the news is not good about a child's health.

He then went on to say that mothers are the real heroes in all of this. The mother and the grandmother who continues to visit their sons and daughters in prison do not get the recognition that they deserve. It is easy to be there for your children when they are being a success but it is in the difficult times that this role is tough.

Mothers, he stated, are special and in Dublin a mother can hear their children get in to a taxi in O'Connell Street after a night out and also when they arrive home and put the key in the lock. That is what care is and that is what love is and while teenagers may not

show it they do appreciate it that someone cares. The worst thing for a child must be that no one cares.

On expectations, he said we must stop planning our child's future. We do not own our child's life and the gift is to be able to nurture the child. He referred to the late Christina Murphy and her very valuable talks. A student must always study at least one subject they enjoy – it can make an otherwise difficult day bearable.

He paid particular tribute to the teachers who discover a particular talent a student may have and nurture this talent before, even the child or the parents may be aware of this talent. The influence such a person can have on a child can be immeasurable.

Happiness – Now we must try to make sure children are happy and contented but with the best intentions this can be disastrous. Always read to your children and make up stories. This will give them the gift of a love of reading. The simple things – he quoted a story of what a little child had found the most enjoyable in her day and it was holding the parent's hand on her way to school.

Do not be negative about your child's performance in school – praise their achievements and keep your expectations to match your child's ability and only measure your child against reality.

As parents we must strive to nurture and guide and treasure our kids and be there for them.

He illustrated his address with anecdotes from his own family which were both illuminating and amusing.

President's Address: Tommy Walshe opened his address by asking the delegates to remember back to when their first child was born, so small, so delicate and so precious and when you brought home this precious bundle the necessities which were required like the locks for the presses, the fireguard and of course the play pen. Time goes on and they go to school and who was most upset, the mammy or the child. Then we start to look at the educational system and try to make things better. To do this we will give up our time and our week-ends. We still worry about our children and want them to be the best they can.

He concluded by saying that PACCS are absolutely delighted to have everyone present and we hope to get a chance to speak to everyone. He went on to say that PACCS had a very strong team who work extremely hard in the areas of Special Needs, Transport and Catchment Areas. He then called on Grace Mooney to launch the Special Needs Leaflet.

Special Needs: Grace Mooney, Vice President launched this leaflet at Conference. The idea came out of a workshop which had been given by members of our executive at last year's conference. The Citizens Information Board had funded this project and this enabled PACCS to produce it. While the information is relevant at time of going to print, it is changing all the time. Grace went on to say that this was something she was very

proud of and she thanked the rest of the executive for their assistance in proof reading etc.

There followed the first session of workshops:

Internet/BEBO – Margie O’Riordan

What’s the Points – Tom Farrell and Patricia Quigley

Parents leading change – Sean McCann.

Lunch followed after which the morning workshops were repeated.

After coffee break Conference was addressed by Humphrey O’Riordan, President of NPCpp.

Humphrey opened his address by explaining that NPCpp was a totally different organisation which is comprised of 5 constituent bodies and they are PACCS, NPAVSCC, FEDCBS, CSPA and COMPASS and all are under the umbrella body of NPCpp who do their best to further parents’ views.

They are represented on many bodies – Marion Lyon who is on NCCA which is working to improve the syllabus has represented the Council well during the year. We are also represented on the Teaching Council, Children’s Rights Alliance and many more doing what we can with the resources available.

The Examination Helpline is another area where NPCpp is there for the parents as of the 3,703 queries which had come in 60% of these last year came from parents whose children are working away during the Summer and at the time of the examination results. NPCpp get financial help from Independent Newspapers, Eircom and DES. Qualifax is used for the information.

Last year at the Annual Delegate Conference in Tullamore, PACCS had twenty delegates there. Each body is entitled to have that number present.

PACCS submitted motions to this conference – all of which were carried.

1. That where NPCpp is requested to send members to meetings, they should come from the area in which the meeting is held.
2. That each constituent body would receive a grant of €7,500
3. That all officers would have a child in the system at the time of election
4. Department of Education and Science would supply class sets of books.

Last year a Strategic Review was carried out to figure out how to achieve the best results from the Council. This had come from a motion of 2001. But we are a voluntary body and we have a way to go and we need to be properly funded to go forward. However, we are hopeful of achieving extra funding.

There are big changes in the education system and a further body is now emerging and this is Educate Together.

We are working on many issues at present and we need to be working with all the education Partners in the system. There are schools with problems and the summer work scheme has been abolished for this year, the integration of special needs students needs to be properly resourced. Parents need to hear that they are being valued and must never forget that they are the number one educator and we need also to support our teachers in every way.

The following Executive was ratified for 2008/2009:

Dublin: Liz Quigley – Ballinteer
Grace Mooney – Palmerstown
Teresa McSweeney – Rosmini
David Medbury – St. Colmcille’s, Knocklyon
2 to be advised

Mid West: Catherine Sides – Gort
Ann Leamy – Cashel
Tommy Walshe – Moate

West: Breda Hanley – Castlereagh

South East: Margaret Molloy – Gorey

North East: Carole Trodden – Ashbourne
Margaret Moore – Ashbourne

North West: To be advised

Southern: Antoinette Moynihan – Rathmore
Humphrey O’Riordan – Millstreet
Maria Hanley – Ballincollig
Marie Buckley – Ballincollig

Nominations for president were then called for. Tommy Walshe was proposed by Teresa McSweeney and seconded by David Medbury and since there were no further nominations and Tommy was willing to go forward he was re-elected for the coming year.

He thanked conference for electing him and said he hoped to get out to more of the schools in the coming year. The main thing is to get the information out there to parents.

The rest of the motions were then taken after a roll call and election of tellers. John Murphy and Kay Herlihy would continue in this role. Standing orders had been adopted on the previous evening and the standing orders committee remained in place.

There were 14 further motions with one emergency motion which had been submitted too late for inclusion in the Handbook. All were carried with an amendment to one.

The conference then moved on to Open Forum. The following Panel took questions from the floor:- Patricia Wroe, A.S.T.I., Annette Dolan, T.U.I., Patricia Quigley, Tipperary Inst., Aidan Farrell, State Examinations Commission, Marion Lyon, NCCA and Ciaran Flynn, ACCS. The Chairman was Sean McCann.

The President, Tommy Walshe thanked everyone for their attendance and input into the Conference and Connie Carolan closed conference.

Dinner was served and PACCS were joined by their Guests. This was followed by music and dancing in the Hotel.