

# The Galilee Day Program

## Alternative education and training strategies for young people in substitute care

Robert Long

*Comprehensive research undertaken in 1995 and 1997 clearly establishes the educational needs of at-risk young people. Research by Webber and Hayduk (Leaving School Early) and Brooks et al (NYARS report Under-age School Leaving) establishes indicators contributing to under-age school leaving which are discussed in relation to the responsibility of schools in meeting the needs of at-risk students. Without revisiting the tenets of the deschooling movement which have been canvassed in detail in the pages of many books and education journals, the discussion explores the validity of alternative models to mainstream schooling. The paper assumes a certain inability of schooling to meet the needs of at-risk student; indeed it could be argued that the purpose of schooling generates and selects at-risk students. In a schooling culture which propagates the ideology of integration, the paper suggests the validity of an alternative and exclusion-based model of education. One such model has been established in 1997 in the Australian Capital Territory and this alternative education program is evaluated.*

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During 1995 a comprehensive research project was undertaken by Galilee Inc. on early school leavers, aged 13-16, in the ACT. The research encompassed both service deliverers and young people. All agencies providing education services for the target group were included. An extensive review of Australian literature was undertaken, including a wide spectrum of alternative education programs. The research was analysed, and subsequently the *Leaving School Early Report* (Webber & Hayduk, 1995) was published and launched by the ACT Minister for Education in 1996.

The *Leaving School Early Report* focussed on the education needs of homeless young people, including those in substitute care. One of the Report findings was in regard to the nexus existing between homelessness and leaving school early. Subsequently, Galilee won a tender to provide an alternative education program for young people aged 13-16 in substitute care not attending school. The Galilee Day Program, funded by the ACT Department of Education & Training and Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau (ACT DET), commenced in 1997. The Day Program attempts to put into practice many of the principles forthcoming from the preceding research.

This area of service delivery is not well charted within Australia; it is literally at the *cutting edge*. This paper shares findings from research in the area of educating youth who are in substitute

care and offers an analysis of practice in implementing the Galilee Day Program.

### RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

The recent National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) report, *Under-age School Leaving* (Brooks et al 1997, pp. 13-21), establishes numerous factors as contributing to under-age school leaving. These are:

- continual experiences of academic failure;
- inflexible curriculum and teaching strategies;
- alienating school environments;
- family conflict and breakdown;
- low self-esteem;
- poor student/teacher relationships;
- disinterest in education; and
- disruptive behaviour.

The research of Webber and Hayduk (1995, pp. 115-140) determined that the following contribute significantly to the problem of under-age school leaving:

- homelessness (and unstable home environment);
- poor parenting;
- family conflict;
- poverty;
- inadequate behaviour management;
- the devaluing of education;
- student behaviour;
- substance abuse;
- low self-esteem; and

- educational structures, curriculum, procedures and staffing.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the emphasis here seems to let schools and the profession of teaching off lightly. Whilst it is not the direct purpose of this paper to address the recommendations of these reports, it is worth noting that Webber and Hayduk (1995, p. 135) place some responsibility on the education system for the problem. The central recommendations are that:

- principals and teachers undertake training in youth issues, particularly topics relevant to students 'at-risk'<sup>1</sup>. Such training ought to be an integral part of pre-service teacher education;
- schools be encouraged to foster positive, accepting and supportive environments for students 'at-risk', including the development of teams in schools to address the problem;
- school welfare teams develop and foster links with community groups and support agencies for basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, financial support, counselling, health care, financial and legal needs;
- early intervention and prevention strategies for 'at-risk' students be a recognised priority for funding to schools. This includes strategies to be implemented from early school years, including procedures for identification, assessment, provision of in-school support and the adoption of a case management approach;
- schools utilise data collected on 'at-risk' students more effectively, particularly the provision of truancy prevention programs;
- alternative education programs be established to compensate for the inadequacies of the education system in meeting the needs of 'at-risk' students.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1996, p. 16) report that most welfare infrastructure in schools is inadequate. They recommend that schools become sites for early intervention. However, scholars such as Illich (1970), Freire

(1972), Macklin (1976), Apple (1982, pp. 1-37), Middleton (1982, pp. 2-6), Meighan (1986, pp.142-62, 235-9), Handy and Aitken (1986, p.77), Preston and Symes (1992, p. 34ff) and Jamrozik and Sweeney (1996, pp. 34-52) have argued for some time and with convincing evidence that schools are agents of social reproduction, that is, schools by their structure and function generate and maintain discourses of inequity.

It is with the aforementioned research in mind that the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) sought to found an alternative education program in the ACT for young people in substitute care. Whilst the ACT school system has several alternative structures to accommodate 'at-risk' students, they only take students for a relatively short time and are oriented towards a schooling paradigm. The development of the Galilee Day Program was the first program in the ACT to intentionally target 'at-risk' young people in substitute care as a group.

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## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Brooks et al (1997, p. vii) list six intervention models which categorise common initiatives in addressing the needs of 'at-risk' young people in schools. These are:

- community-based partial withdrawal – students are withdrawn from mainstream school on a part-time or temporary basis to a project operating

in a community setting, with the aim of eventually reintegrating students back into mainstream schools (32% of sample);

- school-based partial withdrawal – students are withdrawn from normal classes to participate in an alternative program operating within the school. The initiative may operate as a full-time or part-time annex within a school or as a 'time-out' program parallel to normal classes (23% of sample);
- community school – comprehensive education and support program operating as an alternative to mainstream school. Participants are usually not expected to return to mainstream school (18% of sample);
- outreach services – provision of specialist support services to a number of schools within a particular geographical area (12% of sample);
- integrated whole school – a whole school approach to target 'at-risk' students within the school community through innovative curriculum and welfare measures (12% of sample);
- event-based – focus on one particular intensive activity, such as a wilderness excursion or cultural camp (3% of sample).

The Galilee Day Program most closely resembles the 'community school' model but has a more flexible approach to mainstream pathways, including possible return to school programs. Whilst it has been a common trend in the education community since the 1970s to favour 'inclusion' as the best way to deal with problems in schools, the establishment of the Galilee Day Program runs counter to this. Contemporary special educational researchers and experts outside of schools espouse the notions of collaboration, integration and 'a non-categorical approach' in pedagogy with special needs students. The non-categorical approach, or 'Inclusion Movement' as it has become known, is convinced that all children can learn given effective instruction and that it is more just and productive to have all children in the school system. Whilst educators admit that labelling is generally destructive to the needs of children, there are several factors which work against the implementation of the ideal in education regardless of what is

<sup>1</sup> The term 'at-risk' refers to young people at risk of homelessness and under-age school leaving.

believed about good education (Marginson, 1993, pp. 55ff). The cost of lower class sizes, support staff, extra professional development and alterations in curriculum design inhibit the implementation of educative measures in schools with special needs students. In such cases it is easier to resort to simplistic teaching methods and curriculum designs which are more controlling and cost effective but less educative. Long (1996, p. 119) invites us not to be bound by the ideology of the Inclusion Movement but to be open to alternative and segregated models:

It sounds innovative. It sounds democratic. But this is not a perfect world. Screws drop out; things go wrong; promises are not fulfilled. Budgets are cut, and good intentions end up as empty promises. The Inclusion Movement is an innovative and exciting idea to be explored; it should not be a cult to be followed.

The establishment of alternatives external to the school system is important for students 'at-risk' because the young people themselves believe that the system has failed them, it offers them no solutions (Webber & Hayduk, 1995, p. 113). Young people who are trapped in cycles of failure and self-fulfilling prophecies must be offered a new environment where they can believe that they can change their own future (Stacher, 1995, p. 1). Cumming (1997, p. 13, 16), in agreement with accepted psychological analysis, recognises that alienation is a common trait of the adolescent years. Hill's research (Cumming, 1997, p. 13) indicates that students in schools make the least progress with learning in years 5-9, what Cumming calls 'the alien years'. Cumming argues that schools need to reinvent themselves making reference to some innovative projects such as the concept of 'full-service schools'. Cumming (p. 16) argues that current school structures and curriculum construction 'acts as another impediment to reform'.

Pittman (1996, p. 5) explains:

Anyone who has worked intensely on any discrete youth problem (eg., teen pregnancy) learns quickly that the problem is intertwined with education, with opportunity structures, with family connection and support, and with a

range of developmental issues which cannot be ignored if any intervention is to be successful. Rather than applying our understanding of human motivation, however, we have taken a complex process, divided it into small units, developed programs to address the discrete parts, and then reacted with surprise when there is little overall improvement. Two things happen when we focus too heavily on a single problem. We weaken the possibilities of both documenting impact (by tracking only a narrow set of outcomes) and having impact (by focusing too narrowly on a specific set of inputs). Many programs argue that they are comprehensive in approach and broad in services; all should be evaluated against some basic outcomes that reflect the full set of competencies and connections desired.

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Pittman (1996) suggests the following youth outcomes which broaden academic competence to cognitive or intellectual competence and also include vocational skills, career knowledge and attitudes, physical and emotional health, civic, social and cultural competence:

- confidence;
- having a sense of safety and structure;
- membership and belonging;
- self-worth;
- mastery and future;
- responsibility and autonomy;
- spirituality and self-awareness;
- aspects of identity;
- competent;
- having ability and motivation;

- social, emotional, physical and cultural health;
- intellectuality;
- employability.

The problem is that there has not been any national strategy (Brooks et al, 1997, p. vi) to establish developmental benchmarks or to define the steps needed to acquire a range of competencies for 'at-risk' youth. The *Under-age School Leaving Report* (Brooks et al, 1997, p. 77) makes a significant contribution towards establishing such a set of benchmarks by setting out factors linked to success with 'at-risk' youth. The Report targets nine common strategies used by initiatives for 'at-risk' youth:

- provide activities to increase social skills;
- identify and monitor students at-risk;
- provide activities targeted at increasing self-esteem;
- provide counselling to participants;
- strengthen home/school relations;
- provide activities to increase literacy and numeracy skills;
- establish interagency links (with government and community organisations);
- develop appropriate teaching methodologies/provide a flexible and alternative curriculum and;
- provide professional development for staff.

Success for these initiatives was evaluated in the Report by the following outcomes:

- improved participation and acceptance;
- completion of compulsory education;
- increase in self-esteem;
- decrease in disruptive behaviour;
- personal development;
- increase in literacy and numeracy skills;
- decrease in suspensions/exclusions/expulsions;
- improved academic performance of participants;
- improvement in teacher student relations;
- improvement in school structures;

- increased skills of teachers and other school staff;
- improvements in student/parent relationship;
- strengthened home/school relations.

The Report also lists factors affecting the effectiveness of the initiatives:

- a caring and supportive holistic approach to student welfare;
- ability and dedication of initiative staff;
- flexibility in responding to the individual needs of students;
- focus on individual success and development;
- low student/staff ratio;
- encouraging individual responsibility;
- parent involvement;
- professional development of staff;
- removal from the school environment for a period of time.

With these factors in mind it is pertinent to explore the establishment of the Galilee Day Program in the ACT.

### **THE GALILEE DAY PROGRAM A CASE STUDY**

Galilee Inc. is a community-based non-denominational Christian organisation which provides programs for disadvantaged young people. Galilee is divided into three operational directions: Family Placement Scheme commenced in 1987; the LIFT Project (prevocation and peer leadership/education for young adults) commenced in 1990; and the Day Program which commenced in 1997. The Day Program is located at LIONS Youth Haven, a 70 hectare property in the Tuggeranong Valley south of Canberra. The resources at Youth Haven enable participants in the Day Program to experience a diversity of horticultural, agricultural, vocational and educational endeavours.

### **VISION**

The Galilee Day Program (GDP) is an alternative, education-based program for students in substitute care between the ages of 13 and 16 years, previously excluded from the school system. The Program aims to enable participants to have access to learning opportunities and to maintain progress through to acceptance in a mainstream educational

environment, vocation and/or independent living.

### **AIMS**

The Galilee Day Program seeks to assist the development of young people in four key areas:

- help young people develop an enthusiasm for life long learning;
- assist young people to adapt to mainstream educational approaches to learning;
- provide skills and vocational experiences which will assist participants in future employment;
- facilitate reintegration to mainstream settings.

### **MISSION**

The Program endeavours to maximise the educational potential of participants by providing:

- a safe climate for learning;
- a non-coercive pedagogy;
- opportunities for personal development;
- vocational skills;
- independent learning programs which combine case management and learning opportunities;
- social education;
- scholastic learning opportunities;
- individualised, holistic and accredited programs.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS**

GDP is part of a charity which is ecumenical and Christian. The philosophical perspective of the the Day Program is eclectic with its roots in critical theory, pragmatic realism and radical Christianity. It is not the purpose of this discussion to fully explore this philosophical perspective which is well documented elsewhere (Long, 1986; 1996) but to simply flag some of the ideas which underpin its development. The educational anthropology of the Program has a focus on the Christian notion of maturity, that is, that persons are matured teleologically. The telos, or end point, is the goal of 'Christlikeness' (Christ as the ideal of the educated human). The outworking of this perspective places an emphasis on the

following guiding concepts: love; relationships; hope; justice; humanisation; community; understanding; spirituality; respect.

The Christian foundation of the Program is not emphasised out of respect for participants, a consciousness of the nature of indoctrination and a knowledge of the effectiveness of indirect/informal methods in pedagogy.

The key to working with and achieving sound results with young people as a youth worker or a teacher is engagement. The informal environment of working together on a project or task is often the best way to get to know a young person, learn about them and endeavour to meet their needs. In the Day Program, workers are always directed at the young person's holistic needs – psychosocial and educational. Engagement is about that space where togetherness in something is achieved. For example, I can cook with a young person and not engage them even though the meal might be brilliant, in most cases the meal will be 'mine' not 'ours' or 'theirs'. It is more important for a young person to be engaged in cooking than to achieve some culinary delight.

As an indicator the philosophy of the Program is informed by scholars W. E. Andersen, B. V. Hill, J. C. Walker, R. Banks, J. Ellul and J. Moltmann.

### **ORGANISATION**

The Day Program operates weekdays from 9am to 3pm including school holidays. During school holiday periods the Program adopts a more recreational structure.

### **TIMETABLING**

The Galilee Day Program is structured using:

- a flexible timetable which lists a key learning focus for the day and routines;
- an individual learning area record which keeps stock of where and what each participant is learning;
- an organisational diary which lists tasks;
- an organisational diary which lists shopping and appointments in the near future;

- a daily timetable which takes into account the changing nature of the Day Program and its clients.

These are all managed on separate whiteboards which are clearly visible in the meeting and work room.

### REFERRAL AND ADMISSION

Young people who are 13-16 years of age, not in school and in substitute care, are referred to the Program by substitute care agencies and the Bureau of Family Services. Participants are admitted after an interview process if the numbers and Program dynamics allow.

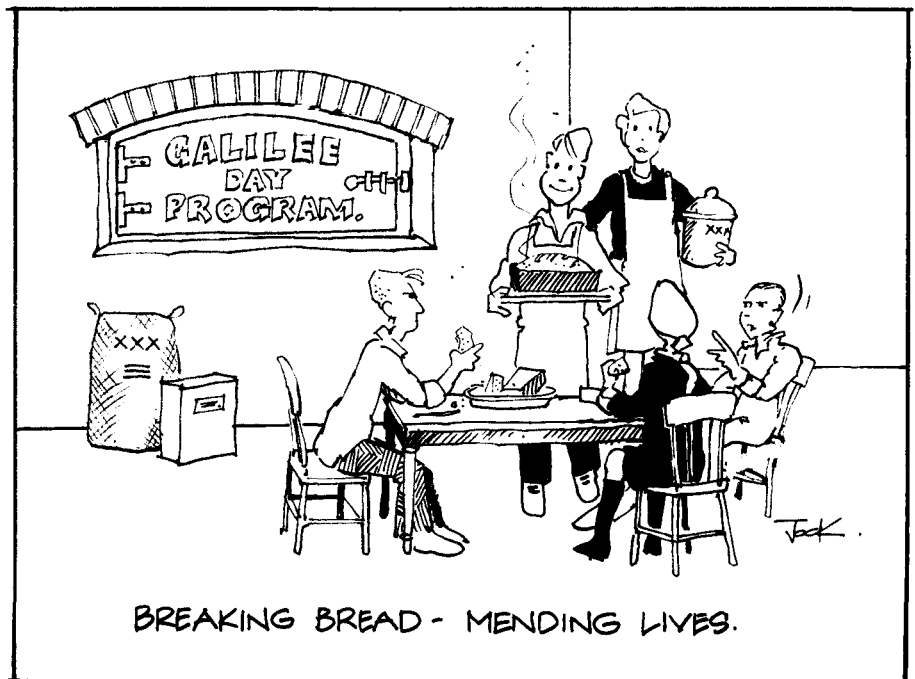
### SPECIAL FEATURES

Special features of the Program are pointers to the more hidden philosophical foundations which are threaded in day-to-day procedures. The special features (in bold type) discussed in this section govern the ethos of the program in an informal way. One feature of the Program is a focus on learning through Information Technology (IT). Most academic work in the Program is performed on computers. The work of Fitzgerald et al (1996), Owston (1997) and CRESPAR (1997) establishes that the use of Information Technology with 'at-risk' young people (usually prohibited from using computers in schools through fear of damage and as punishment for naughtiness) significantly enhances motivation and learning.

Another feature of the program is the emphasis placed upon food and eating as a strategy for engagement and psychosocial development. Research by Holt (1995), Juengst (1992), Visser (1986), Harris (1985) and MacClancy (1992) emphasises the significance of the psychosocial impact of eating together. Holt, in Banks and Stevens (1997, p. 322), states:

In all societies of the world, ancient and modern, eating is a primary way of entering into and sustaining relationships. In fact, the English word *companion* is derived from the French and Latin words meaning 'one who eats bread with another'.

In the Program staff recognise the relational, therapeutic and psychosocial importance of food preparation and



BREAKING BREAD - MENDING LIVES.

eating with the young people. As a consequence a food studies curriculum has been constructed and the physical structure of the meeting room is focused around a kitchen/dining area.

The **morning meeting** is a focal point of the GDP social education process. The arrival of young people at Youth Haven and their organisation is a crucial moment in the day. How young people are marshalled, introduced to planning and brought to commitment is perhaps one of the most important aspects of their learning. The morning meeting is important for the stability of the Program and for the reinforcement of core values with the young people. It will be these values which will enable them to adapt to the mainstream more than many academic activities that occur in the Program.

It is important in the morning meeting that:

- people sit still and listen to each other;
- commitment is elicited from people to tasks for the day;
- activities and times are set out and clarified – make sure people understand what they are doing;
- positive options and alternatives are given;

- neutral or not committed behaviour is challenged.

One-to-one **travel** is viewed as an opportunity for enhancing **relationships and dialogue** with young people. Young people are picked up from rendezvous points each morning and returned in the afternoons. Whilst travel in groups is good for bonding, it is often in one-to-one travel that important disclosure and a counselling environment are encountered.

**Colocation** is also a special feature of the Galilee Day Program. GDP is colocated with numerous other community based projects on the farm, and all the following farm projects are oriented towards disadvantaged youth:

- Shadowglass - a glass craft and glass-blowing workshop (managed by Fusion Australia)
- Awesome Fabrics - also linked with the CIT course in indigenous fashion and design at Watson campus
- the Snowy River Saddle School - a saddlery and leatherwork business
- Beacon Enterprises - a landscaping, human ecology and environmental business
- the LIFT peer education, pre-vocational and vocational project

- the LIONS Youth Haven organic horticultural project
- Fusion (Aust) Kurrajong Nursery
- the Galilee Day Program cottage industry
- LIFT Street Theatre Program
- Canberra Feltmakers
- LIONS farm projects
- Fusion (Aust) accommodation for unemployed/disadvantaged youth
- the Cart Horse and Street Stall (CHASS) Project.

The farm location enables young people not to be distracted by the enticement of commercial, peer and social attractions.

#### EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

##### 1. Social

- To learn how to function and cope with a learning situation
- To provide a climate of homeliness assisting identity, acceptance and belonging
- To learn social skills adequate to participate with a group in a learning situation
- To learn behaviours relevant to participate in a learning situation
- To develop a sense of responsibility for achieving personal learning goals
- To learn how to set realistic, achievable learning goals
- To develop a more positive attitude towards learning
- To enhance the civics skills of participants
- To increase levels of self-respect and self-esteem

##### 2. Scholastic

- To enhance the participants' knowledge and skills in using Information Technology
- To develop literacy and numeracy skills to a competent level
- To develop information literacy skills

##### 3. Vocational

To provide opportunities for and basic skills in carpentry; metal work; painting; building construction; mechanics; glass; leather; fabric; horticulture; agriculture.

#### 4. Recreational/life skills learning

- To learn living skills relevant to independent living
- To foster positive attitudes and habits in basic hygiene
- To encourage positive attitudes to safety
- To provide skills in food and home living technologies
- To develop basic communication skills

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#### CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

The curriculum at GDP is integrated with the many colocated services at the farm and is categorised in traditional learning area descriptors for the purposes of accreditation. On a day-to-day basis, such distinctions are not visible; instead the Program curriculum is founded in a project or activity approach and competencies (competency based training (CBT)) are emphasised.

#### EVALUATION AND PROGRESS IN 1997/98

The Program has been successful to date evidenced by:

- high participation rates;
- high retention and interest levels;
- positive attitudes to learning;
- acceptance of formal and informal learning contexts;
- a consistent referral rate (and referral waiting list);
- a marked decline in negative and destructive behaviours;

- completion of significant scholastic goals;
- signs by some clients of readiness for re-entry into the mainstream;
- client development in prevocational competencies and skills;
- a solid response to peer education structures;
- changing attitudes towards re-entry into mainstream education.

Since February 1997 the Day Program has had 56 referrals and has processed 16 participants. Of the 16 participants, six are consistently progressing through the Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE) which is a course accredited through the Canberra Institute of Technology (TAFE). Another four young people are progressing through the Day Program's own curriculum structure. These results are indicated by the following:

1. Three of the young people in the Program, diagnosed with severe mental health problems and having significant juvenile justice records (major personality disorders accompanied by a long track record of violence, including armed robbery and assault), have made extraordinary progress. These three young people have been able to accept the demands of a balanced scholastic and prevocational educational work load and have achieved significant stabilisation of social behaviour within the Program. They have not reoffended since their entry into the Program. One of these young persons has started on a return to home living program.
2. Four participants, diagnosed as having mild to medium mental health issues, have significant learning problems, including one aboriginal male who is visually impaired. These young people are unable to perform scholastic work at a very high level and require individualised and intensive tuition in literacy and numeracy. The four young people concerned have a juvenile justice record. Two of this group have not reoffended since joining the Program.
3. The remaining three young people not mentioned in the current group

are in a stable state and have not been in the Program long enough to accurately assess their progress.

4. Three of the 6 participants who are doing the CAGE modules are on target to complete their studies by the end of 1997.
5. The Day Program has developed its own certificate system based upon the Mayer Key Competencies for curricular activities outside of the scope of the CAGE certificate. This means that participants are able to have their skills acknowledged and credentialised in such areas as farm maintenance; light industrial machinery; tractor competence; glass fusion; leatherwork; food studies; music; recreation; fabrics.
6. By the end of August four participants had indicated their desire to continue studies at college and have begun the enrolment process, including visits and an interview with Principals.
7. One participant has accepted a traineeship with a tree surgeon.
8. Two participants are seeking work and expect to complete year 10 studies by the end of the year.
9. Two participants have graduated into independent living and no longer qualify for the services of the Program.
10. Several of the participants have completed successful work experience placements and anticipate movement into the TAFE sector or work.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored contemporary research into the plight of at-risk young people, drawing particular attention to their educational needs as outlined in recent reports. The research indicates that whilst 'at-risk' young people have failed the system, the school system has also failed 'at-risk' young people, and alternatives and restructuring are necessary. The paper sets out clear indicators of problems determining under-age school leaving and the nature of measures taken initiated to assist young people who are 'at-risk' and alienated from mainstream living. Benchmarks are outlined which list common elements in best practice.

Intended outcomes are identified which delineate the characteristics necessary in helping young people move out of cycles of failure and dysfunction to a healthy, safe and functional future.

The Galilee Day Program in the ACT is described as an example of effective practice. Even at an early stage of development the Program is effective because it conforms to key aspects as outlined in the research and a number of young people have been helped out of dysfunctional patterns of living. Whilst a comprehensive evaluation of the Program is yet to be undertaken, some anecdotal evidence was noted on the Program's effectiveness. □

Dr Robert Long will present a paper on the Galilee Day Program, and conduct a tour, on 11 November 1998 at the CAFWAA Practice Exchange, 'Adolescents at risk - who cares?', to be held 11-13 November 1998 in Canberra. For details, tel (02) 6295 2755.

The Day Program can be viewed on the Internet at:  
<http://crlit.canberra.edu.au/GDPsite/GDP.html>

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