

Ms Megan Mitchell  
National Children's Commissioner  
Australian Human Rights Commission  
Level 3, 175 Pitt Street  
Sydney, NSW 2000

Dear Ms Mitchell

**Re Present rate of self-harm and suicide among young people of Australia**

I am writing in response to your public invitation for professionals to discuss factors concerned with the present rate of self-harm and suicide among the young.

There is now considerable evidence that many children are being raised and educated with inadequate effort to raise their self-esteem and internal locus of control to the levels required to function effectively in society and the workplace.

The evidence for this statement arises from the fields of education and athlete development. Research has been accumulated over more than six decades from studies of children in schools, which confirms that higher self-esteem is associated with enhanced learning. Yet in schools across Australia there is a clear division between the vast majority of schools and a small number of non-selective schools, which each year are able to assist 60 to 80 percent of their students to gain high achiever academic performances represented by an ATAR of 90+.

Students assisted to perform at this academic level are in many instances treated to well-known transformative techniques by teachers at schools where this approach is well understood. However, the vast majority of children do not receive this assistance and leave school with insufficient self-esteem and internal locus of control to be able to identify with relationships in communities and requirements of the workplace. Few acquire the self-esteem at school necessary to know what they want to do in life and then when they leave school, find little opportunity awaiting them. Many are then subject to feelings of futility.

People who choose to enter a sporting field appear to experienced coaches to often arrive very poorly prepared, whether direct from school or after years of apparently successful careers in the workplace. Some sporting coaches find the overriding task is to enhance the self-esteem of beginners, through applying the same transformative techniques used at schools where students are assisted to gain academic performances of high achievers.

My career has been as a trained teacher of physics and chemistry, a forensic scientist working for coroners' courts and a sportsman at world champion level. I have personal

experience of assisting hundreds of students in China, learning in their second language, to enter overseas universities with TER and ATAR scores of 90+. I am presently responsible for teaching people how to progress rapidly in a new sport, the result of enhancing their self-esteem and internal locus of control.

I would respectfully suggest to the Australian Human Rights Commission that there is a huge anomaly in our society, in which children of the vast majority of schools are not assisted by teachers to build the necessary level of self-esteem. This leaves them poorly prepared for life and prone to resort to escapist activities such as the taking of illicit drugs. Many who are prone to develop mental health disorders can as a result be expected to not be able to avoid the manifestation of such tragic effects upon their lives.

From my experience I would recommend a combined strategy to assist young people to develop self-esteem and internal locus of control in both academic and sporting activities. I am aware that the teaching profession is not currently equipped to undertake this strategic change in direction. This is not a new idea, having been espoused by the Hon Cecil Rhodes in his will of 1902. There would appear in Australia to be little or no monitoring and documentation of the effectiveness of efforts of schools to assist children in this way. That is, there is no reported comparison of the effectiveness of the two groups of schools on the lives of young Australians.

From the above, the legendary failure of many schools to rectify the educational inequality of indigenous and other Australian children can be readily understood.

It also needs to be stated that most inmates of correctional institutions appear to lack adequate self-esteem to live a healthy lifestyle. One cannot but wonder how far the claimed anomaly is affecting our society.

I would like to commend you as the National Children's Commissioner, for drawing attention to what may well be an unacceptable consequence of a shortfall in the raising and education of children. Unless this anomaly is recognised and managed then the present rate of self-harm and suicide among young people can be expected to continue. If economic conditions in Australia render employment more difficult to obtain, then the situation could deteriorate even further.

From the experience of colleagues in both education and sport training the solution appears to be entirely feasible. If the solution can be achieved under the extremely difficult circumstances of schools in China, from which students become accepted for entry to Australian universities, then there is no reason why this should not happen in Australia.

I would be happy to clarify any of the above.

Yours faithfully