

Corio Bay Secondary College, Victoria – building resilience through the Advocacy Program

School profile

Corio Bay Senior College is a year 11 and 12 college located in the northern suburbs of Geelong with a population of approximately 365 students.

Corio has the highest rate of unemployment in Geelong. At the start of 2003 the college opened a childcare centre for the use of young, student parents. It currently caters for 8 children however the college is planning to expand this to a full size childcare centre which will be able to cater for up to 35 children.

The college offers a broad range of pathways for senior students – VCE, VET and three VCAL programs – Arts, Land-Based Industries and Industry Skills. A significant number of students are choosing to complete their VCE over 3 years.

Background to Advocacy at Corio Bay Senior College

The Advocacy program was initiated at Corio Bay Senior College four years ago with the purpose of increasing retention at Year11 and Year12 by providing students with direct personal, academic and career support. The program operates across Year 11 with approximately half the college's total student population involved. (180 students)

Advocacy involves the allocation of a small group of year 11 students (approximately 10) to a particular teacher. The teacher meets the students regularly (2 x 50-minute periods per week) as part of the school timetable sometimes as a group but primarily on a one-to-one basis. Initially meetings involve 'get to know you' activities and progress to a point where the teacher and the student know each other reasonably well. Any tasks completed in Advocacy should have relevance to the student and be recognised by both Advocate and student as worthwhile

The Advocate (teacher) has no discipline roll, only to monitor and advise on student progress, provide encouragement, and assist with the day to day problems experienced by a senior student and, of course, help in any unexpected circumstances that may arise in that student's time at the College.

Advocates assist the student in personal organisation, meeting due dates, study techniques, course counseling, resume writing, job applications and helping seek out any agencies within or outside the school that may be of assistance to students with a particular problem.

The Advocacy program doesn't claim to solve all problems for all students. It has helped many students both personally and academically and not only has become a permanent feature of Corio Bay Senior College but has been held as a model, both in Victoria and interstate, for other schools wishing to support and communicate with their students more effectively.

Definitions and assumptions:

Values education takes place implicitly through the Advocacy Program. Advocates care for students on a personal basis, helping them with personal concerns and crises, as well as helping them with structural issues such as goal setting, time management, etc. The school takes the following things to be important to advocacy:

The advocate-student relationship is:

- Caring
- Supportive
- Flexible

It is NOT:

- Judgmental
- Disciplinary

The assumption that the school makes about values education is that it is best done implicitly, rather than through classes and lectures. The Principal, parents and teachers believe teaching values to adolescents in a formal program is not the best approach; they believe students best learn from the personal experience of these values through the advocate-student relationship. Previous evaluations¹ of the Advocacy Program showed that students learned caring behaviours and, with time, began to extend mature forms of care to their advocates. Advocates reported this as a new thing, quite unlike their previous experience in teaching. The quality of care learned and returned in the Advocacy Program was in advance of that experienced in teaching. The current project found that this is one of the main sources of satisfaction for advocates. Thus, in values education, the

school prioritises learning through relationship over learning values formally in class.

Objectives of the Advocacy Program

The purpose of the Advocacy Program is to establish adult-student relationships between teachers and students that are not based on the traditional Teacher-Student relationship. The Advocacy relationship assists students with issues and problems relating to their academic success, personal life and career pathways.

As such the Advocacy program address' various objectives of the National Goals of Schooling, but specifically:

- 1.2 have the qualities self confidence, optimism, high self esteem and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and work force members.**

The Advocacy program promotes development in all these areas through an ongoing counseling situation and involvement in activities to monitor and assist students in the development of their strengths and work to overcoming their weaknesses

- 1.3 have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions.**

The values modeled in this program are:

- Care
- Support
- Flexibility

The values specifically excluded from this program were:

- Judgment
- Discipline

To ascertain the values that they thought important to the advocacy program:

- two focus group sessions were conducted with staff (18 staff at one session (advocates and teachers), 12 at the second (advocates)).
- an open-ended questionnaire was given to staff
- one focus group was held with parents (9 parents attended).
- a questionnaire was given to Year 11 students (66 students, a 50% response rate).
- interviews were held with the Principal, Assistant Principal, current and previous Advocacy Coordinators and Student Welfare Coordinator.

Evaluating the outcomes:

The intended outcome was an identification of the factors pertaining to the Advocacy program valued by staff, parents and students. The methods of evaluation used were focus groups with open-ended questionnaires (advocates and teachers), interviews (school administration and Advocacy Coordinators), a focus group (parents) and a questionnaire (students). The findings were:

Focus groups with open-ended questionnaires (advocates and teachers)

1. The problems students have that the Advocacy Program helps with, (according to the advocates and teachers)

Personal

- helps with personal problems
- encourages friendship groups
- helps with problems with other students
- loneliness, isolation
- uncertainty, helplessness
- self-esteem/morale
- identity
- intimacy
- shout spot for frustration
- medical issues

School

- connection to school and social groups
- slowed the number of drop outs
- monitors/improves attendance (focuses on underlying issues)
- integration of mature age/disabled people

- tracking
- parental education
- career counselling

Improvement on traditional teacher/student relationship

- provides a mediator when required
- reframes problems with students more positively
- gives more background to behaviour problems
- offers alternative type of relationship with an adult

Academic

- helps with academic skills
- course counselling/subject selection
- helps with homework

Organisational

- time management
- goal setting

2. The things teachers most value about the program about the program

Relationship

- the relationship/friendship with students
- greater trust and better communication, developing more articulate responses in students

Helping

- helping students overcome difficulties/solve problems

Job satisfaction

- meeting own values through work - "knowing I am doing something worthwhile" (academically, emotionally and socially)
- doing one to one (helps them feel valued)
- continuing contact with students the following year, or even after they have left, they seek you out to talk
- getting an insight into students' behaviour, which increases understanding
- helping students mature/reach full potential
- seeing students work productively
- helping students with goal setting
- continuity of relationship
- helping students academically

- helping students' transition to college
- getting to know students you don't teach
- getting students to be a support group for each other
- lets us do what we would like to do in teaching if the VCE structure allowed it
- seeing personal development and success of students
- some students appreciate what you are doing
- hearing students value you from other sources
- helping students with future employment

What are the differences between advocacy and teaching?

| Differences between Advocacy and Teaching: the bulleted comments were made by teachers | |
|--|---|
| Advocacy | Teaching |
| <p>Flexibility versus Order</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relationship - less structured, fewer rules, no commands • more relaxed, more open, more informal, flexible | <p>Order versus Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to maintain a working, learning environment • more procedural - deadlines, tests etc. |
| <p>Personal versus Subject-centered</p> <p>more personal one-on-one cf large group student centered</p> | <p>Subject-centered versus Personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tied down by curriculum • impersonal • transfer of knowledge • improves skills in the subject • aims to produce changes (in way student thinks, works) |
| <p>Freedom versus Discipline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no discipline • addresses underlying issues instead of demanding change in behaviour • voluntary • no formal assessment | <p>Discipline versus Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compulsory |
| <p>Support versus Judgement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support • non-judgmental | <p>Judgement versus Support</p> <p>No comments made</p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more understanding • increases confidence • improves skills in personal relationships • fun | |
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Interviews (school administration and Advocacy Coordinators)

1. The Ideal Advocacy Relationship comprises:

- Trust
- Confidentiality
- Friendship
- Mutuality/ Equality
- Support
- Empowerment
- Guidance
- Has areas of mutual interest (things in common)
- Is student -directed
- Is relaxed
- Is informal
- Is functional, practical

The Ideal Advocacy Relationship is NOT

- A Dictatorship
- Instructional
- Hierarchical

2. The Ideal advocate

Has these abilities:

- To look at person as a whole
- To understand young people
- To establish and maintain conversations
- To identify what is relevant
- To ask for help/seek advice
- To relate to students on their level
- To win trust

- Not to take rejection personally

Has these personal characteristics:

- Non-judgmental
- Sense of humour
- Open
- Honest
- Accepting
- Positive
- Optimistic
- Fair
- Reliable
- Wide range of experience (apart from teaching)

Focus group (parents) (this also constituted the Values Education Forum)

1. Evaluation of Advocacy

Most parents were quite happy with the program, although one had not heard of it.

They saw Advocacy as a backstop, and were relieved their child had someone to fall back on when their own efforts at communication and support failed. For some parents, the program was the main motivation for their child to stay at school. Without it, they felt their child would have left school by now.

2. What did parents want from Advocacy?

They wanted their child to be given support, and to improve in confidence as a result of the program. They also mentioned they wanted advocates to create the experience of equality with students, to "turn over the them-and-us thing", so that their children could learn how to get on with an adult. They did not support the idea of formal "Values" classes, (nor did the school administration), believing that adolescents would not participate in any structured program. Instead they preferred the implicit values education of the Advocacy program.

3. What are the important differences between Advocacy and teaching?

To find out what parents valued about the Advocacy Program, we asked what they saw as the important differences between Advocacy and teaching? The distinctions they make reveal what they value about advocacy. The points they made can be gathered under two headings - issues to do with personal support/personal awareness, and issues to do with greater power by the student in the advocacy relationship. Parents saw both these factors as positive.

Personal issues

- The teacher has no time to engage in much social talk, but the Advocate does. Social talk is valuable.
- Advocacy is a one-to one relationship whereas teaching involves a group relationship.
- It's social - there are other students in advocacy group for their child to make friends with
- Advocacy is more supportive/informal than teaching
- Trust and confidentiality are greater in Advocacy, so problems with students private lives would surface earlier

Power Issues

- There is less pressure, less structure in advocacy, so there is more fluidity in the relationship with the advocate
- Students are more likely to see the advocate as human than a teacher; this awareness would transfer to other adults (Including other teachers)
- There is mutual respect in Advocacy
- There is no judgement in Advocacy
- The younger person can judge the success of this relationship, in teaching the teacher does that
- The student gathers information from the advocate whereas in teaching the teacher chooses what information the student gets. Having this choice means they get help when they are ready, with issues on which they want help.
- Advocacy is more empowering

Further information about the philosophy, background, resource material, teacher information packs and a number of questionnaires related to both values education and the Advocacy Program are available on this website. An evaluation of the program also appears here:

<http://www.advocacy.gsat.edu.au/advocacy/advocacy.htm>