

Mayoral Column – June 2008

Young People as Winners in Learning

In Council's four year plan, *Making a Difference*, we committed to supporting the development and responsiveness of local education and training to meet community needs.

The recent Community Cabinet provided an opportunity for Council to brief State Cabinet on Council's *Go-for-Gold* program.

Go-for-Gold involves five key actions to close the gap between our goals for a sustainable and prosperous community, and the current reality which presents some challenges in terms of social and economic disadvantage, health problems and educational under-achievement.

In coming months we will be working with a range of community organisations in a whole of community approach on these five key actions:

- Enhancing childhood health, development and learning;
- Engaging young people as winners in learning;
- Developing adult and mature -aged skills and training ;
- Building a healthy, strong and inclusive community; and
- Achieving environmentally sustainable widespread prosperity.

The response from the Premier and Cabinet Ministers was very positive. Already plans are being developed for a close partnership as we work to ensure that all members of our community have access to every opportunity available. We encourage our young people especially to *Go-for-Gold*.

We know we must tackle the education issue for our children and young people as a priority. During Community Cabinet it was great to hear members of our community acknowledge the wonderful work of our "Best Start" program, led by Marg Kent, which is so active in the issues of the early years.

It was a special pleasure for me to launch Best Start's new initiative "It's not OK to be away", which seeks a cross community partnership to ensure children are at school when they are supposed to be.

Many High Street traders enthusiastically displayed posters with the "It's not OK to be away" message. Through these actions, we hope to reduce school absence and give kids a better start.

The Maryborough Education Centre followed with its Community Conversations. This offered all of us an opportunity to join Principal Barney Healey and two hugely enthusiastic teachers, Julie Reiger and David Sutton, who led us through a day and evening session to identify the needs of young people as winners in learning.

The outcomes enabled us to see that two really important opportunities for our young people are the support of a caring community and our broad opportunities in sport and

recreation. Key needs we have to continue to work on are the lack of career and employment options and transport difficulties.

The conversations led us to agree on the importance of developing self-worth and ensuring that young people have access to people who can act as role mentors to develop an early commitment to life long learning.

During the conversations, Council encouraged MEC to focus on:

- addressing early literacy problems;
- helping students to understand that they need to be winners in learning;
- providing top quality education for all students;
- instilling a *Go-for-Gold* aspirational culture;
- developing a passion for life long learning and the valuing of knowledge; and
- enabling students to understand the principles of employability and self ownership of continual workplace relevance.

With a much better understanding of State Government on our future needs from the Community Cabinet, including the key role of education, and the really innovative efforts of Best Start and MEC in the two activities which followed, I think we are well underway to work together to ensure education offers all our children and young people the ability to *Go-for-Gold* and achieve all their hopes, aspirations and dreams.

Chris