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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION : WHAT LOCAL GROUPS CAN ACHIEVE

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The following is a brief account of the achievements of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) in Innisfail.

PRIOR TO 1980

Aboriginal/Islander students in the Innisfail district were underachieving at school.

This was particularly at the Secondary level. The first significant steps to remedy this problem were taken at the Good Counsel College in 1977.

INDIGENOUS TEACHER AIDE POSITION : GOOD COUNSEL COLLEGE

Teaching staff, parents, and members of the Aboriginal Training and Cultural Institute discussed the poor performance of Aboriginal/Islander students at the college.

The creation of an indigenous teacher aide position resulted. The duties involved promoting better communication and understanding between teachers, students, parents and the school.

TEACHER AIDE POSITION AT THE STATE HIGH SCHOOL

In 1979 a group of parents formed a committee to lobby for a similar position at the State High School.

Parents visited the school to discuss this matter. The local parliamentary member was lobbied. The principal of the High School sent letters supporting the position at the school.

In 1981 a teacher aide position was allotted to the High School. An Aboriginal person filled the position, and was given the task of liaising with the school, community, parents and students.

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PARENT/TEACHER MEETINGS AND PARENT AWARENESS PROGRAMS

These were organized by the liaison officer at the high school. The Commonwealth Employment Service was invited to speak about employment opportunities, as well as Commonwealth Education, Technical and Further Education, guidance officers, remedial teachers, etc.

HOME STUDY CLASSES

These were organized at the local Housing Co-operative Hall, and enabled students to receive help with homework and studies.

A "formal" Aboriginal/Islander parent organization had not been formed, but the group did meet regularly to discuss educational issues.

The major area of concern raised at many of the meetings was "Primary" education.

It was not until 1983 that real steps were taken to examine this issue. The catalyst was a workshop organized by the executive officer of QATSICC, and held in Townsville.

CONCERNED PARENT GROUP FORMED

Delegates from the workshop returned, and the parent group was formalized. The group took the name, *Concerned Parent Group*. It recognised itself as part of QATSICC.

HOME STUDY PROGRAMS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Members of the Concerned Parent Group surveyed all the primary schools in the districts to determine:

- . the number of Aboriginal/Islander students enrolled
- . the attendance rate
- . the performance of students.

Home study classes were organized at the major primary schools. Parents provided voluntary supervision, and teachers voluntary tuition. However, the Concerned Parent Group believed there was a need for a liaison type position to service the primary area.

PRIMARY SCHOOL LIAISON OFFICER

Commonwealth Education, in response to a request from the Concerned Parent Group, organised a submission writing course. The skills gained from the course were used by the group to write a submission. This was sent to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

In 1984 a liaison officer position was created and filled.

QATSICC INNISFAIL

In 1985 the group began to call itself QATSICC Innisfail. The group recognised that it would have more influence if it became part of a larger organisation. (QATSICC was recognised by the Queensland Department of Education).

TEACHER AWARENESS OF ABORIGINAL/ISLANDER COMMUNITY

A concern expressed frequently by QATSICC Innisfail was the lack of understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal/Islander people by schools and teachers. A barrier existed between the Aboriginal/Islander community and the schools.

The group became aware of funding available for inservice training of teachers - QINSEC. Using the skills gained from previous programs, a submission was sent to QINSEC requesting funding.

Approval was given and a workshop was held in October 1985.

Twenty-four QATSICC members, and thirty others including guidance officers, inspectors, remedial teachers, participated in the workshop. Small workshop groups discussed issues such as Aboriginal/Islander student cultural difference, peer group, parent involvement in education etc.

The workshop was a valuable experience for all participants.

POLICY DOCUMENT : QATSICC INNISFAIL

In 1986 the group realised it needed a policy - a plan of action that the group could pursue. Commonwealth Education was asked to organise a course on policy writing. The skills gained enable the group to write a policy.

NADOC WEEK 1986

The group had previously been involved in NADOC Week in past years. However, they wanted to make an impact in the primary schools

QATSICC members decided that they would teach the students about Aboriginal/Islander people because they were the experts. However, they did have some apprehension about teaching a classroom full of students.

A course was held to give the members basic teaching skills, lesson planning, organisation and presentation.

CONCLUSION

There are many ways in which parents groups can become involved in the education of their children, as demonstrated by the QATSICC Group in Innisfail

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TURKONDI

Aboriginal Education Funding and Resources Guide

The *Turkondi: Aboriginal Education Funding and Resources Guide* (see review - Vol.14 No.4 August/September 1986) is now available.

A combined undertaking by the Education Department of South Australia and Flinders University, working in close co-operation with the South Australian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee, *Turkondi* provides detailed guidance for Aboriginal education workers, Aboriginal resource teachers, advisors and field officers, community groups, parents, principals and teachers in the development of Aboriginal education activities and the preparation of Grants submissions. A comprehensive list of agencies and programs and a calendar/planner are provided.

It is planned to update *Turkondi* from time to time as changes to existing information or new information are received.

Turkondi costs \$7.00 per copy and may be obtained from :

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