

# The Sharon Faye Foundation Quarterly

September 2016 Volume No. 2

## Dear Friends

Welcome to the second quarterly Sharon Faye Foundation newsletter. Last time we introduced you to the Board and shared with you our early achievements, including patron Sue Cruthers' story of lifelong anorexia being published in *The West Australian* and the setting up of a weekly anorexia group. This time we would like to share with you more about the research we've been working on.

### At a glance:

- Each month the Board meets for an operational discussion. Once a quarter, it meets to discuss the Foundation's strategic planning. The focus in the last three months has been on research.
- Schools have a vitally important role in child development—they can facilitate or impair it. A key challenge for 21st century principals is to nurture the emotional development of teachers for improved student wellbeing and performance. Emotional strength fills this crucial, but overlooked, need. We are in the early stages of developing a research project to demonstrate it (see below for more details).
- Shame is a powerful and ubiquitous emotion, but one that often remains unacknowledged. When shamed, we feel diminished, worthless and exposed: feelings we typically want to avoid. Shame and denial are intimately linked. We have reviewed the literature ahead of future publications on shame, denial and emotional strength.
- Sharon has shared her story over two interviews with editor of *West Weekend* magazine, Julie Hosking, for an upcoming feature article.
- The anorexia focus group has been meeting for two hours every fortnight for seven months now. We have amazing discussions about taboo topics such as living with malnutrition, and taking responsibility for the choices we make in life. We have a lot of fun and share some really bad jokes. It is a very safe environment where people can tell the truth without judgement.

### Education Research Project

The biggest project in the pipeline is a 12-month applied research study on emotional strength in a Western Australian primary school. We propose that building emotional strength in teachers will improve the academic, emotional and behavioural performance of students. Over the last quarter we have been reviewing the literature on emotions in education, on teacher expectations on student achievement, and on pre-and-post-test research on emotion in education.



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## What We Know:

- Australian schooling advocates excellence and equity, but our performance in international and national assessments has plateaued, and in some areas is in decline. This is despite a 14 per cent increase in government spending per student over the past decade.
- Australia's declining performance operates within a broader context of rising rates of learning difficulties, mental health issues and behavioural problems in school-aged children, and high levels of student disconnection. At least one in five Australian students feel like they "don't belong" or don't like school. A common theme is that children do not feel heard in the classroom.
- Emotions are at the heart of teaching and learning. Emotion plays an essential role in attention, perception, memory, decision-making and creativity-all of which are critical to education. We feel, therefore we learn.
- There has been a growing emphasis on developing students' social and emotional capabilities to boost wellbeing and academic success. Extensive research confirms this link.
- The vast majority of social and emotional development programs are aimed at students, not teachers. This is despite the demands on teachers being greater than they have ever been, and a substantial body of literature confirming that positive teacher-student relationships are essential for promoting student achievement. What is lacking is a focus on teachers' emotional development for improved teacher and student performance.
- Students' emotional development and academic growth is fostered in safe, caring learning environments where they feel valued, respected and heard.

Emotional strength is essential to improve the quality of our education, and the lives of our children.



Can Anybody Hear Me?

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## Our Writing Experience

"Can Anybody Hear Me?" This is the title of an article we've been working on for publication in an education magazine on why our children are not being heard at school and what we can do about it. When we came to thinking about what we wanted to share with you in this newsletter it hit home to us how much this is the same question we are grappling with at the Foundation.

As you can see from above, we have spent a lot of the last three months on research. The other side of our strategic intent is publication. If we want to get emotional strength out there in the world, we need to get published in mainstream forums, whether that be academic journals or the general media. What we need to do to get published, is to get publishers interested in what we have to say. We need publishers to hear us.

What we have found difficult is how to write about complex phenomena in a way that expresses what we want to say, at the depth we want to say it, in a concise way that lands.

One of our challenges is how to bridge the gap between mainstream perceptions of processes like denial and shame, and even everyday terms like "education", and what *we* mean by it.

Another is how to say what we want to say in a way that people feel embraced, not alienated.

As clients, we know from working with Sharon in person that, however hard it might be to hear some of her feedback, she has our best interests at heart. At a deep level we know that even when we are challenged to face things about ourselves we don't want to see, or anyone to see, that we are not being judged or blamed or made wrong. This opens us up to hearing (and healing) at a levels we otherwise never could.

The Foundation's struggle is how to create the same experience for readers of our written work. In the "Can Anybody Hear Me?" article, for example, we have made repeated revisions in an effort to express our support for teachers, without rescuing or, alternatively, making it sound like they are wrong. On any given attempt it might sound too harsh, or too wishy-washy.

The question "can anybody hear me?" is one we've asked ourselves in all our communication, including emails seeking an audience with relevant academics or phone conversations with journalists. Sometimes people think they know what we are talking about, but don't really, or can't hear it at all. Our experiences have ranged from frustration, confusion, sadness, disappointment and depression to-sometimes-joy.

We always knew the Foundation's goal of introducing emotional strength to the world was going to be a big gig. We share our experience knowing that many of you have felt the same way when talking to friends and family about your own ES journey.

See you next time.

Sharon Faye Foundation Team

"Listening to your heart, finding out who you are, is not simple.

It takes time for the chatter to quiet down.

In the silence of "not doing" we begin to know what we feel.

If we listen and hear what is being offered, then anything in life can be our guide.

Listen."