

Education

Senator BILYK (Tasmania) (7.07 pm)—I doubt anyone in this chamber would disagree with me if I said that the role of Australian schools in preparing children for their lives as adults goes beyond simply teaching skills and imparting knowledge. Sure, we want our high school graduates to be able to secure a job and to learn life skills, but we also want them to have a sense of philanthropy and to want to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. As well as learning facts and skills, school is also a place for learning values.

Great values are learnt by helping students to develop an awareness of how their actions positively impact on the environment and society at a local, national and global level. What better way to develop this awareness than to produce an educational toolkit for public schools, non-profit organisations and government funded community agencies that enables young people to become active citizens and lead social change.

The Foundation for Young Australians, an organisation which aims to empower young Australians to be ‘successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens’ has done just that with a program called ruMAD? ruMAD? stands for ‘are you making a difference?’ I guess it appeals to young people to abbreviate phrases like this, especially when you consider the way text-speak is pervading our culture. There are four different programs or levels of ‘MADness’ that a school or organisation can implement with the program. They could organise a MAD day, where the students take on a one-day activity that gets everyone thinking about making a difference. They could organise a MAD project, a longer term commitment that involves detailed research, planning and involvement. They could establish a MAD foundation to raise funds for a cause and donate those funds to a local community organisation. Students could become ruMAD? youth ambassadors. Students celebrate their achievements through ruMAD? at an annual Youth Action Conference and learn about being an ambassador for community action.

Conferences have been held in the north and south of Tasmania over the past two years and hundreds of students have attended. A fifth level of MADness—ruMAD? social enterprise—is soon to be added to the list. Since the inception of the program, over 50,000 young people in 150 schools around Australia have participated. I am very pleased to say that 12,500 of these students, or one quarter, have been from my home state of Tasmania. In fact, last year 32 Tasmanian schools participated.

The success of the program in Tasmania is a testament to the dedication of a local organisation, the Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning. The program is primarily funded through the Tasmanian government’s

Tasmanian Community Fund, but there are a number of other organisations, including local councils and government departments, that also contribute funding. The centre provides professional development; curriculum materials; a global learning resource library; a ruMAD? school coordinator, education officer and program manager; and also helps network with other organisations working for a fairer world, including Amnesty, Anglicare and World Vision to name just a few.

Three schools in Tasmania—Rokeby High School, Queechy High School and Gagebrook Primary School—have taken a lead in running the program by providing dedicated ruMAD? teachers for one day a week. I was pleased to have the opportunity to attend the expo session of this year’s ruMAD? Youth Action Conference in late August at Rokeby High School. While there was an extensive program for the conference, the expo was the opportunity for the schools to exhibit their projects to invited guests and members of the public. Some 180 students from 16 schools participated in the conference, and they had clearly put a lot of work into their projects and their exhibits.

One of the great things about the ruMAD? program is the amount of direction and planning that comes from the students themselves. The students had the opportunity to choose their own projects, and I could tell from their excitement that they were not only proud of their projects but had a genuine and passionate commitment to the causes they had chosen. East Derwent Primary School had been raising funds and awareness to help save the Tasmanian devil, a native marsupial that is currently at risk of extinction from a facial tumour disease that has spread rapidly throughout its population. Two of their fundraising initiatives included selling chocolates and holding a car wash.

Cambridge Primary School had chosen a cause closer to home—connecting with the elderly. A couple of weeks after I had attended the expo, I had the opportunity to visit Cambridge Primary School to attend an assembly that was dedicated to showcasing the results of their project. The students had put together gift bags for elderly people. These included useful information for seniors such as bus timetables and concession guides. They collected recipes and collated a recipe book, which was sold to raise funds, the proceeds of which were used to purchase board games and DVDs to donate to Ningana Nursing Home in Sorell.

Other issues that featured at the expo included child rights and global poverty, environmental sustainability and water conservation. The other participating schools included Cygnet Primary, Huonville Primary, Clarendon Vale Primary, Herdsmans Cove Primary, Gagebrook Primary, Rosetta Primary, Lenah Valley Primary, Rokeby High, Geilston Bay High, New Town High, Kingston High, Dover District High, Tarremah Steiner School and Campania School. I thank Rokeby High

School for the invitation and the opportunity to hear directly from students learning valuable lessons about social action.

Since the conference, Rokeby High School have organised a major concert, securing *Australia's Got Talent* winners Justice Crew as the headline act. The funds raised from the concert, titled Concert 4 Cambodia, have been used to support the Tabitha Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that conducts development, education and housing programs in Cambodia.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging a few people for their role in making ruMAD? a success in Tasmania. First of all I wish to thank and congratulate Helen Hortle, Jeremy Picone and Karen Reid from the Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning for their stewardship of the program. I would also like to thank teacher Emma Christian, who, after coordinating the program at Rokeby High School, helped to roll it out to other schools and took a lead role in organising the ruMAD? conference. Her involvement in ruMAD?—amongst other important contributions to the school community—has earned her the 2010 Pride of Australia Inspiration Medal, an award that is well deserved. I would like to acknowledge and thank all the other teaching staff and volunteers who have assisted with ruMAD? throughout the state.

Finally, I will acknowledge the most important people of all: the thousands of schoolchildren who have worked hard on their respective ruMAD? projects. I hope ruMAD? has inspired you to continue making a positive contribution to your community, even after you finish your involvement in the program. I am impressed by the dedication, the consideration and the imagination that you have put into your projects. Your efforts to make the world a better place set a great example for the rest of us. While there is still poverty in the world, while there are still people living in isolation, while threats still exist to our sustainability and natural environment, it is incumbent upon each of us to ask ourselves and those around us: 'Are you making a difference?'

Nitric Oxide Therapy

Senator KROGER (Victoria) (7.16 pm)—I rise today to place on the public record the critical need for publicly funded nitric oxide therapy to treat critical care infants. This therapy is used to treat hypoxic respiratory failure, HRF, which affects about 500 newborn babies each year. I would like to note that Senator Connie Fierravanti-Wells raised the issue of nitric oxide therapy in estimates only last week, and, disappointingly, the witnesses knew nothing about it. Nitric oxide therapy is available and could provide much-needed help, but it is not listed on the PBS. It is a safe, proven and effective treatment that has a clear role in the management of critical respiratory failure in newborns.

Exactly a month ago, I wrote to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, about my concerns. As of today I have not received a response from the minister or her department. In my letter I urged the minister to investigate the situation and consider how this therapy could help newborn babies with respiratory failure. My office has been contacted by two key stakeholders in this area. The Australian and New Zealand Neonatal Network wrote to me, seeking assistance for critically ill babies and young children, which their members care for. Associate Professor Dr Kei Lui, director of newborn care at the Royal Hospital for Women in Sydney, wrote to me as the spokesperson for the group in August, and expressed the critical need for appropriate funding for HRF. In correspondence with my office, Dr Lui recently said:

I strongly believe that critical care babies who need this Inhaled Nitric Oxide (INO) treatment should have access to it under a federal funding scheme. Withholding or rationing a life saving treatment due to local budgetary constraints is unacceptable to health care providers and the families of babies who need it. Access to a life saving treatment should not be a lottery.

Earlier this month I met with Lorna Meldrum, the general manager of IKARIA—and Lorna and her colleagues are here in the gallery this evening; I note their attendance, and thank them for coming. IKARIA is the Australian provider of the drug INOmax, which is nitric oxide for inhalation. Lorna advised me that the drug is currently used around Australian in over 20 hospital neonatal units. She expressed her concern that, due to the hourly cost of nitric oxide treatment, it is potentially being rationed within the hospital system. IKARIA has been advised that the drug cannot be subsidised through the PBS and MBS because it is classified as a designated 'orphan drug' and should be funded through the hospital budget.

In Australia, orphan drugs are defined as drugs which treat diseases or conditions affecting no more than 2,000 individuals at a time. Whilst other orphan drugs are eligible for public subsidy consideration under the PBS, MBS or the Life Saving Drugs Program, IKARIA has been advised that INOmax does not meet the criteria as INOmax treatment is only administered in a public hospital setting and requires technology to deliver it. INOmax is only ever used within a hospital, and therefore should fall under the hospital budget.

Hypoxic respiratory failure is a serious condition that occurs when the cells in a baby's body are unable to receive enough oxygen. Nitric oxide has been used by Australian specialists to treat HRF for a number of years prior to its approval by the TGA. Prior to the introduction of nitric oxide, there was no other pharmaceutical product available, and the only alternative form of treatment was heart-lung bypass surgery. Mortality rates reported in the pivotal nitric oxide registration trials indicate that 11 per cent to 17 per cent of