

Gap between sexes closing



PHOTO: LUCY VICKERS

CLOSING THE GAP: Northcote College students Tim Vickers and Odette Treadwell.

by Lucy Vickers

The problem with under-achieving boys is exaggerated, at least if you look at the results of some of New Zealand's well-known secondary schools.

Lately the government has come under criticism for not acting on a national gender gap of 10 per cent between boys' and girls' achievement.

Paul Baker, rector of Waitaki Boys High School, announced

last month at a conference at the Albany campus of Massey University that the gap is widening.

However, at some schools the gap is very small, or does not exist at all.

Last year at Northcote College the gap was four per cent, which recently-departed principal Ted Benton says is "smaller than it is nationally and half the size of schools of the same decile".

He says there are some "real-

ly bright boys" and the majority of the school's past duxes have been males.

Researcher and data analyst at the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Janine McCardle, says boys are also given a lot more scholarships than girls.

Alison Davis, deputy principal of high-performing Lynfield College, says the problem is overstated.

"It is not an issue and in most subjects there isn't a gap.

"Lynfield data does not suggest that girls do significantly better than boys or that the gap is widening."

Some educationalists think boys do better at single-sex schools.

"Boys certainly do better at all-boys schools, and it has been proven that single sex schools' results are higher than co-ed," says Wellington College deputy principal David Ashby.

However, others believe that a large part of whether boys do well lies in the school.

"Boys can thrive in co-ed schools that are well run," Baker says.

Among other schools which defy the notion that boys aren't achieving as well as girls is Macleans College in Auckland, where boys got more than 50 per cent of the results gaining credit in 2005.

Avondale College deputy principal Phil Hill says the gap at the school is smaller than the national average.

At Cashmere High School in Christchurch boys did better than girls in NCEA last year. The girls got 8956 results gaining credit and the boys got 9598.

The 2005 NCEA results show that boys got more credits than girls at Onslow College in Wellington and Bayfield High School in Otago.

Burnside High School and Lincoln High School in Christchurch, and Kavanagh College in Otago, are just some of the other examples of secondary schools where the gap is very small.

Education Minister Steve Maharey says boys undoubtedly have trouble in areas such as literacy, but they are not failing overall.

Benton says the reason for boys not achieving as well as girls is largely due to the fact that boys are generally better at examinations than internal assessment. Also, NCEA is better suited to girls because they are more conscientious.

Furthermore, boys mature more slowly than girls.

"Their concentration isn't as great. They put things off to the last minute.

"When much of the assessment is based on deadline the suggestion is that boys are being penalised."

This is evident, he says, in the NZQA statistics for 17-year-olds (Year 13), where the gap between boys and girls narrows and the boys catch up.

"By Year 13, boys are much more inclined to sit down and write essays," Benton says.

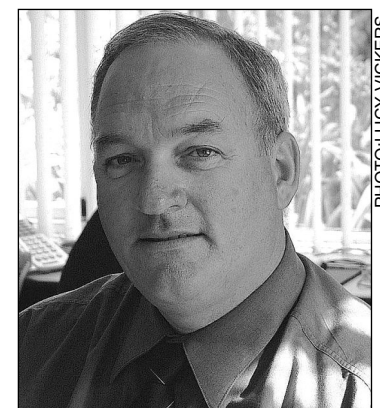


PHOTO: LUCY VICKERS

Ted Benton

Youth crime prevention programme getting ready to run nationwide

by Leisha Jones

Ten years on from its creation, a unique crime prevention programme for at-risk youth has evolved into a successful organisation which is taking its first step towards becoming nationwide.

TYLA, standing for "turn your life around", began in 1996 as a three-day programme at an Avondale school.

The programme currently covers six schools in the Mt Roskill and Avondale areas and accepts up to 30 students a year to be part of a one of a kind 42-week programme.

TYLA is run by police and social workers with the support of local businesses, government agencies and the TYLA charitable trust.

Chief executive of Saatchi & Saatchi Kevin Roberts, the trust's major benefactor, has been involved from the start and strongly supports the cause.

Philip Crowley, project manager at TYLA, says the programme would not be where it is today without Roberts.

"He is extremely passionate about the cause. Without his amazing support TYLA could not function."

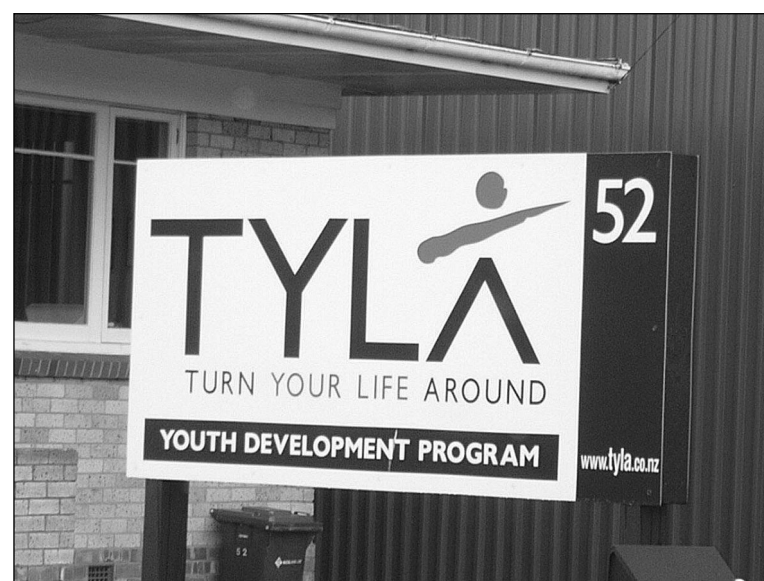


PHOTO: LEISHA JONES

Crowley says the programme is unique in its approach as it is integrated into the school programme and intervenes at year seven, targeting children who may be taking the wrong path.

"We are the defence at the top of the cliff," he says.

The programme begins with a week-long camp where youth are faced with a number of physical and mental challenges which enforce the "TYLA values" and encourage positive communication and decision making.

This is followed by weekly visits from social workers through-

out the year and students are encouraged to set goals and use the values they have been taught.

Once they have graduated from the 42-week course they continue to have regular visits from a social worker for the next four years.

Glenn Grey, resource teacher of learning and behaviour at Mt Roskill Intermediate, says that he has seen amazing results from the programme and that other schools around New Zealand will definitely benefit from TYLA.

AMAZING RESULTS: Kids take part in challenges enforcing the TYLA values.

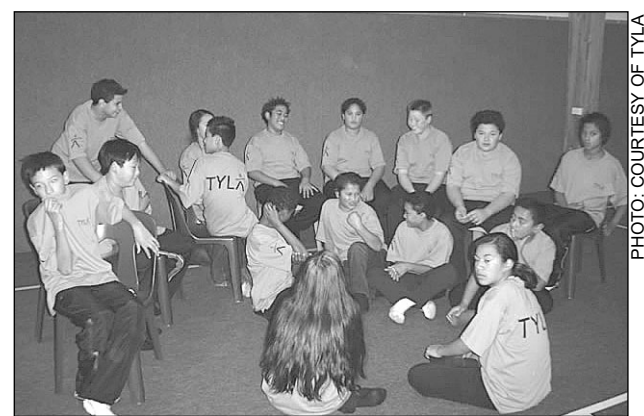


PHOTO: COURTESY OF TYLA

"Anything that encourages children to get outdoors and engage with people is good."

He says the programme is competing with a different environment than it was 10 years ago.

"Children are now more interested in X-Box, DVDs and the internet. All that stuff is one-way and children don't have to engage.

"A programme like TYLA means children have to step up and contribute. That's why it's successful."

Crowley says now that the Mt Roskill programme is well established they would like to "roll out one a year" in different areas.

"We are the blueprint to be

copied," he says.

TYLA Otara is soon to be launched and will be the first of many for other communities throughout New Zealand.

Senior sergeant Sarah Su of Otara police says the introduction of the TYLA programme is going to be a "time for celebration" in the Otara area.

"We have been waiting a long time for a programme like this and are really looking forward to implementing it."

Su says that the programme will be slightly tailored to suit the area, but that the principle will remain the same.

"We want to try to empower children to be their own person and make the right decisions."