

# having a go

Why Men Volunteer  
in Schools



### About This Publication

This booklet was developed by Ken Bright and Simone Silberburg of the Engaging Fathers Project at the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, as part of their work with fathers and male volunteers. A grant was provided by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (International Year of Volunteers, Small Grants Program) to assist with research and publication. The interviews were conducted by Ken Bright and the transcripts analysed by Simone Silberburg. Editorial assistance was provided by Antoinette Holm and Richard Fletcher. A full report of the interviews conducted is available through the Engaging Fathers Project. See contact details on back cover.

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## >>> **Volunteer men bring assets** >>>>>>

*Men who volunteer at schools bring with them a range of skills and qualities:*

### **The ability to relate to kids**

Well, I think being a younger man helps in visiting with Jake at the school, just because in terms of relating to him. I mean, Jake has a dad at home . . . but I'm more of like a big brother to him. We relate to each other, you know, I take my skateboard and he's right into skateboarding . . . (Les 23, Red Cross volunteer)

### **Communication skills**

I'm a good listener to the kids and we do reading things, but I ask the kids about their personal life . . . We have a talk before we start the lesson and we might talk for a minute or two, just to get them on side with me sort of thing. (Bruce, 47, school granddad)

### **Specific skills**

My knowledge of software, software applications—not so much games or internet, just more to do with software programs—what they will be needing at high school. (Mike, 47, school dad)

## > **What men get from Volunteering** >

*Men who volunteer in schools get the personal satisfaction of seeing a job well done, of seeing the smiles of children or of seeing children progress in reading.*

*They also gain a sense of being an important part of society, of making school an even better place for everyone.*

### **Experience working with kids**

... I think as a father who's raised two children. Any father would realise that having gone around once, they've learnt some valuable lessons, maybe they can use those lessons again. (Sean, 50, volunteer)

### **Commitment, patience and understanding**

... I'm a carpenter, a painter or a builder and that's not really what you need. All you need to have is patience and understanding with kids, and commitment to make a change in their [life].

(Ray, 40, school dad)



### **Personal satisfaction**

The benefits that I get out of it are high self-esteem, very much so. Makes me feel great. I'm on a high for days after. (Chris, 45, volunteer)

### **Kids enjoy having their father (volunteer) at school**

Children go, 'Is that your dad?' and, 'Yeah, that's my dad!' There is a lot of self-esteem and that comes back on the man ... and the children feel good about him being there. (Rod, 38, volunteer)

### **Making a difference to a kid's (school) life**

Well, I guess what I get out of going up to see Jake is ... that he looks forward to it every week. I mean ... he's a disadvantaged kid, he doesn't have a lot in his life ... the fact that you make just a little thing, a small difference, you know, he sees me coming and ... you can see he gets excited when I'm there. (Les, 23, Red Cross volunteer)

### ***A way of contributing to the community***

I feel that we have to take responsibility in the community for the young people and if that means being more active in the school, and that's a good way to be, good way to do it. (Sean, 50, volunteer)

### ***You discover that your kid is like any other kid***

You get a chance to be closer to your own kids, and you get a chance to find out what [makes] other kids tick. (Paul, 40, school dad)

### ***To help show that you find school important***

I thought that this would be a good opportunity for me to help [my son] out, to support him . . . If the parent isn't active in the school, the kid will think, 'Well, you don't think [school is] important. So why should I take it as an important thing?' (Ray, 40, school dad)



## **>>> Challenges for Volunteer men >>>**

*Being a male volunteer in a school environment brings challenges:*

### ***Having to be cautious when you interact with children***

One thing is just getting used to the sort of duty of care, like being a male and not really seeing myself as a man in a school . . . things like not going into the sports shed with him to get, like, stuff out. And he'd ask me why—he'd sort of like, 'Why can't you come in?' And I'd just go, 'I'll stand here and you get the stuff and you bring it out.' (Jack, 23, volunteer)

### ***Motivating kids***

Some kids show lack of interest, they would like to play games or things like that, or just don't pay attention to what I am trying to show them. (Mike, 47, school dad)

### ***Other parents worry***

The way they looked at me, not knowing who I am, 'Are the kids safe?' I think that's a big challenge to get over and to let parents know that their kids were safe around me. (Adam, 41, school dad)

## > **What men need to know about Volunteering in primary Schools** >

*The hard part about doing something that not many people have done before is being aware of the procedures involved, and the pitfalls.*

*Sometimes volunteer men don't know how rewarding volunteer work can be, or how hard.*

### **Initially, some kids may put up barriers**

He didn't know me, so he put up a lot of barriers then; but as we got to know one another that was overcome. (Rod, 38, volunteer)

### **The role you play when the child is getting into trouble**

For me, it was a challenge that my little person was getting into a fair bit of bother and he was telling me this and that. And I didn't know whether it was right or not. (Chris, 45, volunteer)

### **Walking through the gate the first time**

One main challenge was actually walking through the gate—was actually going through there. But after that, the second time of doing it, it sort of fell away. (Ray, 40, school dad)

### **You're a pioneer**

... You do sort of understand that the school is a bit of a woman's place, so being a man going in there you are a bit of a pioneer, you know, I think, in that way. (Ray, 40, school dad)

### **Once you give it a go, you will enjoy it**

And yeah, I mean just giving it a go, I suppose. Just getting up there and having a go, seeing how you like it, you know. I mean, there's no real obligation as long as you just try it out if you're interested in it. (Les, 23, Red Cross volunteer)

### **It gives you great personal satisfaction**

It doesn't matter if it's an hour or half-hour; it's being involved around other kids, knowing that the child is the same as your child. (Adam, 41, school dad)

### **Training in issues of duty of care are important**

It can be really basic and really brief but just a brief overview of ... some of the challenges you might come up against and some of the legal responsibilities you might face. (Les, 23, Red Cross volunteer)



# THE **ENGAGING FATHERS** PROJECT

An initiative of the Family Action Centre at  
The University of Newcastle

The Engaging Fathers Project promotes the wellbeing of children from 0 to 8 years of age by engaging fathers and father figures in the lives of their children. The project provides training, develops resources and conducts research, and works with schools, family services, antenatal and childcare services.

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