

## **Michael Morrissey's Graduation Speech 2010**

When I was asked to talk today about the impact the Graduate Diploma of Adolescent Health and Welfare has had on my personal and professional life, I found it hard to put into words. From the moment I started the course I found it to be a very challenging yet rewarding experience.

Personally, the course has satisfied my desire to learn more about the issues the young people I work with are facing. Before starting my career as a high school teacher, I worked briefly as a recreational youth worker for a large welfare based community agency in Bendigo, Victoria. This agency worked with youth who were no longer living with their families so were either in Foster care or agency-run youth housing. It was here that I first started working with young people who faced a multitude of issues and life challenges.

From that time on, I have always been keen to understand how and why these young people had ended up in the situation they found themselves in. It was obvious that these young people had not chosen to be in these situations and it seemed likely to me, even at this stage, that the young person's family life would have had a significant impact. But I willingly admitted to not having any real idea of what was going on in these young people's lives.

I then started teaching at a large rural secondary college in northern Victoria where I again found myself trying to deal with students who had been labeled 'at risk', and where I still felt completely out of my depth. It was at this stage I decided I wanted to study further so that I would be more able to help these students.

Through completing the Graduate Diploma in Adolescent Health and Welfare, I now feel I have a far greater understanding of the types of risk factors these young people would have faced and I feel far more confident helping such young people. The whole concept of both risk and protective factors was something that immediately helped me to better understand many of the situations I had encountered whilst working in Bendigo and in my first few years of teaching.

Professionally, the course has helped me identify issues with my students and given me the skills and confidence to deal with many of these issues myself. Being a rural community, confidential youth services are often not as easily accessible for our students, particularly for those who live out of town on farms. The course has not only given me the expertise to help many of these students but also the knowledge of other services in the community and online that I can refer my students to when they need help.

Through gaining these skills I have also gained a new position within my school where I am responsible for the welfare, discipline and academic progress of approximately 275 students. I often see the welfare side of my role as similar to that of a triage nurse, in that I need to deal with the problem in the short term until I can get the person to an expert in that particular field.

This postgraduate course has given me the knowledge and skills to undertake this role effectively and with confidence.

The course has not only helped me to better understand the young people I work with, but also their parents and the types of issues they are likely to be facing in some of the communities in which they live. I now find it much easier to deal with parents, and I am making much stronger relationships with these parents which in turn is helping the students as they feel more connected to the school.

The skills I have gained have also allowed me to assist other staff who are having difficulty with particular students and I now work very closely with the welfare team offering assistance when needed.

Overall the course has been fantastic and has significantly improved my life.

Thanks,

Michael Morrissey  
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