

# Boy, it's tough growing up

by ADRIENNE HUBER

WHAT a pity we spend so much time deciding how deficient boys are compared to girls and how deficient and unfair teachers and schools are to boys.

What this must do for the self-esteem and overall confidence of boys individually and collectively! What I have read about girls is that they seem to be finding their way through the pre tertiary (and maybe tertiary) education maze, but I'm not so sure.

How confusing for girls who supposedly do so well at school only to find the "better" jobs go to males who "failed" at school. What is this saying to all of us? Very mixed messages. Should we abandon schools? It seems boys get by nicely "without" whatever they do not have that girls do "have". That is, if they make it to adulthood and haven't become a suicide statistic first. I suspect girls grin sweetly and bear it with the aid of psychotropic and other drugs to blur it all out of their minds or developing eating disorders instead

of acting out in obvious attention getting physical ways as boys frequently do.

How much more constructive to speak of ways in which schools support both boys' and girls' learning by being mindful of them as people who are individuals within a community and culture.

Parts of the following are extracts from of an article of mine published in the UK's National Literacy Trust journal *Literacy Today* in September 2000. You can find the entire article at [www.yearofreading.org.uk/Pubs/huber.html](http://www.yearofreading.org.uk/Pubs/huber.html)

In this article I describe eight (quite by coincidence four boys and four girls) children's developing literacy. Their journeys are most interesting as the first three were not identified as experiencing any difficulties developing literacy while the last five were. Yet their journeys to literacy all share something in common. The adults in their lives held particular views about each of these children as people – not boys or girls – but people... people who were either could or could

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Comparing boys and girls can only undermine self-esteem

## Reaching out to young people in rural and regional Australia

Advertising feature

Reach out and touch my heart  
Reach out and touch my hope  
Reach out and touch my mind

Touch my hand so I may write a wonder  
Touch my heart so I may have a voice  
Touch my hope so I may be more courageous  
Touch my mind so I may know what to do for a friend

You help people when they are down  
You make them smile not frown  
You go from town to town

You go to all the schools  
And show them your web-site  
Everyone thinks it rules  
REACH OUT!  
'Sally', RORRT, Gnowangerup, WA

The Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour (RORRT) has played a vital role in increasing awareness of Reach Out! in young people like Sally, as well as in service providers living in rural and regional Australia. When the Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour (RORRT) began in 1999 it was in response to the need to do something in rural Australia where overall suicide rates were twice as high and Internet access far more limited than in the cities. That was when the idea to take Reach Out! on tour was born.

Reach Out! – [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) – is a service that uses the internet to help young people get through tough times. The Inspire

Foundation, the organisation behind Reach Out!, developed the service to inspire young people to help themselves by providing them with access to important information, stories, contacts and suggestions on a whole range of issues facing young people today, in an environment that is fun, interactive and engaging.

The Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour promotes the benefits of using the Internet to link up young people with those who can support them as well as providing a positive profile of young people by building a local community website.

The RORRT has four key objectives which focus on promoting positive mental health outcomes for young people in rural and regional areas:

1. To capture and share positive experiences of young people in rural and regional Australia
2. To promote help-seeking behaviour and coping skills via the promotion of local services and the Reach Out! Service
3. To assist and enhance existing community networks to better support their youth
4. To promote 'Net Social Benefits' – the use of the Internet as a valuable tool for the delivery of social services.

So far the RORRT has toured NSW, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia, engaging with over 23,000 young people, in 280 schools, in over 230 towns. These young people have been profiled on 263 town websites which can be accessed via the Reach Out! website ([www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)).



The next stop on the RORRT is Victoria with the consultative phase of the tour kicking off on August 6, 2001. During this phase, the RORRT team will visit 15 regional centres to meet with local youth service providers, teachers, principals, school counsellors and youth advisory councils who will help determine youth issues and gauge interest in the RORRT. Smaller local communities will also be invited to attend these regional meetings to identify events and provide direction for the formal leg of the RORRT visit.

The formal phase of the Victorian RORRT is scheduled to commence in late August for a period of 12 weeks. This phase of the tour will consist of a series of presentations, mostly in schools in rural and regional towns, letting young people know about Reach Out! and how they can access local help services.

This part of the tour provides an excellent opportunity for local service providers to introduce themselves to young people in schools and promote their service:

"I think it was really good because it allowed us to get into the schools...it was more difficult for us to get into the school before and RORRT was a great way for us to be able to promote our service to the young people there." (Rural youth worker, Anglicare, QLD)

For each town visited during the formal phase of the tour, the RORRT team will build a website to profile young people and the towns

they live in with interviews, stories, artwork, poetry and images. As a result, the RORRT has already had a huge impact on the lives of young people living in remote areas:

"Seeing their images and art and stuff was probably the strongest thing in the whole site...The kids were just queuing up to have a look and a listen. That was really powerful stuff...genuinely a really motivation thing that was good for them." (Mental health worker, QLD)

You can help the Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour work with communities to promote positive mental health for young people living in rural and regional areas. If you are a teacher, principal or school counsellor in a rural or regional school in Victoria then you can help us determine key issues for young people living in those areas and also tell us which schools you think the RORRT should visit in your area. If the RORRT has already visited the students at your school then we would love to hear about the impact you think the tour has had in your community.

**For further information about the RORRT contact**  
**Kylie Lee, RORRT Manager, (in the office) 61 2 9818 3055 (on the road) 0419 434 178 (email)**  
**[kylie@inspire.org.au](mailto:kylie@inspire.org.au), or check out the Reach Out! site at [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au).**