

High school entry #20: Warners Bay High School



The Bay Watch



WISDOM: Sharon Cowcher and her granddaughter Chelsea Cowcher.

Grandmother puts her view on teenagers

By ELISHA AMOS

MRS Sharon Cowcher, grandmother of Warners Bay High School student Chelsea Cowcher, visited the school in August to talk about changing worlds, a topic being studied in English and history.

She was asked if she thought teenagers had changed since the late 1940s.

"In my day you had more freedom, you knew you were safe, you were able to walk the streets alone," Mrs Cowcher said. "Today kids aren't as independent, there is more fear and more perceived threats."

"The media is a very strong influence on today's teenagers and the opinions the general community have of young people."

"The news gives a negative view of teenagers; you could say the media creates some of the fear and negative stereotypes."

Mrs Cowcher commented on the story of Corey Worthington, the Sydney teenager who hosted a party while his parents were on holiday.

"He made some mistakes and took matters into his own hands and the media blew this out of proportion; they even encouraged his unacceptable behaviour," Mrs Cowcher said.

She believes many teenagers are subjected to making risky decisions and that the choices they make come back to parental values.

"You must give teenagers rules and boundaries to keep them safe and prevent them from getting into trouble."

Understanding audience

By GEORGIA MONAGHAN

WHEN Warners Bay High School students had an opportunity in August to study the work of Australian author Scott Monk, they did not realise that within a short time correspondence would open up between them and the author.

Mr Monk has bridged the generation gap to try to understand the teenage psyche and used his findings to write books that appeal to reluctant teen readers.

The author and journalist has received multiple awards and had one of his young adult novels, *Rauv*, listed for study on the 2001 HSC curriculum.

Mr Monk said that his own teenage experiences had influenced his view of contemporary teenagers and their reactions to other generations.

Like many adults, he admits his teenage years were "comfortable but boring".

He struggled with the same universal issues many teens experience today: peer pressure, difficulties with the opposite sex, family and self-discovery; experiences that inspired him to write about teenage issues.

Mr Monk said that as a teenager he was a reluctant reader but he realised his strength was in writing.

His own reluctance to read inspired him to write books that



INSIGHT: Author Scott Monk tries to write books that appeal to teenagers.

appealed to teenagers and to make the 'chore' of reading less tedious.

By writing action-packed stories filled with appealing teenage characters and real-life situations, Mr Monk has made a strong connection with his audience and lured them into reading.

"I guess most adults remember what our own teen years were

like and try to forget how hard it really was to survive," Mr Monk said.

He believes teenagers are misunderstood to a degree by society, as the media constructs many negative teenage stereotypes that influence people's views.

Mr Monk believes teenagers have the choice not to conform to

those stereotypes and that this is a generation "that should be one of the brightest we've ever had".

"Young people can create their own identities," Mr Monk said.

Last month Mr Monk signed a contract for his fifth book and his first adventure story. The novel for teens will be released in late 2009.



BELIEF: Dr Sharon Parkes believes teenagers are unfairly portrayed. — Picture by Courtney White

Positive power of youth

By MELISSA IND, LAURA SCULLY and LAURA BURTON

WARNERS Bay High School principal Dr Sharon Parkes says she has been privileged to witness the numerous successes of her students, citing 2007 school captain Patrick Fisher.

Patrick was the regional winner of the Rostrum

public-speaking event.

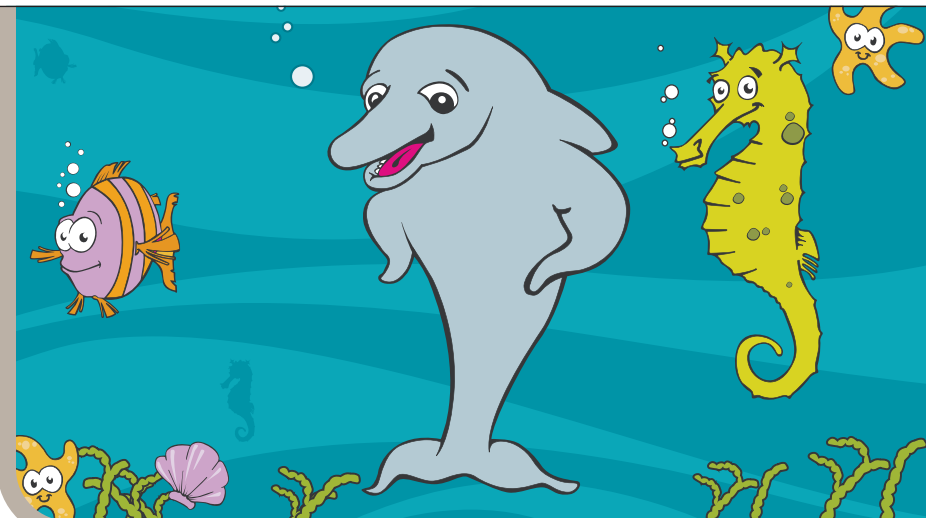
His HSC artwork, a series of sculptures and paintings exploring the perception of women in modern Australia, was selected for the prestigious 2008 Art Express Exhibition.

Dr Parkes said that such successes were due to "teenagers being more globally aware, sensitive to social issues and more likely

to challenge the status quo".

Dr Parkes recognises that high school years are some of the most challenging in an individual's life, with pressures from teachers and parents about the importance of achieving in the HSC.

She believes the media is quick to criticise teenagers, rather than "look at the positives in these young adults".



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Youth deserve a fair go from media

Editorial

By ROMANY MCGUFFOG and JOSH GANI

PAST generations tend to believe their teenage years were safer, more affordable, balanced and without temptation. They worked harder, were never idle and almost always played by the rules.

But some fail to remember that they also experienced some of the same issues faced by the 21st-century teenager: peer pressure, family complications and the temptation of alcohol and drugs.

What has changed is the onslaught of communication, the persuasive power of the media and the gullibility of the minority to believe blanket generalisations.

There is a huge amount of research on generation Y (teens born from 1982 to 2000), binge-drinking, drugs, pregnancies, academic performance, car crashes and suicide. The results are often gloomy and some media outlets leap on these statistics.

But is this really the story of today's teens? Compare this pessimistic data to the research of social researchers such as the Parenting Research Centre which reports that the majority of teenagers are well-balanced, hard-working, fun-loving human beings attempting to come to terms with responsibilities, commitments, major decisions and a fast-paced world.

Are we as a society fascinated by the negative story, willing to believe in stereotypes and reluctant to look for the good in the generation that will eventually become the future leaders of Australia?

Scott Monk, author and journalist, says society seems to place teenagers into two categories. "There's the ultra-bright, high-achiever or the chain-smoking, foul-mouthed kids who hoon around tabloid television."

Is this how the community views today's young people? Or is this message delivered by media outlets looking for ratings and sales?

Today's teens are growing up in a world where many full-time employment opportunities have been replaced by short-term contracts, where qualifications are almost mandatory and keeping pace with technology is a prerequisite. Some could argue that generation Y may even have it harder than teens of the past.

Young people cannot be stereotyped. Just as generation X and the Baby Boomers had their share of rebellious teens, so too do today's youth. The only difference is that past generations could hide their difficulties. In a world driven by sensationalism and media encroachment, today's teens have nowhere to hide.

If positive stories balanced the negative articles, the community could make an informed appraisal of teenagers. They would recognise that the majority of teens are optimistic. That they have dreams and desires not too different to past youth.



IN A SPIN: Warners Bay students, clockwise from bottom left, Elliot Rowney, Gabby Zimmerman, Nedeana Suba, Cameron Schmidt, Maddi Bennett, Briana Attala and Caitlin King. — Picture by Mason Bohatko

Tackling big issues head on

By CAITLIN ROGERS

WARNERS Bay High School students have participated in a month-long correspondence with officers from the NSW Police Force and set up a forum to debate issues faced by teenagers.

"The majority of today's teenagers are still respectful, however I believe today's teenagers are not as respectful as in the past to persons in authority," according to Senior Sergeant Kenneth Jury, of Belmont station, a member of the force for more than 26 years.

He said he believed teenage crime had increased but not drastically. "A number of factors that have

contributed to this increase are a larger population of kids and the breakdown of families.

"Teenagers are constantly confronted with drugs, pressure from peers and parents and media images of perfection."

The issue of teenage crime was discussed with a group of eight senior students with an average age of 17. They believe that teenage serial offenders create stereotypes that affect the entire teen population.

The majority of students suggested lenient sentences were wrong for teens who continually flout the law.

"Some teenagers know they will be dealt with 'easier' than an adult of 18," a female student said.

Asking for the views of older people

By ABBEY BROMLEY and SUSANNAH FULLER

WITH many complaints about the behaviour of teenagers, particularly at shopping centres and malls, Warners Bay High School students have visited a local shopping centre to get the opinions of the businesses and local community.

The results may surprise even the most cynical.

Mr O'Brien, of Warners Bay Amcal Chemist, said he believed teenagers were good, generally nice and well behaved.

That teenagers have greater freedom than in the past was a concern to some people but this was contrasted by positive comments about time spent on sporting pursuits, part-time employment and attitude.

A number of community members commented on the amount of responsibility today's teenagers have compared to the past.

Local resident Mrs Susan Buxton said teenagers were perfectly well-mannered and had a lot more on their plate than past teens.

Some people interviewed commented on the role of the media and its influence on society's perceptions of young people.

Mr Smith, manager of Warners Bay Butchers, said the media only delivers bad stories about teenagers and leaves the good ones out.

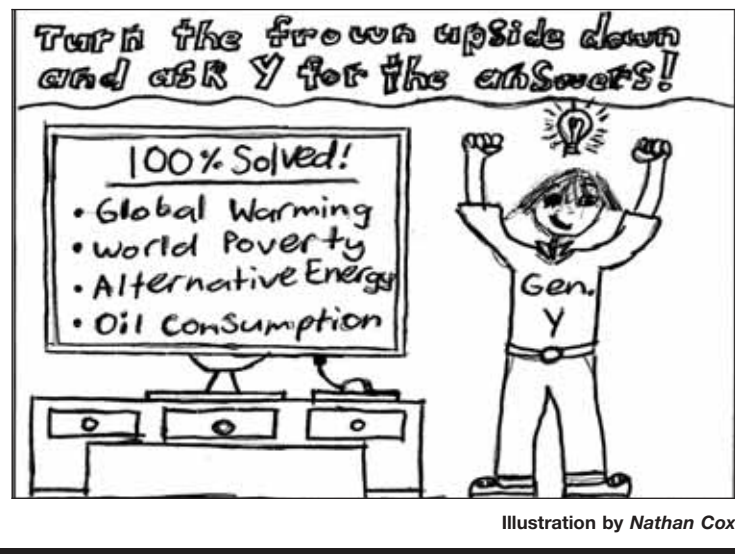


Illustration by Nathan Cox

Karate kid knows how to keep it all together

By ROMANY MCGUFFOG

WARNERS Bay High School student Viktoria Crouch is balancing a part-time job, Year 12 HSC studies and her sport of karate.

In August, 2007, Viktoria was the youngest competitor to represent Australia at the chito-ryu karate world championships, winning gold.

Viktoria has proven herself to be one of the country's top martial artists, winning gold, silver and bronze awards in the

past four years at Australian national championships.

"I know I can manage it all," Viktoria said.

"Even the karate world titles at last year's Soke Cup in Norway.

"It hasn't been easy but with the support of my mum, family and friends, I believe I can have it all.

"The only change I will be making is to become more organised with my time."

Viktoria believes sport helps her balance academic and personal goals.



SUPPORT: Viktoria Crouch at karate with her mother Mrs Kae-Narelle Reeves.

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