



*Lawyer leads charge to equip children in battle against drugs*

# Toowoomba man aims to help kids help themselves



**BIGREAD**  
 with Merryl Miller  
 merryl.miller  
 @thechronicle.com.au

LET the record show: Adair Donaldson is no wowser.

This is a man who enjoys a drink, who hints at some pretty good times during his own university years, who shudders at the term "moral crusader".

But Adair is also the man at the forefront of a program which shows great potential for curbing dangerous behaviours among teenagers (as either victim or perpetrator) including alcohol or drug abuse, and sexual or physical assault.

Called *Putting Youth in the Picture*, it is now being used in 85 Queensland schools (with another 90 pending), and has featured on media across the country including the ABC show *Four Corners*.

In the wake of the Matty Johns affair, its message rang across Australia loud and clear.

"I am not a moral crusader – there are enough of those around already," Adair says.

"This is not about judging people, but

accepting them. It's not moralising or scare-mongering, but about showing the reality and consequences of certain decisions.

"We don't preach abstinence (except when it comes to drugs), we don't tell teenagers they shouldn't have fun.

"What *Putting Youth in the Picture* does is make people more aware."

Adair first felt the call to do something after facing far too many kids in trouble and their parents in his legal office in Toowoomba.

These were often good kids who would pay big prices for bad decisions; decisions which had life-altering consequences for the teenager and for which the community would pay dearly in terms of legal costs, court costs and compensation costs.

"It has been a long journey, which began in April 2007," he says.

"Around that time I found a booklet in my letterbox called *Talking with your kids about drugs*, a federal government campaign which cost \$47million. Yet every parent I knew just threw it in the bin.

"So I called local school principals together, and suggested that we could create something better.

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►Toowoomba lawyer Adair Donaldson is waging a campaign to help prevent harmful teenage behaviour. The key to its success, he believes, lies in parent solidarity. The program he developed 'Putting Youth in the Picture' has already received significant interest across Australia.  
Picture: NEV MADSEN



►Programs such as 'Putting Youth in the Picture' might prevent teenagers from engaging in risky behaviours such as those evidenced at Schoolies Week.  
Picture: AAP IMAGES

“Yes, success is hard to measure, but if just one person thinks twice about taking drugs as a result of this program, then you are ahead in terms of the tangible costs.”

— Adair Donaldson



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“The support I had from schools and the police was tremendous.”

The result?

A hard-hitting series of video scenes with appealing characters, using the approach made famous by Geoffrey Robertson on his *Hypothetical* series.

It was interactive, it was realistic, and it created a sense of solidarity among stakeholders.

“It was important to get parents talking and create that solidarity – was it Barack Obama who said ‘let’s start a conversation,’” Adair says.

“In our first session we had 1200 kids, and it was then we realised that we were onto something.”

Lobbying followed to obtain government support, but while all agencies were enthusiastic, no funding was forthcoming.

“We then decided to do it ourselves – it was important and we weren’t prepared to give up,” Adair says.

“Both myself and my legal partner Peter Shannon have invested significant time and money into this project. I have four boys myself aged from three years up to eight, and I’ve got to say I sometimes have trouble handling them now! I can only imagine what it will be like when they are teenagers, so I wanted to see something in place.

“And it has to be something that works – because I don’t want it to fail with my own boys.”

*Putting Youth in the Picture* was officially launched in October 2008, and its subsequent success has been principally via word of mouth.

The package contains 12 modules which

are flexible and can be taught over time at the teacher’s discretion.

An independent review rates the material highly, as do parents and students.

“Our website has received 600 hits per month – there is a hell of a lot of interest,” Adair says.”

“This is a program which can bring about change for young people, and I am confident it will.

“Yes, success is hard to measure, but if just one person thinks twice about taking drugs as a result of this program, then you are ahead in terms of the tangible costs.

“I base my confidence on having stood before young people and their parents, and hearing their feedback.

“Families are talking. That’s success.”

While he is reluctant to speak publicly on the monster that is Schoolies Week – among the riskiest of times for teenagers – Adair has ventured into the lion’s den, spending time at the event last year.

The experience crystallised his thinking on the information young people most need in situations where good decision making may be thwarted, and reinforced his determination to make a difference.

“Most information that students receive about Schoolies’ Week is given to them the week before the event, when it is too late,” he says.

“*The Putting Youth in the Picture* program is delivered over time, and is focused not on peer group pressure, but on peer group support.

“Friends are the ones who can make all the difference.”

Adair was contacted recently by the

Drinkwise organisation, offering his program support for a pilot program to evaluate parental feedback.

He has since given a presentation to 120 parents in Toowoomba, and has similar sessions scheduled for across Queensland and New South Wales.

The message to come through clearly from the first session was that “parents just didn’t know” either the sorts of risks their children faced, the consequences of poor decisions, or their own legal rights.

Getting parents on side is of paramount importance – as is perpetuating many of the messages of other government campaigns.

“I would like the government to really sit up and take notice of what we’re doing,” Adair says.

“They spend heaps of money on various campaigns to protect teenagers, yet we have combined it all into one resource.

“All government reports into this issue promote being interactive, early intervention and harm minimisation – which is what our program does.

“This can work.

“Above all else, in two years time I would love to see the *Putting Youth in the Picture* resource available in every school, every sporting club, and every employer in Australia.” Adair Donaldson will be the guest speaker at a session entitled *Putting Parents in the Picture* hosted by Drinkwise on Tuesday July 21 at 7pm at the Scots PGC Assembly Hall, 60 Oxenham Street, Warwick. Entry is free, but participants need to register their attendance by phoning 07 4659 9277 or via the web [www.puttingyouinthepicture.com/form.html](http://www.puttingyouinthepicture.com/form.html)