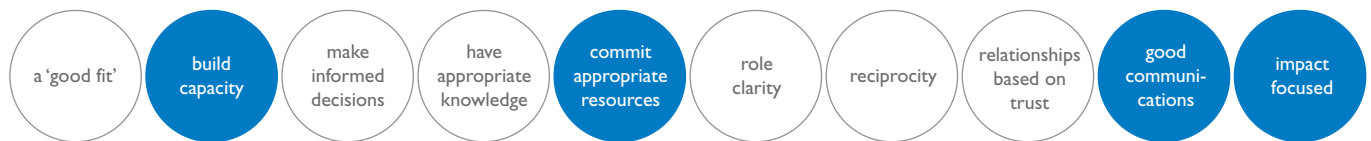


Case 6: Stonnington Primary School

(Philanthropic grant to a not-for-profit for a program with schools)



Priority areas: student engagement; literacy and numeracy; student wellbeing; parents

About the Support Project

Stonnington Primary School (SPS) has a student population of almost 200, with a diverse cultural and socio-economic mix. The school places a high priority on student wellbeing to facilitate high learning outcomes. Ardoch programs at SPS were developed in partnership with the school and include:

- ▶ Trained community volunteers providing learning and wellbeing support in classrooms
- ▶ Literacy Buddies (penpal) program for students in Grades 5 & 6 with corporate volunteers
- ▶ Lunchtime activities to support SPS students to overcome isolation and develop social skills, led by local secondary school students
- ▶ Healthy Eating program
- ▶ Family support work to encourage parental engagement at the school, as well as support parents with material aid.

The Ardoch Program at SPS received one year of funding in 2011 from The Ian Potter Foundation to support the costs of an onsite Program Coordinator.

To learn more, visit: <http://stonningtonps.vic.edu.au>

About the Ardoch Youth Foundation

The Ardoch Youth Foundation is a not for profit organisation that works nationally to make education a reality for children and young people. The Foundation has been supporting young people since 1988. They link schools, corporate organisations and communities, generating resources to support and facilitate projects that assist young people and their families, including those experiencing disadvantage, to be in school.

Ardoch believes that education provides the means for creating options and choices in life. The Ardoch Primary School Support Project is a community development project, which develops holistic early intervention and prevention programs at primary schools.

To learn more, visit: <http://www.ardoch.asn.au>

What we discovered

Build capacity and commit appropriate resources – Volunteer programs are not ‘free’ – we have to grapple with that idea – there are still oncosts, administrative costs and time costs to be considered.

Good communications –

- ▶ Communications need to be reviewed and need to allow for such things as leadership changes (e.g. a new principal) – don't assume that the new person will know about your program and how it functions. Communication needs to be continuous and flexible.
- ▶ Communication processes don't need to be formalised, but they do need to be open and ongoing.

Impact –

- ▶ Formalised processes can be implemented to help capture qualitative data (i.e. templates for volunteers to use).
- ▶ Volunteers need to have some direction and guidance – they want to see the difference they might make.

Build capacity and commit appropriate resources

The central vehicle for building capacity in the Ardoch Youth Foundation (Ardoch) and Stonnington Primary School (SPS) relationship is the body of volunteers that Ardoch sources and trains. Anne McPhee, Principal at SPS described the relationship with Ardoch as a 'two-way street' – with the school, Ardoch and Ardoch's volunteers

There can be multiple beneficiaries in any one program, not just the intended target group. Program supporters and volunteers, for example, can learn a lot from their involvement.

all benefitting from the program and building their own capacity in the process. For the school, volunteer support helps 'school staff to implement small group and individual learning activities; the Ardoch volunteers themselves gain huge

benefits from the program, both in terms of personal satisfaction – the opportunity to 'pay it forward' - and the learning experience and community connections that come from working in an educational environment within identified areas of need. For Ardoch, SPS provides an opportunity to consider and model how programs can be developed in partnership, embedded and then devolved to the school. In essence, this involves moving the partnership into a cluster model of engagement; reducing Ardoch's physical presence in the school and handing over elements of the program for the school to take forward. For The Ian Potter Foundation, which has provided funding to Ardoch, one of the benefits of this not-for-profit's model, says Senior Program Manager, Caitriona Fay, is their "track record of moving programs into the fabric of the school".

If circumstances change be prepared to review and adjust your program and resources accordingly.

To provide some background, Ardoch have been involved with SPS for more than ten years (pre-dating Anne's time at the school). However, the nature of the programs implemented over those years had changed to reflect a shifting demographic in the school. Anne commented that the school was obviously still involved with Ardoch and still referred families to their support services, but that the need had 'dropped'. In addition to the programs implemented at SPS, in 2011 Ardoch directed one year of funding – received from The Ian Potter Foundation – toward establishing a Program Coordinator position located on site at SPS for two days

a week. With the funding now expended and no budget capacity to continue the role, SPS are in a 'transition phase', with two of their teachers taking on the role of managing Ardoch volunteers (approximately twenty in total).

Anne explained that this is not new for teachers, who often manage work placements and volunteer parents in class. Managing Ardoch volunteers, however, brings a new *element* and helps further build capacity in terms of the diversification of volunteers with whom teachers are working. For Ardoch, however, the transition from on site Program Coordinator to their cluster model (which involves approximately 12 schools in a 10 km radius supported by a 1.4 EFT program coordinator) is something new. In this respect, Judi Stanton from Ardoch explains, "we are eager to learn from the experiences at SPS to see how the transition works for both partners".

Work with your partner to determine how post-funding transition might be built into your planning.

Anne is optimistic about the transition and comments, "Of course, it's still early days and we know that there are always teething problems in new initiatives, but we think things should run ok. We have a timetable, but we have to be mindful that these coordinators are teachers not administrators, so there will be times of course when they are in class and unable to respond to calls or emails. The work also takes time away from their teaching".

For both SPS and Ardoch, this is very much a trial period and they plan to 'take stock' in the middle of the year to see how well the off site cluster coordinator and the SPS teachers are working together.

Working with volunteers is seen as a shared responsibility for the school and Ardoch. Any issues that may arise with a volunteer are treated on a case-by-case basis and might either be handled by

Volunteers are an important asset, but they too must understand and appreciate the environment in which they are working.

Anne as part of her role and duty of care, or placed in the hands of Ardoch staff for action: "We trust in Ardoch", says Anne, "we know that they have covered off on any issues relevant to volunteering, such as appropriate clearances and working with children checks." Anne highlights the importance of privacy issues where volunteers are concerned – ensuring that they are not talking about individual students outside the school. To overcome such issues, the school runs PD sessions, which volunteers may attend, to cover particular topics. Judi also explains that

Ardoch runs regular workshops and are implementing refresher training for their volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering for years, to ensure that they are have current understanding of such things as privacy and occupational health and safety.

“One of the challenges of working with volunteers in schools”, explains Anne “is in recognising that these are not ‘free’ resources; schools must still cover coordination and management costs to some degree”. This, says Anne, “can often be overlooked by philanthropics who don’t understand the intensity and demands of the school environment or their many other accountabilities”.

Good communications

When Anne first arrived at SPS, she admits that she didn’t have a full understanding of the Ardoch programs and how they functioned in the school.

Another concern for Anne, who notes she likes to work with a structured approach, was not knowing when the on site Program Coordinator would be at the school: “I understand of course the need for flexibility, but I found this a real challenge.” Judi adds that Ardoch has learned from this that “We need to increase our communications and explain who we are and what we are doing when there is a change of leadership”.

Anne also noted that later in her first year at the school, there were misunderstandings around the continuation of the Ardoch program and the funding needed. Initially, she thought the school was being asked to find \$35,000. Anne was a little confronted by this. However, after some discussion it was established that there was a funding gap that meant it would not be possible to continue the

program in its current form; both partners would need to re-evaluate the support required.

Despite these communication difficulties, Anne says that overall communication with Ardoch has been pretty good. “I don’t believe there is a formalised communication plan, I don’t think there needs to be. Communication is not a big deal; it just happens because we have a comfortable relationship with Ardoch.”

Communication does not need to be formalised in a plan, but it should be clear and open.

Impact

Judi explains that the initial interaction with a school involves a needs assessment, planning and appropriate matching of programs, volunteers and resources to meet those needs. The needs assessment is reviewed on an annual basis.

To understand how the program is having an impact or adding value, Anne explains that the school uses its student outcome data to look at any improvements for students gaining benefits from Ardoch programs. “We’re all here for learning improvement so that is obviously our goal. We still don’t have ‘hard core’ data, but what we do have provides us with some good indications of the value in the program.”

It may not always be easy to see how you might ‘measure’ impact, but use what data you have and explore opportunities to develop simple tools to capture the information you need.

A corporate volunteer works with students



One of the significant ways in which the school is seeking to ensure effective results is by emphasising the need for *directed* volunteering. Anne explains, “The volunteers are there to focus on student outcomes, not to be a child’s best friend. This is very important to us and we believe the volunteers need guidance and welcome the opportunity to see the difference they can make.”

Judi agreed, adding “volunteers don’t generally stay very long without this sort of direction”. To this end, one SPS teacher has created a volunteer template, which is completed by the volunteer after every session. These completed templates are useful tools for helping the teacher determine such things as levels of student engagement.

Judi explains that Ardoch are in the process of exploring new measures. “We value-add to what the school is already doing so there is some difficulty in teasing out what our impact is.” But Ardoch recognises that they, and the schools they work with, need to be able to demonstrate the impact of programs. Consequently, Ardoch are currently looking at what schools are measuring and any barriers to collecting relevant data. “It’s early days yet”, Judi continues, “but we are asking schools to provide us with de-identified data that we can correlate to Ardoch’s programs – we know that we can’t make direct causal claims, but with consistent data collection for all of our schools we may be able to see patterns of changes across and within schools.”

Anne concludes by stating that “when we are offered programs in our school, we must be absolutely clear what impact they will have on student learning outcomes and how we are going to measure impact”.

Ardoch and SPS are looking forward to continuing their partnership and working together to formally evaluate impact.