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Dear Minister

I refer to the Chief Ministers letter of 14 August 2007 in which he called for community and industry input to the ACT Government's 2008-09 Budget. He requested Menslink's views on appropriate strategies, directions and priorities for the ACT community.

Menslink has prepared the attached paper on new policy and funding directions for its Project Oriented School Mentoring program (POSM) as an input to your review.

Boys are not achieving well in schools across a broad spectrum of factors and a general decline in the performance of boys in the education system is now becoming obvious. Anti-social behaviour in boys is increasing, placing more boys 'at risk' and reinforcing negative pathways in learning and life choices. The increasing absence of men in many boys relationships and within the broad education system reinforces these trends.

There is scope to turn around these destructive pathways through participatory programs which target early intervention aimed at mentoring, relationship building and empowerment. This is the focus of Menslink's programs and, in particular, the POSM program which uses a strengths-based approach to develop resilience and socio-emotional capacities. A recent evaluation report shows that POSM program is proving to be highly successful in addressing the learning and social issues confronting boys 'at risk' during their primary school years.

There is now an opportunity for the ACT Government to act on the results of a recent POSM evaluation. A new Government initiative to grow POSM and integrate this program into the ACT education system can reverse negative pathways for boys and yield significant net benefits to the community.

Since the ACT Government's HealthPact 'seed' funding in 2004, funding for the POSM program has been provided largely by the Federal Government via the Attorney Generals National Community Crime Prevention Programme (NCCPP). However, now that the initial three year pilot period is nearing completion, there is a need for local funding responsibility to place the ACT component of the program on a more sustainable footing.

To achieve sustainability for ACT schools in the program, Menslink has been exploring funding pathways with local business organisations, the community and various non-government agencies, culminating with the St. George Bank Foundation and Bunnings becoming major supporters in the sustainability and expansion of POSM. However, an integral part of such a new funding strategy must be a partnership with the ACT Government and its key agencies and programs.

The POSM programme traverses various domains; mental health, education, community development and crime prevention and represents a genuine early identification and early

intervention approach. Therefore POSM is a holistic approach which addresses multiple objectives and priorities ('Support' and 'Transition') of the ACT Young Persons Plan.

We are eager to engage with the ACT Government on the above issues and possible funding pathways for this program. The attached paper may help to provide a starting point for this dialogue.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter and am happy to provide additional material and briefing should you require this. Due to the broad appeal of the POSM programme I have forwarded this proposal to the Ministers responsible for mental health, education, community development and crime prevention.

Yours sincerely

Glenn Cullen
CEO - Menslink

The Menslink Project Oriented School Mentoring Program (POSMM)

Summary

There is a serious and growing need to address the declining performance of boys in the education system. Boys are not achieving well in schools across a broad spectrum of factors. Anti-social behaviour in boys is increasing, placing more boys 'at risk' and reinforcing negative pathways in learning and life choices. The increasing absence of men in many boys' relationships and within the broad education system reinforces these trends. There is scope to turn around these destructive pathways through participatory programs which target early intervention aimed at mentoring, relationship building and empowerment. This is the focus of Menslink's programs and, in particular, the Project Oriented School Mentoring (POSMM) program which uses a strengths-based approach to develop resilience and socio-emotional capacities. POSM was introduced in the ACT as a trial in 2004 and evaluation shows significant positive results. There is now an opportunity for the Government to act on the results of the POSM evaluation. A new Government initiative to grow POSM and integrate this program into the ACT education system can reverse negative pathways for boys and yield significant net benefits to the community. This paper provides a proposal to address these issues.

Section 1 - Purpose

The Menslink¹ POSM program addresses the developmental, social and learning issues confronting boys 'at risk' during their primary school years. Evidence indicates that the program has enormous potential both as a 'stand alone' scheme as at present, within individual primary schools, but also as a program which is 'embedded' into and thus forms an integral part of, the 'formal' education system in the ACT and surrounding regions. The POSM program traverses various domains; mental health, education, community development and crime prevention and represents a genuine early identification and early intervention approach. Funding for the current POSM program will run out in June 2008 and Menslink has now developed the strategy below to modify and grow the program to meet the developmental needs which underpin positive educational outcomes for boys 'at risk' in the ACT. Therefore, providing a crucial social development mechanism that diverts boys from 'at risk' pathways and supports them in reaching their potential.

¹ Menslink provides mentoring and support programs for young men and boys. Main programs are: (a) Mentoring Young Men (MYM) which involves both one-on-one mentoring relationships and group activities, (b) Young Men's Support Network (YMSN) which assesses the needs of referred young men through life-coaching, capacity building, counselling and strength-based group work, (c) Project Oriented School Mentoring (POSMM) which helps to create opportunities for primary school boys 'at risk'. The organisation encourages male involvement, mentoring and leadership for young men to address issues of family breakdown, violence, low self confidence, learning difficulties and risk of self-harm and suicide.

The POSM Program

POSM is about creating opportunities that develop resilience and enhance engagement and connectedness to school. The program is for children and in particular, for boys, but with girls also benefiting from project-oriented mentoring. The emphasis is on boys 'at risk' in Grades 3-5 as the target group but boys and girls 'doing well' are also included. In addition, it is now clear that POSM is also for men, since it provides an important engagement point for men to re-connect with the school and local community, an important consideration for schools and education departments.

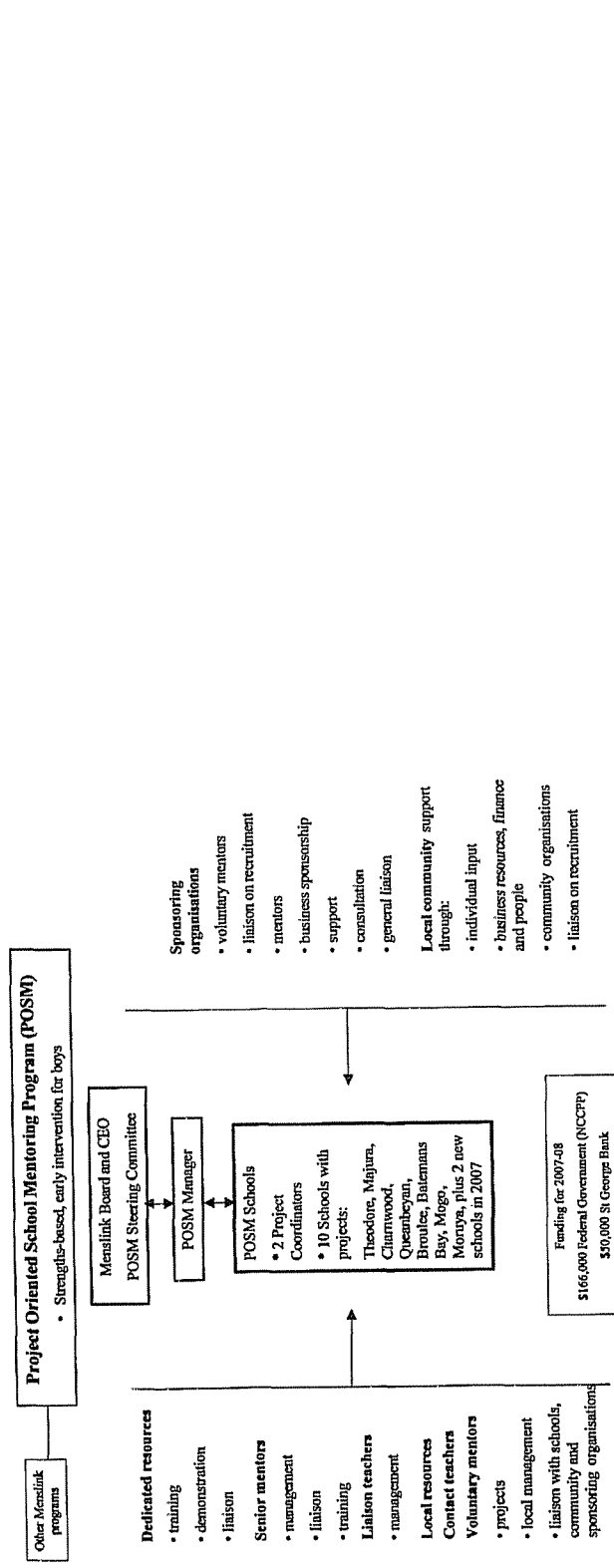
The program design is evidence based, using an early intervention, strengths-based approach – *project-oriented mentoring*. Boys are invited to contribute to their school environment resulting in a process that leads to greater inclusion, ownership and reflective learning. POSM is interactive and relationship building. POSM projects usually begin with a school vegetable garden, hen house, composting, native seedling nursery etc. Cornerstones are:

- **Social learning** – building relationships, and values of respect, caring and acknowledgment.
- **Skill development** – building of life skills, intellectual and physical capacity, and emotional and social balance.
- **Collective efficacy** – recognition and acknowledgement from multiple support networks i.e. family, peers, teachers
- **Mentors play a catalytic role**, helping to facilitate and guide, impart skills, validate children's experiences, and assist children to realise opportunities.

POSM Outcomes: At the *personal* level, students learn to learn, grow, succeed, care for others, build better relationships, acquire life skills and develop self-belief. At the *community* level, outcomes are greater male involvement, engagement of individuals and groups, increased safety and wellbeing, building of relationships and social capital, *collective affirmation of children, and the realisation of business and public opportunities.*

Children and boys in particular, 'at risk' in the ACT region are the primary beneficiaries through increased capacity to 'learn to learn', grow, succeed, care for others, build better relationships, work with new technologies and acquire life skills. Ensuring that these children find better pathways for life will directly benefit the *local families and communities*. Supporting agencies and organizations directly benefit through (a) exposure under the program (b) recognition of direct involvement to improve the welfare of local communities and (c) the strengthening of social and business networks in the ACT region.

Figure 1: Menslink POSM Program – present 'stand alone' model



Section 2 - The present POSM program

POSM commenced in 2004 with seed funding from HealthPact for one year, then followed by three years funding from the Federal Attorney General's Department's National Community Crime Protection Program (NCCPP). The program reached full capacity under current funding arrangements in 2007 with 7 primary schools in the ACT and region: Theodore, Charmwood, Majura, Queanbeyan, Broulee, Bateman's Bay and Moruya. Funding from the St George Bank Foundation has allowed Menslink to expand the program to include Mogo (South Coast) and a further two ACT schools to begin in term 1, 2008 being Higgins and Holt Primary Schools. This represents a strong commitment to the West Belconnen area of the ACT. Menslink staffing under this structure is: Ryan Harris (Program Manager), Darren Hocking (Project Coordinator-NSW) and Nick Slater (Project Coordinator-ACT).

The structure of the current program is shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 represents the 'stand alone' POSM Program in which individual schools 'in need' are brought into the Program as funding allows. Key features are:

- A POSM Manager who oversees the program and provides the interface between the Menslink management, the Project Coordinators and the school and local community

- **Two Project Coordinators**, covering 4-5 schools each, and who provide the leadership and guidance for individual school projects
- **Ten primary schools** in the ACT and Region each with a POSM project
- **A network of teachers, voluntary mentors and school liaison personnel** who provide the hands-on input at the project level
- **A network of sponsoring and involved organizations and business** which provide in-kind, financial and human resources at the individual project level
- **Local community support.**

Funding for the Canberra and Regional schools for 2007-08 is \$216,000 with \$166,000 of this coming from the AG's Department and \$50,000 coming from St George Bank. This represents around \$80,000 for administration and the salary of the POSM Manager, and around \$10-12,000 for each of the schools to cover school project costs and the salaries of two (part time) Project Coordinators. Current funding terminates in July 2008.

The need for early intervention programs for boys

For some time, Governments have been aware of declining standards in boys' education and participation in the school community. Research and public inquiries indicate that, in general, boys are not thriving in the modern school environment.²

In general, and compared with girls, boys are not achieving well in schools across a broad spectrum of factors, such as early literacy achievement, school retention rates, subject grades, suspensions and expulsion. For example, in 1981, girls NSW tertiary entrance scores were 0.6 marks higher than boys but by 1986 this gap had grown to 19.4 and is now widening further. In 2000, over 4% fewer Year 3 and Year 5 boys achieved the national benchmarks, than girls. Some 30% of boys in sole-parent families had low academic competence whereas only 17% of boys in a couple's family came under this category. In Year 5, over 40% of boys could not meet the writing standard compared with 26% of girls. Over 90% of juvenile offenders are male. Men tend to be absent in many boys relationships within the broad education system

As a result of these trends, antisocial behaviour in boys is increasing and this is placing more boys 'at risk' and reinforcing negative, destructive pathways in learning and life choices. Many boys are not now reaching their potential in life with a flow on impact on families and communities. These issues are addressed through Menslink's programs.

The evidence also shows that there is considerable scope for turning around these destructive pathways. In particular, this can be achieved through participatory and developmental approaches to anti-social behaviour and crime prevention for boys and

² Key reports are:

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2002) *Boys: Getting it Right. Report on the Inquiry into the education of boys*, October, <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ed/teob/index.htm>
 Martin, A. J. (2002) *Improving the Educational Outcomes of Boys*, Report to ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, December, http://www.decs.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/Ed_Outcomes_Boys.pdf
 Commonwealth of Australia (2003) *Meeting the Challenge: Guiding principles for success from the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools Program, Stage 1*, Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), www.dest.gov.au/YYW/successforboys.edu.au

young men, highlighting the social context, community networks, family support, and the participation of men as mentors and role models. Programs which target intervention early in the lifecycle and at critical transition stages in young people's development, and are aimed at mentoring, relationship building and empowerment, have been found to work well. This is the focus of Menslink's cutting edge programs and services.

There are no other similar projects being delivered in ACT and surrounding NSW communities. Other than the Menslink POSM program, there is presently no mechanism in the ACT and surrounding regions in NSW for holistically addressing the social, behavioural and learning issues noted above. POSM is therefore a new and innovative approach being trailed in the ACT and surrounding NSW region by Menslink with significant Federal Government support via the NCCPP.

Menslink is ideally suited to manage and guide new approaches to helping young men 'at risk' and Menslink programs are already focusing on this growing problem. Menslink programs have been found to be highly effective and relevant in this context. Menslink programs and services for mentoring and promoting the health, wellbeing, learning and social participation of young men, and for their support in issues such as violence, and family conflict, have been acclaimed.

The strengths-based approach used by Menslink allows boys maximum participation and independence. Menslink has strong linkages into both the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, and into regional communities and its programs enjoy wide support in the ACT and surrounding region. As a consequence, maximum opportunities are created for the building of social and economic networks and alliances. Involvement of the business community opens opportunities for participative technical, communications and managerial activities which in turn open new career pathways for boys.

Evaluation of the POSM program

A comprehensive evaluation plan produced in partnership with Menslink's evaluation partner, the University of Canberra, is providing important information on effectiveness of POSM and on appropriate directions for the future. An interim report³ was prepared by the university as an evaluator in April 2007 and this broadly shows that POSM has considerable potential to address the key issues in boys' education.

The 'process evaluation' model used aims to (a) facilitate reporting to funding partners and stakeholders, generate ongoing information to improve the program while it is in progress and (c) provide insight into new directions for POSM. Evaluation of the project is being carried out on an ongoing basis using measures such as action research, consultation, surveys, numbers of participants in the school POSM activities and events, numbers in the local community exposed to the project, and an informal feedback on awareness about the project.

While the recent evaluation was of an interim nature, there are strong indications that program objectives are being met. Mentoring and project practices are proving effective and sound models of governance, evaluation and reporting are in place. School projects have facilitated strong linkages to stakeholders and parents are expressing greater belief in and support of their children. The impact of POSM on improving the self image

³ University of Canberra (2007) *POSM Interim External Evaluator's Report*, Report to the Menslink Board, April.

and social skills of children is evident, teachers report better teamwork skills where POSM projects are in place and anti-social behaviour (as measured through reduced detention rates) appears to be declining.

The ongoing evaluation is part of a larger action research effort to document and analyse experiences from POSM. This will eventually provide the basis for further innovation and for revealing new ways to address learning and social issues for boys.

Section 3 - Development of the POSM program

The above issues in boys' education can be addressed by expanding POSM to become a broader Menslink program for early intervention for children in primary school education. POSM may be the basis of the 'embedded' model, or it could be one of a suite of initiatives that aim to engage boys.

Figure 2 provides a new vision for the POSM Program. The strategy is to transition from the present 'stand alone' POSM program in Figure 1, to a broader program which integrates and 'embeds' POSM into the education system for boys and the community generally.

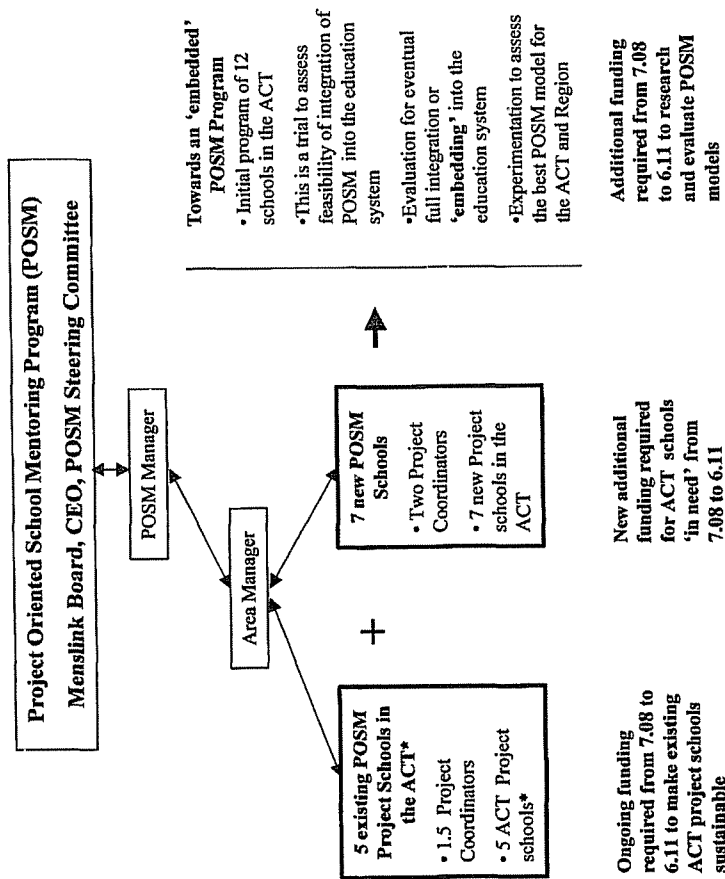
'Embedded POSM' - A Menslink project-oriented mentoring program which is integrated and embedded into the education system and the local community and which facilitates in-school, participative projects for boys and girls 'at risk' in Grades 3, 4 and 5.

This broader 'embedded' program would help to create and then protect sustainable change to address boys' social and education issues. Introduction of this initiative would have to involve key areas of government, the school system, the business sector and the community. NGOs servicing the education of primary school children should also be involved through networking and the sharing of program and human resources.

Key features of the 'embedded model' in Figure 2 would be:

- A **POSM Manager** who oversees the program and development of program strategy, and provides the interface with business and government partners
- **12 strategically identified primary schools** in the ACT each with a POSM project
- An **Area Manager** covering 10 schools each and providing the interface between Menslink management, the Project Coordinators and the school and local community
- **3.5 (part time) Project Coordinators**, covering individual schools, who provide the leadership and guidance for individual school projects
- A **network of teachers, voluntary mentors and liaison people** who provide the hands-on input at the project level
- A **network of sponsoring and involved organizations and business** which provide in-kind, financial and human resources at the individual project level
- **Local community support.**

Figure 2: Menslink POSM Program – transition to an ‘embedded’ model



* The 5 regional schools (in NSW) would continue and numbers would expand but under different, NSW funding arrangements

The embedded program should have: (a) a strong research and evaluation component, (b) funds to implement POSM, (c) funding to explore best practice in learning outside the formal teaching system to ensure boys do not fall behind in the formal education system, (d) funding to ‘embed’ other learning initiatives and (e) be part of an initiative to bring men back into our school communities by being the “best program in the world” at engaging men in school communities.

From Table 1, by 2010-11, funding for the 12 ACT schools for a full year period would be around \$320,000 sourced from federal and state government and business partners. Funding would represent around (a) \$80,000 for administration and the salary of the POSM Manager, (b) \$45,000 for the Area Manager, (c) around \$14,000 for each of the schools to cover salaries of the part time Project Coordinators and school project costs, and (d) \$70,000 over 3 years for research and evaluation.

Table 1: ACT funding over 3 years for the 'embedded' POSM program

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Existing POSM schools	10 (a)	5 (a)	9	12
New POSM schools (b)		4	3	
Total POSM schools	10	9	12	12
Program Manager	1	1	1	1
Area Manager		1	1	1
Project Coordinators (PC)	2	3	3.5	3.5
Budget (\$)				
Program Manager/ administration (\$)	80000	80000	80000	80000
Area Manager (\$)		45000	45000	45000
PCs and school project costs (\$)	136000	126000	168000	168000
R&D and evaluation (\$)		20000	30000	20000
Total budget (\$)	216000	271000	323000	313000

(a) The table is for ACT schools only. There are 5 POSM schools in the ACT. These would continue to be funded from ACT funding sources. The remaining 5 NSW schools would also continue but be funded separately from NSW funding sources.

(b) 4 new ACT schools would come into the program in 2008-09 and another 3 schools in 2009-10.

Partnerships for an embedded POSM

Other than Menslink programs, there appear to be few mechanisms for: (a) protecting and sustaining efforts to make structural changes in the ways in which boys are educated, (b) taking ideas for better boys' education and learning to a wider group in society, and (c) changing attitudes to boys' needs. The broader 'embedded' POSM program outlined above would help to create and then protect sustainable change to solve boys' social and education issues.

Significant progress has been made by Menslink to develop networks of stakeholders but more formal processes of negotiation and commitment are required. This must involve all levels of government, all levels in the school system, the business sector and all levels of the community. It also requires a coordinated approach across NGOs servicing the education of primary school children. To this end, Menslink is:

- (a) **developing partnerships with corporate and local businesses**, eg Menslink has current operational partnerships with all three ACT Bunnings stores providing staff as mentors, the St George Bank Foundation has contributed \$50,000 to expand the POSM model and Upmarket Constructions has contributed on an ongoing basis to mentoring.
- (b) **engaging with community organizations** such as Campbell Page (an employment agency currently piloting a 'work for the dole' program) and the University of Canberra (current evaluation partner).
- (c) **establishing potential funding partners** in government, such as state and territory education departments, the ACT Department of Housing and Community Services, the federal Family and Community Services Department and particularly their 'Mentor Marketplace' program, federal and state regional development departments, the Attorney General's Department, and so on.
- (d) **exploring options for diversified POSM projects** such as through the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation, Victoria.

Where to from here?

This proposal has painted a broad picture of *why* and *how* Project Oriented School Mentoring (POSM) works, however we would welcome the opportunity to present a more comprehensive picture of the program, including the theoretical underpinnings, their practical application, logistical considerations, evaluation trends and the breadth of support for the program from schools and community. Furthermore, we would like to extend an invitation to you to join us for a visit to one of the schools to see the POSM program in action.

I would like to reiterate that the POSM programme traverses various domains; mental health, education, community development and crime prevention and represents a genuine early identification and early intervention approach. Therefore POSM is a holistic approach which addresses multiple objectives and priorities ('Support' and 'Transition') of the ACT Young Persons Plan.

We are excited by the prospect of the ACT Government taking the initiative and demonstrating real leadership in supporting the wellbeing of boys, in particular in the area of education. This is a national issue which desperately needs strong leadership from the states and territories.

Menslink firmly believe the boys and young men of the ACT have a bright future and Project Oriented School Mentoring is a critical plank in assuring this is the case.

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