

**To: The Secretary
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
Inquiry into school closures and reform of the ACT education system**

31 March 2009

1.. The ACT Government's *Towards 2020* policy

Hall village is and historically has been, a service centre for the Hall district, most of which falls in NSW. The *Towards 2020* policy ignores this important fact.

The *Towards 2020* policy does not make ample education options for people who would prefer that their young children attend smaller rural schools.

2. The impact of school consolidation and closures

The closure of Hall Primary School has had significant impact on our family.

Our children were devastated by the closure of Hall Primary School, and suffered significant stress over the closure.

Our kindergarten student, who attended Hall Primary was severely traumatized by the loss of connections with her school friends, and the sense of belonging which came from attending a small, familiar and local school. She found starting a new school quite challenging, and took quite some time to settle and make friends.

Our pre-schooler, who attended Hall Pre-School and was to have started Hall Primary School in 2007 suffered quite badly. A very shy child who didn't make friends easily, he was devastated and completely overwhelmed to have to start kindergarten at a school where he did not know anyone. His shyness and the way he was perceived as different by other children due to his shy behaviour at his new school resulted in him being the victim of bullying and many tears were shed during his first year at school. We strongly believe this would not have happened had he attended Hall Primary School. He would have been much more confident starting school as he would have been starting kindergarten with many of his pre-school friends. In addition, he already knew a lot of the older children at the school. At Hall Preschool (which is located in the midst of the Hall Primary School playground), a high level of interaction between the pre-school and primary school students occurred and was encouraged, creating a strong sense of belonging and confidence, and making for a very smooth transition from pre-school to primary school. The closure of Hall Primary School denied our son this smooth and happy transition to school.

The closure of Hall Primary School has also impacted on our children's sense of belonging and safety in the community. We strongly believe that children should have friends in their own neighbourhood.

In order to attend a school with a smaller, intimate school community, our children now must be transported to school each day, along a busy and dangerous road. This car travel has environmental and economic costs to our family, and time spent travelling reduces amount of quality family time. With a toddler due to start school in 2012, we face 10 more years of this travel.

3. Community responses, including interest expressed by school communities to re-open schools listed for closure:

The *Towards 2020* policy does not consider the uniqueness of Hall village as a rural service centre, the heritage of the school, and the impact the closure of our school would have on our community. The social and economic impacts the closure of Hall Primary School has had upon the Hall village and district community should not be ignored.

Schools bring together communities, and this is particularly important in rural areas where distance disconnects people. Small rural schools instill in children a strong sense of belonging that comes with knowing you are part of a caring and supportive local community. A local school also provides people in our district with a reason to develop and maintain connections with their community, and patronize local small businesses.

We strongly believe Hall Primary School should re-open.

Yours sincerely

Anna & Craig Sheargold
PO Box 273
HALL ACT 2618
Ph: 6230 9555