

Sathya Sai U-turn Training School – Gympie

“The first human value is Truth. Truth lies in the harmony between thought, word and deed. Those whose thoughts, words and deeds are in perfect harmony are noble ones. This is the truth which great and noble souls have been teaching. Truth comes from one’s own heart.” Sathya Sai Baba

The Sathya Sai U-turn Training School was a “not for profit” programme that was totally free to participating students and was operated by volunteers. The programme was supported by the Sathya Sai Organisation of Australia and Papua New Guinea and was coordinated by the participants of Zone A – South East Queensland.

The training programme was based on Sathya Sai Education in Human Values Educare programme, manual skills and positive encouragement. The programme was suitable for male and female students aged 12 to 16 years who had been assessed by their schools as having special needs and required additional support.

The programme was underpinned each week by a simple self-examination activity and a discussion session which focused on five basic principles of Watch your Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character, and your Heart (W.A.T.C.H.).

Additional to this was Trust, which was their boundary and was measured at 100% initially. Their weekly actions were reflected in this score.

Silent sitting, storytelling and discussion were used to draw out the students’ awareness of their behaviour in relation to W.A.T.C.H. This awareness built to a daily experience and formed a foundation to develop Good Character and Self Confidence.

A range of craft, trade and life skills were supported and demonstrated by facilitators, mentors and volunteers. This group provided a mentorship relationship during the activities. The U-Turn School was committed to providing a quality service for the students and the community.

Our preference was not to teach but to instil human ethics into the minds and hearts of our students through enquiry, example, experimentation, awareness, discussion and the practice of these values in their daily lives. This allowed our students to understand that they had choices in their lives and that the important thing is not the end of the journey, but the time spent getting there.

The programme commenced in 2000 and ended in 2011 due to the retirement of many of the key programme leaders.

2000: The **W.A.T.C.H. programme** was first introduced at the Amamoor School of Arts as part of an Education in Human Values after-school programme for children. The programme started in 2000 and was operated by Cooran and Kybong Sai Groups until 2001, when it finished due to lack of students. This programme provided the basic skills required for working with children and developed a committed group of volunteers with similar interests.

2001: The **Mt Perry “Inward Bound” camps** provided an opportunity for the Cooran Group to carry out service activities with boys “at risk” in the school system. Part of the Inward Bound programme, which was organised by the Bundaberg Sai Group, involved “hands on” activities for the boys.

Doug Bettens, who is skilled in metalwork, chose blacksmithing as the property has a working blacksmith shop. Blacksmithing allowed Doug to communicate, discuss and exemplify the Five Human Values with the boys through the mystique of the fire, hot iron and the hammer. This connection became well known through the school network and led to a request from the Youth Development Office, Cooloola Shire Council who was looking for an adult to work with disadvantaged youth.

In the Tewanin Connection, Doug Bettens and Dot Hall introduced the W.A.T.C.H. programme into the Tewanin State School as an alternative option for students who did not participate in the school’s religious education programme.

The Gympie Connection was started by Doug Bettens and the Cooloola Youth Development Unit at Wood Works Museum, and where a programme was conducted based on the Mt Perry experience. Blacksmithing was the main activity, carried out in the Blacksmith shop. W.A.T.C.H. and Trust values were set as the training boundaries for the students. Doug and John were very happy with the new arrangements.

The Caloundra Connection started when Doug Bettens was contacted about being involved with a workshop about values to be held by Caloundra TAFE. It was decided to trial W.A.T.C.H.

2002/2003: The Sathya Sai U-turn Training School – Gympie entered a new phase as it was realised that there was a genuine interest by ISSE volunteers, both male and female, to become part of the U-turn team, which made it possible to establish a girls’ school.

2004/2006: *The programme continued, with numbers of participants expanding and other schools joining.*