Delivery of alternative education to achieve better outcomes for Aotearoa New Zealand's most marginalised young people.

Identifying international models of Alternative Education to benchmark and contextualize for delivery in Aotearoa

JOE GRAHAM
WINSTON CHURCHILL FELLOW 2024

Description of Winston Churchill Fellowship project:

My Fellowship Project was to investigate Alternative Education (AE) programs implemented in Cardiff, New York, Edinburgh and London. These programs have high levels of engagement with disenfranchised and marginalised young people from Indigenous, rural, and urban groups. The organisations involved each offer unique deliveries within their communities.

Currently, AE in NZ is punitive, provided too late, and overly reliant on failed mainstream approaches. There is a strong need to do things differently. Through connecting with successful AE programs, I will be able to develop a range of successful AE programs and approaches relevant for young people in New Zealand.

Alternative Education (AE) is a service offered to young people (aged 13 -16 years) who are alienated, disengaged, or otherwise not attending mainstream education.

A combined Education Review Office and Social Wellbeing Agency report was recently released (June 2023). This report painted a damning picture of the state of AE in New Zealand. The report noted that young people who are referred to AE are among the most highly disengaged from education, are exposed to crime, violence, and trauma, and that just under a third have some form of unmet mental health need. These young people are disproportionately Māori and male, are often referred to AE due to entrenched difficult and problematic behaviours. They are likely to have been suspended or formally excluded from school, typically have poor school attendance and/or are regularly truant. Youth Justice and Oranga Tamariki often refer young people to AE, yet specialist support for these young persons is rarely provided.

The outcomes for young people referred to AE are noted in the aforementioned report - in short, their outcomes are dire. There has been minimal improvement overall in outcomes for young people.

There is a clear need for us to think differently about how we deliver AE here in New Zealand. We need to change our approach and think differently about how we provide educational services and improve life outcomes for our most marginalised and alienated young people.

What experience, knowledge or interests, I bring to the Fellowship.

I have been involved in the Alternative Education sector in Aotearoa for over 20 years, my service in Alternative Education has ranged from a frontline Kaiako, manager, pedagogical leader and national governance. I am currently the organisation lead for Blue Light NZ of our alternative education provision; I currently sit as the national chair of the alternative education

national body (AENB) which I have had the privilege or doing so for the last 8 years. I am also an advisor to the Ministry of Education through advisory groups such as the Positive Behaviour for Learning national advisory board, The Driving Change Network and the Minister of Education's office.

Fellowship project and Organisations visited.

I will visit specific models of Alternative Education provision in Cardiff, New York, and London. Each of these providers utilise different models of service delivery, and are located within diverse settings, including Indigenous, rural, and urban communities.

Cardiff - MAC Media Academy, Nick Corrigan CEO of MAC and Cardiff Foot Academy Education

New York - Roslyn Hilltop Academy, Port Academy and Barry Tech (Nassau County)

London – Pupil Referral Units: Ian Jenkins, the Youth Justice Manager for Ealing, LB Hackney, London, and meet with Brendan Finegan Service Manager, Youth Justice, Children and Families Service.

Connecting with these organisations and the specific models of Alternative Education delivery I will be able to show a range of different delivery models of Alternative Education.

Currently, the service delivery model of Alternative Education is punitive, provided too late in the piece, and the education pedagogy is reliant on mainstream education approaches. There is a strong need to take a different approach.

Wales, New York, and London all provide Alternative Education to young people, but each utilise different models of service delivery.

The International Models I Visited:

New York – (Long Island): School Based Alternative Education Delivery

The Education system in Long Island is made up of school districts, each district has elementary schools (Y1 – Y6), Middle Schools (Y7 – Y10) and 1 High school depending on the size of the district determines the number of elementary and middle schools they have but each district has only 1 High School and most if not all children will attend their local high school, if a child does not wish to attend their local high school in their district then they must ask their local district board to approve a transfer to another district, if accepted then the current district board must negotiate a transfer fee with the new district and pay them to take the out of district student.

The district model in terms of AE students allows district boards to identify potential AE students early and monitor progress through each stage of their education journey and the transitioning from one school to another is seamless for the student and their family, unlike the punitive NZ model the entry into an AE programme in long island is by choice, students that have been identified or self-identified are offered the AE pathway and is usually offered to a student in the latter years of middle school.

The Long Island AE programmes run parallel to mainstream education and a student can switch from AE to mainstream at any time, but this very rarely happens due to an effective AE programme and the support of the specialised staff, however there are more students that switch from mainstream into an AE programme because of the reasons above.

The AE programmes have a huge focus on education achievement and the expectation that all AE students will graduate from High school, the pass rate for the district for AE students' currently sits around 90%.

Roslyn Hilltop Academy:





Figures 1- 1: Roslyn Hilltop AE Faculty and AE Student

The Roslyn Hilltop Academy provides the high school student with a non-traditional, alternative environment which maximizes their personal strengths while focusing on their individual learning styles. Using an innovative curriculum developed and implemented by a nurturing staff, the Hilltop Academy's task is to instil in every student a passion for knowledge and create life-long learners. The Academy encourages responsible, independent thinking, recognizes diversity and respects the individual needs of students.

Student Numbers: 15 - 18

Staffing: 7 Please see staffing make up below

1 x Administrator (Principal)

1 x Child Psychologist

1 x Social Worker

1 x Youth Mentor

3 x Curriculum Specialists

Funding amount per student per year: ($65,000)

PORT (Program of Resilient Teens) Academy:



Figure 4: Port Academy graduating Class





Figures 5 and 6: Port Academy Principal and graduating AE students

North Port High School created an AE Programme called PORT (program of resilient teens) Academy it provides the high school students with an alternative environment that focuses on individual learning styles. The program focuses on a learning environment that is positive, and students achieve the same success as a student in mainstream environment and has a faculty that offers specialised support to each student.

Student Numbers: 20 - 30

Staffing: 10 Please see staffing make up below

1 x Administrator (Principal)

1 x Child Psychologist

1 x Social Worker

2 x Youth Mentors

5 x Curriculum Specialists (Math, English, Social Studies) and part time teachers (PE, Music, ART and Business Studies)

Funding amount per student per year: ($60,000)

nassau BOCES Barry Tech



Figure 7: Barry Tech President

- AE students from all parts of Nassau County choose to add Barry Tech to their high school experience.
- It gives students a head start in learning skills needed for employment and/or more direction in what they want to study at college.
- A successful year or two at Barry Tech can enable you to enter the world of work after graduation.
- Barry Tech courses are taught in environments that simulate the real world.
- Every AE student attending a public high school in New York State is entitled to enroll in an occupational course of his or her choosing. Barry Tech offers about forty different courses.

The Barry Tech experience is an option that is offered to students as part of their high school education journey which is open to all students including students attending an Alternative Education school, the feedback from staff and students are positive due to the delivery being positive and practical which allowed the students to easily apply the information into their everyday life.

A key learning of the Barry Tech model is the open access for Alternative Education students in the Nassau county district and the Alternative Education students are not treated any different to students in the mainstream programmes.

Cardiff - Wales: Community Lead Alternative Education Delivery

The challenges in Wales are the most like those in New Zealand and I found the programmes run in Cardiff the most measurable as these are community lead initiatives funded by the government. The programmes that are delivered in Cardiff are specialised programmes that have a thematic curriculum or “hook” that attract young people or allow referral agencies to have a selection of educational options for their youth.



Figure 8: CEO Media Academy Cymru Nick Carrigan and Education and Government funders

Media Academy Cymru:

Co-producing work with children and young people since 2010. MAC has been at the forefront of supporting children and young people (CYP) in Wales when they have needed support or somewhere safe to turn. MAC is internationally known for its work in diverting CYP from the criminal justice system, having created 10-17 Triage diversion programmes in Wales where previously there was none. To date, we have diverted over 10,000 CYP away from the criminal justice system.

The MAC model is based around core themes, such as utilising media as a means of engagement in a specific industry, and the programme is project based. These models which clearly connect young people with an industry in a hands-on practical way are not currently in use in Alternative Education in New Zealand.

Student Numbers: 10 - 15

Staffing: 3 Please see staffing make up below

2 x Youth Mentors/Curriculum Experts

1 x Social Worker

Funding amount per student per year: ($15,000)

Cardiff Community Foundation (CCF):





Figures 9 and 10: CFO session and classroom



Figure 11: Cardiff City FC latest recruit Joeigo Maoridonna

The aim of the Cardiff community foundation is to change lives and transform communities by providing a supportive network that encourage growth, wellbeing and a sense of belonging. The CCF harnesses the power of football and leverage the assets of Cardiff City FC to improve health and wellbeing, supporting learning and skills and build stronger communities.

The above is important as people living in South Wales face a myriad of challenges including the impact of inequalities on health, education, and employment opportunities and rates of offending and reoffending.

The programmes are:
Premier League Inspire
Head in the Game – Mentoring & Wellbeing
New Club, New school - Y6 School Transition
The aims of the programmes are listed below:

- Increase pupils' participation in extracurricular activities
- Improve pupils' physical and mental wellbeing
- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning
- Inspire and engage pupils whilst looking to improve attendance.
- Improve pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
- Improved interpersonal relationships

They offer several programmes that are fees for service that are purchased by parents, schools and government agencies and use qualified youth educators and mentors alongside the contracted football players.

Fees for the different programmes range from $2000 - $9000 NZ.

London – UK: Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and Alternative Programmes: State and Community Delivery



Figure 12: PRU Class, Hackney

Pupil referral unit (PRU) are a type of school that caters for children who can't attend a mainstream school. Pupils are often referred there if they need greater care and support than their school can provide. Around 16,000 pupils are currently educated in PRUs, and while the majority are secondary school age, these units can also provide a solution for primary school children who are having difficulties at school.

The aim of PRU's is to provide education to secondary-aged pupils who experience difficulties accessing schooling for several reasons or who are not able to maintain a placement at a mainstream school, including pupils with an EHCP.

This means that the young people may have:

- Been unable to get a school place
- Been permanently excluded
- Refused to go to school
- Put themselves at risk of exclusion
- Been out of school for significant periods of time

Alternative Programmes:

These programmes are offered to youth that cannot attend a PRU due to a number of reasons:

- PRU is not suitable for their individual needs
- PRU is not accessible
- Alternative Programme delivers more specialised subjects such as: Boxing, Music, Art and Gaming design.

These inclusive AE programmes have a strong commitment to supporting the young people to achieve the best possible outcomes regardless of their special educational needs. All young people are offered a provision that is best suited to their needs and are offered inclusive teaching which will enable them to make the best possible progress in school and feel that they are a valued member of the wider school community.

The PRUs and Alternative programmes are used by the Youth Justice Providers in the UK and the key contacts I meet Ian Jenkins YJ Manager Ealing and Brendan Finegan YJ Manager LB Hackney. For both Ian and Brendon PRU's are great educational option for youth justice offenders as most PRUs are set up with staff and facilities that are conducive to their clients. However, there were quality inconsistencies with the different PRU's in their local council and both Ian and Brendan had preferred PRUs that they would use.

The PRU's could be an initiative that we could use in New Zealand without being a state run, the option of a collaboration of Alternative Education providers within a consortium is a model that the AE sector in NZ was open to and the recent conference.

Dissemination activities

2024 Alternative Education Conference: Presentation.

I presented a summary of my overseas engagements and key learnings as part of the full conference programme for the annual AE conference we had 150 attendees from across Aotearoa.



Figure 13: Keynote Address, Alternative Education Conference June 2024

Waikato Kahui Ako forum 2024:

As a result of speaking at the AE National conference I was invited to share my fellowship kaupapa at Kahui Ako forum, the attendees were education leaders from schools in the Waikato.



Figure 14: Keynote Speaker, Waikato Kahui Ako hui July 2024

Meeting with Hon Erica Stanford:

I presented the models and key learnings with the minister and presented recommendations for her to consider regarding a new look AE delivery model could look like in Aotearoa, because of the hui I have been invited to sit on an advisory group in 2025.



Figure 15: Meeting with the Hon Erica Stanford Minister of Education

Key learnings

Long Island – New York

- A well-resourced (funded) programme ensures that AE students have the same access to qualified and experienced professionals as mainstream students and have the same educational outcomes and success.
- The Attitude of the Education governing body with a view of early identification and prevention by being the “fence at the top of the cliff” as opposed to what we have in NZ as “the ambulance at the bottom of cliff” mentality can contribute to preventing youth from disengagement from education.
- Tertiary Education opportunities for AE youth that offers a more kinaesthetic learning environment that gives a glimpse of the future.

Cardiff – Wales

- The CCF model is very different, but I believe could be used as a preventative programme in NZ to help disengaged students to stay in school by using Key professional sporting clubs in NZ.
- Project based programmes that integrate the curriculum that are connected to a specific industry or have a “hook” have a higher success of engagement and course completion.

Hackney and Ealing – London

- The Pupil Referral Unit model could work in NZ potential under the Charter School model to encourage AE providers in a region or city to collaborate/merge to deliver programmes that will significantly increase the current resources and offer students a wider range of subjects.
- Alternative programmes could work alongside current Alternative Education delivery in New Zealand and can offer the different options like boxing, music or art and would complement current provider offerings.

Conclusion

Overall, the Fellowship has encouraged me to keep advocating for rangatahi and whānau and the AE providers that support them. Seeing the high level of resources and innovative ideas provided internationally has shown what is possible if resourced well.

The focus areas of rangatahi achievement and involvement through innovative programmes that have been contextualised for their district, local authority, city and country.
Each of these areas has specific outcomes; overall the common theme is resourcing and attitudinal change in governing bodies to re-design and create an alternative to mainstream education that allows disengaged rangatahi to reignite their learning journey and succeed academically in an environment that is student centric.

The feedback from the Alternative education sector is very supportive and encouraging of the various international models shared and has reinforced what we already knew in the AE sector of increasing sustainable resources and funding will directly impact and increase the success of the alternative education student journey.

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust fellowship has allowed the Alternative Education sector in New Zealand to provide our government and the Ministry of Education with successful and proven delivery models of Alternative Education, the international providers and schools that I visited have all indicated that our sector is able to connect if we require further information or support if developing their models in Aotearoa.

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for firstly accepting my application and allowing me through the fellowship to implement and share ideas for rangatahi and their whanau within the Alternative Education sector in Aotearoa.