

Pukekohe Intermediate School

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AIM HIGH
Whāia Nga Taumata

24th February 2015

Pukekohe Intermediate School students have been lucky enough to be invited to become a part of the 'GEM' journey.

We have been a PB4L school since the initiative began and strongly believe in finding interventions that work for our learning, behavioural and pastoral students. The GEM group is a highly regarded Tier II group intervention in our school. We follow the idea that students who have difficulty reaching the National Standards with their learning have specialised, individualised programmes and are taught to meet their needs. Likewise, our behavioural and/or pastoral students also need a specialised, individualised programme that is tailored to meet their needs. We have found the GEM group meets this need for our students.

We have also been lucky to have a group of passionate staff and RTLB's who can now assist in spreading the word and keeping the spirit of the GEM message alive and growing in our school. We currently run Year 7 groups with a staff member who now feels empowered enough to run her own groups, with support from Ron. Every year I agonise over the candidates to put forward to attend the GEM groups. Now that word is spreading I have students begging to be selected to attend. I could easily double the numbers who currently attend and I see this as an area that will keep growing as more staff become skilled at working within this programme.

At Pukekohe Intermediate we keep our morning blocks as sacrosanct for literacy and numeracy without any disruptions to this learning. However, the GEM group occurs during this time as our principal, Gary Sweeney, sees this as such a valuable learning experience.

Students report that after the experience of GEM they can now understand others better, be more empathetic, trust more, have better endurance and be less likely to 'give up' when 'the going gets tough'. They talk about the experiences from the boy in the book and are able to relate and reflect on their actions and future pathway.

Students also benefit from having opportunities to speak with Ron one-on-one when they have been experiencing personal difficulties or spikes in behaviour. The school has found this specialist psych-liaison time to be an extra bonus by providing a service the school does not have the specialist personnel or expertise to provide.

Papatoetoe High School

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Principal: P.R. Gall 65c



12 February 2015

Attention: Tess Aherne

Manager Mental Health
Counties
Manakau

Dear Tess

I am writing this testimonial on behalf of Ron Phillips from Whirinaki Clinic. Ron has been presenting his TSI (Gem of the First Water) story to selected groups of students at Papatoetoe High School over the last seven years.

The participants are carefully selected and are usually students from our high risk cohort of juniors. The year 10 cohort is usually selected as we run a Travellers programme for these students at Year 9 level. Generally the students tend to be from the Maori or Pasifika cultural background who have had multiple changes in their lives or been actively seeking counselling over a long period of time during their Year 9.

Ron's programme is engaging and successful. The students enjoy his methodology as an orator and his personal mana. Gem is a totally unique experience for these students as the oral tradition of storytelling has been almost lost due to modern technology. As Ron narrates his own fable he engages the students inviting them to contribute their own ideas and experiences but without pressure. This suits students as at times they just like to listen and absorb the tale.

At the start Ron tells them he will give them a gift that is worth more than gold. I believe he does just that. Papatoetoe High School feels privileged to have a professional of Ron's experience and calibre taking a group once a week. Many of the students ask to return year after year and at times senior students continue on as role models in the group. The school has also purchased the entire trilogy of Gem for our school library as some of the students wished to read the other books in their own time.

We are hoping that Ron's programme will continue to be delivered at Papatoetoe High due to its values content and the gains for our selected students are outstanding.

I would also like to acknowledge that during the tragic aftermath of suicide by one of our students last year, Ron assisted the guidance staff in counselling the bereaved peers. He was also a great support for one of the newly trained counsellors who worked in the team at the time.

Ron would like the Principal's signature confirming the school's recommendation. I have asked Mr Peter Gall to sign below.

If you would like to discuss this testimonial further, feel free to contact me at school.

Yours truly



Lyn Papp
Ph: 278 4086 Ext. 728

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE:  16/2/15.



HIGH SCHOOL

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24/3/15

Papakura High School
Willis Rd
Papakura

To whom it may concern

On behalf of Papakura High School we are writing in support of the programme 'The Gem of the first water'. This programme has been running for at least 7 years at Papakura High School. During this time we have had the privilege of having Ron Philips facilitate 'The Gem of the first water' programme each year within the school. I have found this to be a very effective programme and have always had very good engagement from the students participating.

By using the medium of storytelling to engage the students this programme reaches a lot of our students who are very hard to engage in other ways.

This is a programme that we would like to keep running in our school and we would support any funding initiative for this to remain accessible to us.

Regards

Josy Whittaker
Social Worker
Papakura High School

Paul van Etten
Deputy Principal
Papakura High School



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17 March 2015

RE: GEMS at James Cook High School

Over the past 4 years, Ron Phillips has delivered the GEMS Programme to students at James Cook High School. I have had the opportunity to observe and be part of many of these sessions. I have always looked forward to the time when Ron joins us, bringing his special genre of 'counselling' alive and enthusing our students.

We have chosen our participants with the view to giving them an alternate way of looking at their choices, their behaviours and how they impact on their lives. It is difficult, even at the best of times to engage with young people, given the many distractions, both personal and technological, so when a different way of reaching out comes along---I am always interested. Yes, Ron's methodology is 'age-old.' The art of story-telling is an ancient one.

Ron brings a world to our young people that they can connect to----encouraging them to look at themselves, their lives and how the decisions they make impact, on not only on the day to day 'present,' but on how they may be in the future. It's this knowledge that Ron elicits from the group that is most powerful.

Ron's approach is gentle yet challenging. A student may well be an observer at the beginning of the 'journey' Ron introduces and takes them on, followed by a gradual reaching out to explore new possibilities, all as part of a 'safe' group.

I have seen young people change as they become more confident re sharing and asking questions. The times when they 'pass' on a contribution become less as they enter into the 'story as Ron 'tells' it. This form of therapy can be very powerful. I try to choose young people who I deem would get most of this experience and I have been surprised at just how closely they align themselves to the characters.

Sometimes, a year or more later, I come upon a student who has been part of the GEMS groups and I still feel the connection we had when we experienced this very valuable gift that Ron so eloquently and professionally delivers. That is the 'power' of Ron's programme.

Thank you Ron

Vaughan Couillault
Principal

Neil Coleman
Head of Counselling

Principal
Vaughan Couillault
MEdLM PGDipSM
BComm DipEdng

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
THERAPEUTIC STORY-TELLING INTERVENTION (TSI)
Facilitated by Ron PHILLIPS

Whirinaki Child, Family and Youth Mental Health, CMDHB

I was introduced to Ron Phillips and TSI in 2003 when I was Counselling HoD and Campus Pastoral Committee Co-ordinator at Southern Cross Campus in Mangere. This was part of a Whirinaki response to my urgent request for assistance with a senior female student group that I discovered had made a pact for each to take her own life on a specified date. I was immediately impressed with the TSI concept and content, its identifiable relationship with guidance counselling and potential for therapeutic benefit. I was also impressed with Ron's pragmatic approach quickly establishing rapport and TSI buy-in with this group and the ensuing progressive individual resilience-building over time that lead towards the group changing its plan and direction to achieve a safe outcome for all participants.

Subsequently I have maintained a professional working relationship with Ron over 12 years now, annually co-facilitating TSI in school for variously configured student groups identified as likely benefitting from this therapeutic journey format. Groups have comprised students:

- vulnerable to unsafe influence, eg drug use, self harm, suicidality
- needing social coping skills development
- significantly affected by death of significant other(s)
- wanting to develop/extend senior leadership confidence and skill-building
- identified as in need of positive self-esteem and self-efficacy building
- of mixed age groups, Juniors Y9-10; Seniors Y11-13; single and mixed gender;

While each individual journey is unique, there are observable common identifiable benefits:

- TSI has cognitive and imaginative particular appeal to adolescents (fast buy-in)
- utilises personal process over time as intervention for positive change (counselling)
- empowering safety parameters of TSI group participation (right to pass)
- power of group process learning (interspersed individual response rounds)
- cost-effectiveness of group rather than individual intervention delivery
- TSI adaptability/flexibility to meet targeted needs (participants, emphasis, length)
- weekly point of low-key contact/monitoring with supportive adult(s) in pastoral role

TSI now comprises a regular part of this school's guidance counselling practice, contributing to the school goal of reducing barriers to learning through student opportunity to become self-aware and resourceful at their own personal pace in a non-threatening way. Student counselling clients are observed as subsequently being able to progress in school with less or no pastoral intervention. Other feedback includes periodic unsolicited student reference to learnings from TSI subsequently personally internalised as a guide for self-management.

School management and pastoral staff are supportive of TSI continuing at Otahuhu College. It is particularly relevant in the current climate of an identified youth suicide community crisis.

Elizabeth George MNZAC; DipCouns; B.Ed(tchg); DipSpEd

16 March 2015



Onehunga High School

Founded 1959

Principal: Deidre Shea

23 February 2015

To Whom It May Concern

Ron Philips has been presenting the Therapeutic Storytelling Intervention to groups of young people at Onehunga High School for the past 2 ½ years. Groups at Onehunga have been run with boys varying in age from 13 to 16 years old, and have specifically targeted boys who are less likely to talk about their problems and who might otherwise not take up the opportunity for counselling. I have had the pleasure of sitting in with three of these groups where I have witnessed ongoing and permanent positive changes in both the behaviour and attitude of the boys. Ron's gentle therapeutic approach invites and engages the members of the group into the story to learn about themselves. The unnamed boy provides a peer role model, his experiences, which mirror the struggles of adolescence, provide an abundance of unthreatening material for discussion in the group. Ron's questions foster the connection between the hero of the story and the boys in the group giving the boys the opportunity to reflect on both the behaviour of the hero and their own behaviour, discuss consequences and possible options for solving the problems encountered.

As the story unfolds, observing how Ron captures the attention of the young people and helps them to develop greater awareness, improved self-image, personal honesty, thinking before acting, and problem solving skills is a privilege I consider myself very fortunate to have. I look forward to Onehunga High School's continuing involvement with TSI.

Sue Walsh
Head of Guidance
Ph:6366006 ext 8050

Deidre Shea
Principal





MARCELLIN COLLEGE

A Catholic Co-educational School founded by the Marist Brothers

To whom it may concern.

Subject: Ian Hyde-Hills letter of support for Ron Phillips and Therapeutic Storytelling Intervention to continue to be presented to secondary school students.

I have worked with Ron Phillips and Whirinaki over the last twelve years in my roles as School Guidance Counsellor at Marcellin College, Royal oak and De la Salle College Mangere. For six years I provided counselling and monitored the mental health of the boys at both schools. In the last eight years I have supported Ron in his presentation of the Therapeutic Storytelling Intervention (TSI). TSI has been both a vital and integral part of my work in both schools for the most at risk year nine and ten boys. I have always been totally supported by the Principals in these schools to have Ron present TSI to students because they witnessed the very positive outcomes for the students involved. There are many reasons I have promoted Ron and his presentation of TSI. In no small part is it because of the way he just seems to naturally draw young men into his presence and hold their attention while he takes them on a journey, inwards, with immense skill and sensitivity.

There is a couple of things I find particularly special about TSI. Ron presents the programme in a way that not only provides a therapeutic intervention, but also teaches participants to become their own agents of change and develop the skills and capacity to gain some control over their own lives. The isomorphic framing techniques he uses to draw parallels between the TSI story and each individual student's therapeutic needs, introduces young students to the world of self awareness and self reflection - in a sense these students are now primed with the introductory skills to deal with future difficulties. Being in a small group, particularly a group that is considered popular, helps reduce some of the barriers many of these young men have against 'personal talk' therapy? The TSI group, once it is formed under the good shepherd Ron, also provided a safe context for them to develop these reflective and sharing skills.

Another thought I have is that the storytelling style of the programme is more powerful than it may first appear. Stories are, in fact, so ubiquitous in human experience that we hardly notice their existence. Rudyard Kipling's claim that "if wisdom were taught in the form of stories it would never be forgotten" explains very well what happens in the lives of many young men after the TSI group journey. In fact, by chance, I spoke with a young man, now twenty one years old, in Onehunga a few weeks ago. He asked 'is Ron still doing his programme at school? At the time I was having real problems in life. It is the best thing that ever happened for me. I think about the programme nearly every day. I am now finishing my degree in Performing Arts and run a life skills programme on behalf of MIT in schools with my own performing group'. To me this was a real witness to the long term power of TSI and a confirmation of the cycle I consider to be true empowerment - becoming empowered and then supporting the empowerment of others. Recent Neurological research is confirming what Kipling spoke of. Yes, the human brain co-evolved with storytelling, narrative structure and the heroic struggle. The very things supplied to them in

rich abundance throughout their TSI experience. Young men are today, even with the high tech alternatives surrounding them, still hungry for a story around the 'campfire' with the master storyteller Ron.

Over the years I have worked supporting young people through their struggles, I have become aware that many of them had early relationship difficulties which often resulted in attachment problems. I am of the view that the various negative attachment complexities can somewhat be moderated in young people if they are able to, with the guidance of a caring other, create a coherent life story in the present while remaining mindful of these past events. This "making sense", which I understand creates a pathway to 'earned' secure attachment, needs to go way beyond just having a logical understanding of the past events - the "coherent story" needs to involve all of the senses, head to toe. The extended nature of the progressively deeper journey through the TSI experience, particularly when the good shepherd is a man such as Ron Phillips, I have no doubt provides such an opportunity for this to happen.

Over each of the last eight years no less than thirty of the highest risk boys in year nine have attended Ron's programme. Everyone of these young men, many with multiple mental health issues, and some requiring subsequent referrals, managed to navigate through their subsequent years safely. In no small part do I believe this has been due to TSI as presented to them by Ron Phillips. I submit this observation as a form of anecdotal evidence supporting my unconditional support for TSI and Ron.

I would strongly recommend that TSI, as I have known it to be presented by Ron Phillips, continue as long as is possible as a therapeutic intervention for young secondary school students who are assessed as having mental health struggles.

Kind regards

Ian Hyde-Hills
Educational Psychologist/School Guidance Counsellor

Ian Hyde-Hills
21/3/2015



PAKURANGA
COLLEGE

13 March 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Ron Phillips, Psychologist: Gem of the First Water – Groups

For the last three years, Ron has been running Gem of the First Water groups with our juniors. He has run nine groups, and worked with approximately one hundred of our students. I have had the privilege of co-facilitating these with Ron.

Ron has a particularly engaging style with our youngsters. Rather than being just another adult giving moral lectures, he appeals to subconscious processes by telling a story they can all relate to in terms of their own journey.

He works at the top of the cliff as it were, preemptive, fostering positive decision making and growth, rather than reactive, dealing with the aftermath of trouble.

His work runs much deeper than simply decision making. It sets youngsters up with a skill set not just to step forward positively, but also in how to deal with hard times, possible depression, self-harm or issues with suicidality, attachment, self-esteem, and how to be leaders.

I thoroughly recommend this programme. The students, once finished with the groups, often talk of their experience in meeting and growing with Ron, and ask if they can do the group again.

Yours sincerely

Francis Jamieson
Counsellor/Psychotherapist

Paul Williams
Head of Department, Counselling

Michael Williams
Principal



2nd March 2015

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Gem of the First Water initiative Year 10

For the past 2 years, Ron Phillips has been involved in mentoring small groups of students at Sancta Maria College using Therapeutic Story-telling Intervention techniques based on his own book, "Gem of the First Water. We have found his sessions with the students to be helpful and have had positive feedback from both students and parents over the two years that these have been running.

Ron suggested that we extend his counselling sessions to the entire Year 10 group in 2015. After discussions with Ron, we decided to trial this whole class approach in order to build on the work done with small groups in building positive attitudes and decision-making skills for adolescents.

The focus on owning your decisions and making the correct choices throughout your life is one that we would like to include in a programme to promote the general well being of our Year 10 students. The story will give the students the opportunity to discover and develop themselves through the life skills explored in each chapter. Ron has presented a series of tasks and focus points that he would like the students to explore during his proposed 12 sessions with each class. The staff will be included in the delivery of the programme and will also be involved in discussion on teaching points for each session. It is our intention to have an information evening for the parents of the students so that they are informed about the 12 week sessions.

Regards


Janet Williams
Year 10 Dean



Michelle Holly

Assistant Principal



Letter of Support

Gem of the First Water

Ron Phillips has been delivering his Gem of the First Water group therapy sessions at De La College for the past 6 years. During this time the students have been thoroughly engaged in the sessions and have benefited in many ways.

The students have learned about the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions in the context of responding to life's stressors. They have been given a safe place to relax and have meaningful discussions with their peers about navigating life's journey. The students involved in this group often need connections with peers. The social skills needed to cement these connections are modelled seamlessly by Ron during his sessions.

The boys at De La Salle College have made many positive comments about the program. Here are a few responses when asked how the program helps them:

"It helps me with my life experiences"

"I found out how to manage my anger better"

"He explains things that make sense to me about how to problem solve and how ways of thinking are so important"

"The story is really cool, it helped me understand that we have many choices in life"

From a counsellors point of view it is great to be able to put some of our schools most vulnerable students in a group for added support. It is reassuring to know that there is an experienced practitioner helping our students in creative and effective ways.

Warm regards

Ben Coaton

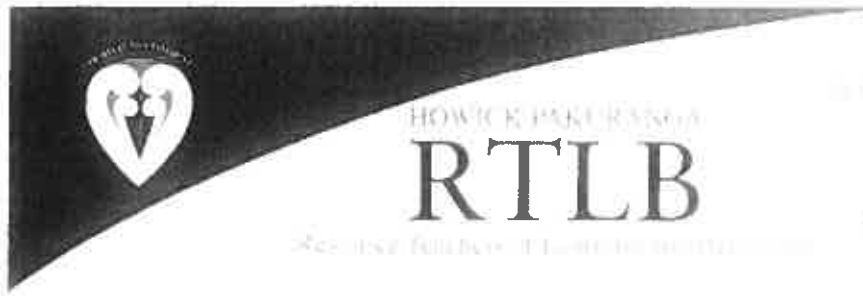
Guidance Counsellor

Co-signed:

Myles Hogarty

Principal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Myles Hogarty', written over a light blue horizontal line.



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12 March 2015,

Tess Ahern
Manger
Mental Health Services
Counties Manukau

Dear Tess,

Re: TSI – The Gem of the First Water

I have had the pleasure of working with Ron in a therapeutic setting with 8 boys at a time in a Decile 4 Co-Educational High School and I have been delighted with the outcomes for the students in the group. Watching the boys learn new tools for their journey through life has been both an honour and privilege. I often knew a lot about what was going on in the boy's lives, information which Ron was largely not privy too, yet he was able to tap in to what was going on for each and every one of them making the tools relevant and useful for them to navigate their way through challenging circumstances, often beyond their control.

It seems a shame that this amazing tool is not able to be used more widely throughout the region and I wonder how we could make that a reality as I know many of the young people I work with in my new role would really benefit from TSI and more specifically The Gem of the First Water. I really do hope that CMDHB are taking steps to ensure this valuable work continues as it is amazing how the story is able to reach a wide variety of students from a plethora of backgrounds, drawing them in week by week and teaching them without them even realising. The fact that Ron can reach so many students all at once is also such a blessing. The number of weeks the programme runs for and the positive outcomes achieved are fantastic given the volume of students we have been able to engage in the group with attendance rates of 90-100%.

If you would like to hear any more about my first-hand experience of co-facilitating TSI Groups with Ron Phillips please do not hesitate to contact me as it would be my pleasure to advocate for more groups and to see more young people benefit from the work Ron carries out.

Regards,

Kim Todd
M.Couns, Dip.Tchg, B.Ed.