Institutionalised Oppression: A Few Thoughts

When raising children, the concept of institutional authority is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it is important for children to know, accept, and understand the values held by you and the society into which they are born. On the other hand, we also want our children to be free and original thinkers.

As a rule, the age of 18 is the designated point at which a child ceases to be held under the care of overt institutionalisation and enters the adult world. At this point, they are theoretically free to make their own decisions and so long as they act within the bounds of the ethical and legal laws of the land, those decisions are seldom challenged.

Something I have learned more and more is that often, the very laws and ethics behind them are bound in beliefs which make them inherently oppressive in the first place. As the founder of JCS, I have felt from day one that none of the organisations who have power over us remotely understand what we do and why it needs to be done. In many cases, I know people involved and they are of the highest calibre, and yet even they do not seem to understand the plight of marginalised groups in this society.

To be the parent of a traumatised teenager in this society is to gain some insight into what it must be like to be locked outside the system which is supposedly there to help you. The first sign comes when school starts the process of managing your child out of their system. There are detentions, then meetings, then contracts. Then, amidst the subtle undertone of blame laid on you for the school's inability to cope with your child, there is the 'dismissal.'

From there on, institutionalised oppression grows exponentially. Other schools see the poor record and try to discourage enrolment. Students end up seeing a string of psychologists, psychiatrists, specialists, and doctors who run a plethora of tests which tell you what you already know in a language you can't understand but NEVER offer a viable solution.

Before long, the parent begins to feel very alone. And it is then the real meaning of institutionalised oppression becomes apparent. Having spent thousands of dollars, seeing all these experts and getting nowhere, a common theme emerges. 'If all these highly qualified people can't fix the problem then the problem must be us (or me), the parent.' From here on your confidence dives. In the face of pages of bureaucratic, self-indulgent, testing and failed outcomes, you realise something you may never have experienced before... suddenly you are a part of the minority; the institutionally oppressed. For some of us, particularly educated, wealthy, middle aged, white, professional men this is a total shock.

Initially, you fight it, certain from your years of experience that the world will eventually see things your way. But the more you fight it, the more marginalised you become. You feel like you're stuck in some kind of real-life drama show. You end up doing what seems to be the most normal thing in the world by advocating for your child, only to discover that the harder you fight, the harder the fight becomes.

At this point, you are left with two options. You can give in and go along to get along kidding yourself that your child is getting the 'education they need,' or you can keep on fighting.

I am sure many of you identify with this story. And in many ways, it is the story of JCS. The fight is a long and very taxing one. Most of the time, you ask yourself if it is worth it. You feel very alone. You feel very disempowered and helpless against a system which seems somehow to have appointed itself as the arbiter of what is in your best interests. The system has become the law, the law has become the system and so you fight to change it... only to discover that in order to change it you have to run the risk of operating entirely outside the very support structures you had grown up to rely on.

At this stage, the enormity of what some people face strikes home. You are fighting for your child. Often you are doing so from a position of advantage. After all, you may be educated, white, wealthy, and employed, but even then the fight is tough. So now just for a second, imagine you are born aboriginal, poor, unemployed and uneducated. How then do you fight against injustice, when you have been in the minority all your life? Who taught you? Who guided you? Imagine Nelson Mandela; imagine Gandhi, imagine Muhammad Ali and imagine Vincent Lingiari. Imagine surviving the concentration camps of Nazi Germany or the Killing Fields of Cambodia and then having to fight your own way back.

For me, it is in these moments that the solution is found. Usually it is the mother who makes it real. Waking, praying, striving on a daily basis to find a way through for her lost child, she realises she must rise above the system in order to show her child that they too can do the same. And slowly as they discover that even those at the very top of the system are trapped within it, a new realisation is born... the best indeed the only way to rise above institutionalised oppression is to remain true to your own ethical values and step out of institutions altogether comfortable in the notion that even if you are a minority of one... the truth is still the truth.

From the Founder
Gender Bender

This month we held our annual Gender Bender Day. This is a day for both students and staff to walk a mile in someone else's shoes and experience what it is like to be judged based on something that is out of their control.

Students are encouraged to dress up in order to gain an insight into how the world treats people based on their appearance. The activity is designed to help participants be aware of the judgements we hold and how these prevent us from seeking to understand other people and their situations. Maddie and Liam received some insight into being a young couple with a baby. Molly felt the judgement of teenage pregnancy. Dean experienced the difficulty of navigating the city in a wheelchair. Stuart felt all eyes on him dressed up in amour. Marty attempted Tourette's syndrome and Amelia was confronted by the harsh reality of being homeless. The day successfully opened the students' minds to the types of generalisations we make about others. It also helped them understand the ways they are judged based on the image they project.

DECV

DECV Submissions for VCE close this Friday. Please contact JCS if you are concerned with your child's progress. We are encouraging students who are not up to date to attend the centre for catch up assistance.
Queensland Camp

This year Queensland camp followed the term’s theme of accountability. The students took responsibility by contributing to the organisation of camp. Part of empowering youth is by allowing them a voice and an opportunity to be heard. The next step is making them understand that with this voice comes responsibility. Simply having an opinion does not earn you the right to be heard. It is the willingness to act on our opinions and take responsibility for the resulting effects, that earn us that right.

This year the students had a contrasting experience...from the razzle dazzle rides of Dreamworld to the reality of life on the streets. The students were exposed to the extremes in thrill and pleasure followed by the harshness and boredom of homelessness.

Maddie faced her fear of heights, free falling 120m. Amelia learnt the value of budgeting by investing $8 on a snow cone! Molly took to the high seas on a sturdy pontoon fishing boat while Marty dropped a line and almost caught the boats engine. Liam heroically jumped ship in order to scavenge for fish bait. Rachel’s dreams of eating a Corn Dog came true and Dean transformed his body into a human surfboard to tackle some of Queensland’s biggest waves.
**Birthdays**

Amelia Ransom, Hannah Bevan and Catherine Duong Thai were our Maybies this month. A big Happy Birthday to these three great cake appreciators. The cakes included a massive red velvet cake, decadent chocolate brownie and a healthy sugar free, gluten free, vegan banana cake!

**Important Dates**

**Term 2**
- Thursday 5th June
- Friday 6th June
- Monday 9th June
- Friday 27th June
- Tuesday 15th July

**Melbourne Arts Centre Excursion**
- **DECV VCE Semester 1 Submissions**
- **Queen's Birthday**
- **Term 2 Concludes**
- **Term 3 Commences**
Sisters are doing it for themselves!