

Media Release
Monday 15th May 2006
Contact: Paul Simpson 0410 66 5961

ABC's AUSTRALIAN STORY features Heath Ducker

Story introduced by Prime Minister, John Howard

"I was very young when I realised we were looked upon as a needy family. Probably it was unsaid, but there wasn't much of a future for us because everyone knew our background and the struggles we had at home."
Heath Ducker

"Probably some of the saddest moments in my life, to actually witness not only the environment, but the effects that the environment had on him."

Ron Barr, Youth Insearch

"I grew up in this poverty and I'd been sexually abused and here I am a few years later. I'm sitting in the office of the Prime Minister of the country discussing youth affairs and youth issues."

Heath Ducker

"We're going to hear more of him. Whether it's in politics I don't know. But I know this boy spells success to me."

Ron Barr, Youth Insearch

Baulkham Hills resident Heath Ducker is a remarkable young man who threw off the shackles of an almost Dickensian childhood and is now on his way to professional and personal success.

One of 10 children with many different fathers, Heath lived in abject poverty in a run down house. At the age of 12, he was sexually abused by his best friend's father.

The Sydney-based 'Youth Insearch' organisation became his saviour. It brought him into contact with other young people, some of whom had managed to overcome extraordinary deprivation. Their stories inspired the young Heath Ducker to work to overcome the handicaps of his own difficult background.

He seized on education as his ticket out of the cycle of deprivation. Unable to study in the chaos and noise of a crowded house, he retreated to the rooftops to study.

He became the youngest person ever to be appointed as a Youth Insearch leader. He has led several expeditions on the Kokoda Track and has become a significant role model for troubled youth.

He's even been invited to advise the Prime Minister about youth affairs and has formulated his own strong ideas about welfare delivery.

When he graduated with a law degree last year, there were tears of pride and relief all round. Now, Heath Ducker has clinched a job as a solicitor with one of Sydney's leading law firms....

This remarkable story will air tonight on the ABC's **Australian Story at 8.00pm**
For Further Information Contact: Paul Simpson Youth Insearch 0410 665961

Web: www.youthinsearch.org

BRIEFING NOTES:

DATE: MAY 2006

Youth Insearch

- Heath Ducker, living in Baulkham Hills is a remarkable young man, is the subject of Monday's Australian Story (ABC 8pm, May 15; introduced by the Prime Minister). Heath grew up on an old, run down housing commission home with his nine brothers, sisters and mum in immense poverty. He was sexually abused at the age of 11 by his best friend's father, and the only place he could find peace and quiet was on the roof of the house.
- He then discovered a wonderful Australian organisation, Youth Insearch, a unique voluntary non-religious community group which has now helped more than 26,000 Australian kids turn their lives around.
- Heath became a Youth Insearch leader at 13 and was selected to trek the Kokoda Track Leadership Program.
- Heath has now completed his combined Journalism and Law degree and is currently working at a leading Sydney Law firm as a paralegal awaiting full qualification as a lawyer....

Youth Insearch:

- This the 21st year of operations for this amazing organisation, started in 1985 by Ron Barr, the Youth Development Counsellor for the Community Centre at Riverstone, North West of Sydney
- MISSION: to empower young people to take responsibility for their lives by giving them the opportunity and skills to develop their self esteem and play a positive role in society.
- OBJECTIVES:
 - *to reduce the incidence of violence, crime, alcohol, drug abuse and suicide in young people*
 - *to improve school retention rates*
 - *to enhance young people's self esteem and productivity by empowering them to take control of their lives*
 - *to break the cycle of family breakdown by giving young people skills essential to becoming loving, successful parents.*

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Youth Insearch Camps occur over a weekend.
- The Camps are run by Youth Leaders who have been through the program, so they understand and can relate to other young people.
- After the Camp they attend Support Groups where they discuss how things are going since the Camp. This is an opportunity to set new goals and directions for their lives with those that attended the Camp. Support Adults accompany them to the Camp and assist with the Support Groups. They can be family members, youth workers, school teachers, counsellors, nurses etc.
- **NB – major 21st fund raising black tie event planned for September 22 at Luna Park.**

DONATIONS: 1300 139 289 or www.youthinsearch.org.au

Media Contacts: Paul Simpson 0410 665 961