

Making a difference: IEU Chapters in action

IEU Chapters are the voice and driver of change for members in any school or workplace. Here we examine how four Chapters from across Queensland and the Northern Territory have been working collectively to make a difference for employees and their school communities.



Chapter members Michael Cujes, Evelyn Cutts, Maree Shade and Andrew Carey with their John (Max) MacDermott Award.

Creating sector-wide change

When it comes to demonstrating the essence of what collective action and solidarity is about, the Chapter at St Peter's Lutheran College in Brisbane is an exemplar, having stood up to protect the working rights of all Queensland Lutheran school employees in the face of a hostile employer.

IEU-QNT Organiser Craig Darlington said the Chapter's collective action was not only about protecting members at

their school but anyone working in the sector from what was an unprecedented attack aimed at cutting working conditions and protections.

"While in actual fact, the Chapter at St Peter's would have been spared the worst of the proposed cuts, controls and constraints – the Chapter worked to educate members in other Queensland schools as to why they needed to say no to the employer's proposed agreement," Craig said.

"The result was an act of solidarity that was crucial in promoting the historic 'No' vote for the sector and which brought the employer back to the bargaining table.

"The 'No' vote was absolutely critical in the overall rejection of the employer-proposed agreement.

"The St Peter's Chapter Representatives were actively involved in the campaign – personalising issues for staff and encouraging members to discuss the issues with non-members.

"This encouraged union membership and activism at a school and sector level," Craig said.

In recognition of this collective action and solidarity, the St Peter's Chapter won the prestigious John (Max) MacDermott Award for Outstanding Contribution as a Union Chapter at our union's 2020 Annual Member Awards.

Giving our students options on uniforms

The IEU School Chapter at The Essington School in Darwin are celebrating the success of a multi-year campaign to ensure more uniform options for their students.

Chapter Representative and IEU-QNT Branch Executive member Louise Lenzo said girls now have the option to wear more fitted skorts (allowing them to play freely), dresses or skirts to school depending on their personal preference.

"Previously, girls could only wear dresses or loosely fitted skorts to school which did not provide adequate coverage when engaged in physical activities," Louise said.

"Many found these uniforms uncomfortable and/or unpractical during the course of the school day.

"Our IEU Chapter believed it was reasonable to offer different uniforms that were better suited for students, not only to play and learn, but for the Darwin climate as well.

"When the Girls' Uniform Agenda was established, our Chapter's campaign started to gain more support amongst staff.

"We found the organisation's resources, letter templates and national awareness days a helpful way to approach our employer as well as our school community.

"For example, to raise awareness of our campaign, staff wore pants for an entire week."

Louise said the perceptions of leadership within the school changed and feedback from students, parents and families overwhelmingly supported a change.

NT Organiser Jengis Osman said the Chapter's campaign showed the change



Louise Lenzo (second from right) and colleagues from The Essington School, Darwin take action on the Girls' Uniform Agenda.

members can make at a broader educational level.

"Helping to create a better learning environment for our students is what IEU members do every day in their professional practice – so a campaign like this, is simply an extension of that," Jengis said.



Supporting flexible work

The IEU Chapter at Marymount College on the Gold Coast are working closely with members as well as their leadership/administration team to support those seeking flexible working arrangements.

Chapter Reps Kylie Mathers and Therese Mullins said they had a diverse workforce at their school, many with extra demands outside of the working day or going through changes in their personal lives.

"Our workplace, like many, contains a number of very experienced, highly skilled staff," Kylie and Therese said.

"It's in our students' interests to retain and support these teachers, as their depth of experience is invaluable.

"Without the flexible working arrangements, they are less able to give their best to the students and workplace, and less likely to continue employment when times get tough," they said.

Kylie and Therese said the IEU Chapter at Marymount College ensures that anyone requesting flexible working conditions is supported through the process.

"Sometimes the reasons for requesting the flexible working arrangements are complicated and so we work with our union's experienced industrial team who can read over draft letters, double check eligibility criteria as well as provide other advice as needed," Therese and Kylie said.

Therese and Kylie said having a strong, active Chapter is vital in the workplace.

"Collective action is not only supporting members when they need it, but also informing them of the protected workplace provisions," they said.

Therese and Kylie said through Chapter meetings, members educate each other when they raise issues and concerns for discussion.

"Collective action requires the sharing of knowledge and information – our Chapter members feel empowered and informed by this.

"In many ways, it's a sense of community which becomes stronger the greater the challenge.

"A collective voice connects members, allows them to be heard and voice their fears," they said.

Ensuring recognition for remote and regional work



During the last round of Queensland Catholic Collective Bargaining, a number of regional IEU Chapters stood together to ensure regional and remote schools continue to attract and retain highly-qualified and experienced teachers.

Previously, Queensland Catholic school teachers working in Level 4 locations did not receive a remote area incentive payment after five years of service at that location.

This created a significant disadvantage in terms of ensuring teachers were supported to stay in the sector as well as the area, particularly given the higher cost of living in regional and rural locations.

It also reflected a lack of commitment to providing quality education in regional areas long-term.

IEU member at Saint Mary's Catholic College (Kingaroy) Scott Collier said that, like many schools in the region, securing teachers to stay in the area had been difficult in the past.

"The new incentive payments definitely act as an extra enticement to bring more teachers from larger regional-metro areas to our beautiful part of the world in the South

Burnett region and to establish a life in our community," Scott said.

"It will no doubt help to keep experienced teachers working here at our College and more importantly in our wider-community.

"I know some staff are able to put the incentive payment towards extra costs associated with accessing health care services which are only available in larger regional areas as well as travel costs to keep in touch with family living elsewhere.

"It is also about acknowledgement of service and equity with a similar provision having been in the Queensland Catholic Principal's collective agreement for some time, with no set expiration."

While the provision has been secured for teachers, the next step is to ensure it can be accessed by school support staff – something that is on the agenda for regional and remote IEU Chapters to tackle.

The advocacy of Chapters in the Rockhampton Catholic Diocese over a number of years was also significant in securing this provision within the latest Queensland Catholic Schools collective agreement.