



## MESSAGES TO INSPIRE

(365 Daily Messages of HOPE and ENCOURAGEMENT for Adolescents/Young Adults)

A short daily message to inspire and encourage young people (see Appendix One) and give them the tools to make thoughtful decisions, communicate effectively, understand other people's viewpoints, respect diversity and contribute positively to the world around them.

**Aim:** To encourage young people to become the Best they can Be through a self-empowering, yet encouraging journey – Reach One! Reach All!

### Key outcomes:

- \* More positive behaviour amongst young people globally.
- \* The development of more effective **relationship** building skills amongst our young people.
- \* Young people develop **resiliency** as they develop high self-esteem and a positive self-image.
- \* More **positive peer pressure** in the lives of young people.
- \* **Responsible use** of Social Media and Technology.
- \* Equipping young people with the **Employability skills** needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace: entrepreneurial, creative, innovative, teamwork, learning, communication, problem solving, using their initiative.
- \* Young people appreciate how **positive goal getting** can impact their lives, give them feelings of being cared for, valued and having lives that have positive meaning and purpose.
- \* Young people develop **reflective skills**, critical to their health and wellbeing.
- \* The development of **leadership skills**, as young people learn how to become people positively influencing others.
- \* The development of a generation of potential mentors through the **Spirit of Mentoring** that flows through these messages.
- \* A **reduction in antisocial behaviour tendencies** (eg, emotional/physical/cyber bullying), substance abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour within young people's communities.
- \* **Supporting Neuroscience** and adolescent development research linked to the developing adolescent brain\*.
- \* **(Optional)** The author of the 365 Daily Messages of Inspiration, Robin Cox, is keen to offer a **free online mentoring service** to adolescents seeking guidance or wanting clarification linked to the meaning of a particular message or messages, through his Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/robin.coxauthor>

\* Due to the plasticity of the brain, it can be changed by experiences. The frontal lobes make up 40% of the brain's total volume. They are the seat of our ability to generate insight, judgment, abstraction, impulse control and planning. They are the source of self-awareness and our ability to assess dangers and risks, so we use this area of the brain to choose a course of action wisely. The frontal lobes are said to house the 'Executive' function

of the human brain which only ceases developing in the mid-20s. So adolescents need repetition and to continually learn what responsible choices feel like, look like, sound like etc. When we are not stressed by negative emotions, we can control what information makes it to our brain. In addition, certain activities like interacting with friends, laughing, participating in physical activities and acting kindly increase the DOPAMINE (a chemical neurotransmitter) levels in the adolescent brain, which in turn, could boost the student's learning and ability to process new information. Our brains release EXTRA Dopamine when an experience is enjoyable, one of the key objectives of these Messages to Inspire. (See Appendix Two)

### **Appendix One:**

Draft samples of **generic** Daily SMS Messages to Inspire, which also are linked to the Developmental Assets® young people have been identified as needing to become the best they can be (See Appendix Three). The wording of the daily messages each fortnight will aim to cover each of the key outcomes of these daily messages:

#### **Week 1:**

1. I am responsible for my thoughts, my choices and my actions. 
2. Your life journey is about becoming who you want to be with the support of people you trust and respect. 
3. I can envision or picture new horizons and possibilities of what I can achieve, which will probably involve moving out of my comfort zone. 
4. You can genuinely respect the viewpoints and opinions of others without putting them down if you disagree. 
5. You can choose to step back and count to 20 SLOWLY when you are angry with someone – and you'll avoid a fight or hurting someone or saying something you might regret later. 
6. Your brain is still developing, so you will probably enjoy your adolescent times of challenge, creativity and novelty during which your experiences will shape your future – you are capable of choosing what is likely to be a good risk or a bad risk. 
7. My goal-getting journey can start with 7-day goals which I can set and, as I achieve my goals, I'll discover that goal setting can become a positive and enjoyable habit. 

#### **Week 2:**

8. I can choose to set a personal goal of having 9 hours sleep every night because that will help me become the best I can be. 
9. My personal development and growth requires patience, practice, perseverance – I must not quit! 
10. I can choose to spend time encouraging a younger person – we shall both benefit from the relationship. 

11. I can choose to join a faith group or a youth group or a Club where I can make new friends with similar interests. 
12. You can choose to develop the qualities of trustworthiness, honesty and humility. 
13. I can choose to use different usernames and passwords, so no-one can hack into the sites I visit. 
14. What I learn from making choices gives me wisdom, understanding and power to decide my future. 

### **Week 46:**

316. I can keep asking questions, LISTENING to the answers, showing respect and genuine interest at all times. 
317. You can find a mentor or older person you trust who will encourage and help you to follow your dreams. 
318. When you reach out to encourage another person to become the best they can be, two lives are positively enriched – yours and the other person. 
319. I can be a positive person of influence who never stops being a role-model to younger students.
320. You can turn a setback into a positive opportunity or a new opportunity in your life. 
321. There **IS** a solution to every problem – don't quit! 
322. You can remember that everything you post online is PUBLIC and it makes no difference if you delete the message/post/text. Once you have published it, it can be traced back to you. 

*"I know these text messages would definitely benefit me and prompt me to reflect as well. I find that if I start the day in the right headspace and challenge myself, I can achieve a million times more than I would normally, just because of that extra little 'kick'. I definitely think it's a great idea." (Year 12 female student (aged 17))*

*"I think your idea is very good. Personally I would find it quite useful. Just a suggestion, maybe have it so on delivery the message has to be read before the phone can be accessed." (Year 12 male student (aged 17))*

*"The idea of sharing messages to encourage and inspire young people to become positive peers as they embark on their self-empowering journey through adolescence to becoming young adults, is laudable." (Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, one of Australia's leading Psychologists and author of books on raising young people)*

*"I love this idea – and think that the quotes would be especially helpful to young people." (Jean Rhodes, Frank L. Bayden Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Boston; global expert/researcher in the field of youth development and youth mentoring)*

*"An app/online program appears to work well within the younger generation." (Mac – on behalf of Dr Caroline Leaf, Communication pathologist and audiologist who has worked in the area of cognitive neuroscience since 1985)*

*"Congratulations on taking your passion and knowledge to this additional goal ... your plan sounds well thought out and I wish you great success." (Dr Judy Willis, Neurologist and Educator (USA))*

*"This is a really good idea and a worthy one at that ... what you are saying about the mental health of young people and the need to address this through mentoring and the positivity of these daily messages I agree with." (Michael Knight, Adolescentologist and Director, Peer Power, working with 60% of Australian Secondary/High Schools)*

*"Sounds great to me ..." (Andrew Fuller, one of Australia's leading Clinical Psychologists and family Therapist, global expert on Resiliency and author of many books on the development of young people)*

*"I like the look of your [messages] ... there would definitely be partnership opportunities, possibly even sponsorship, with some corporates ... definitely the youth targeted internet players ... I can see us incorporating this kind of [program], maybe inside a daily Facebook post to our Mentors and Dreamers." (Scott Gilmour, Founder, I Had a Dream youth mentoring program, New Zealand)*

*"I agree with your concerns about adolescent mental health and the need for young people to find connections to others, a sense of belonging, a voice of their own meaning and purpose in their lives. Although I don't think that a well put phrase or reminder can solve issues, I do agree that words can inspire. I also agree that the right words can present a powerful reminder about values, aims and perspective. As such, overall, I really like the idea of having [a program] that simply offers a daily inspirational message." (Dr Helen Street, Social Psychologist, author and educator, co-founder Positive Schools mental health and wellbeing conferences (Australia))*

*"I agree young people need support and encouragement ... sometimes personal support is more impactful but that, of course, can't be scaled up like [these messages] can. I know there are mental health apps that are considered helpful for anxiety, depression and loneliness ... a way to help young people (and their parents) will emerge as you continue to think it through." (Stephen Biddulph, Australian psychologist, author, global expert parent educator)*

*"I admire what you are trying to do and would wish that more people continue to work to guide growing 'neurological units' into adults with purpose, integrity and competence." (JoAnn Deak, PH.D., author, international speaker, educator, preventive psychologist (USA))*

*"I am thinking ... just a first impression ... that you develop these messages into an App for mentors to set some goals with their mentees around each topic. It is good stuff and could be an exercise for sessions throughout the year." (Dr Susan G. Weinberger, President, Mentor Consulting Group (USA))*

*"I concur with everything you write and commend you for it. We have seen a surge in suicides among high school children locally - so much so that this threat brought together formerly uncooperative non-profits and medical providers to tackle this head on. Our society creates immense pressures for kids: absent parents (working/divorced/in conflict) do not help to stabilize the trauma of kids who grow up in the glare of social media which highlight beyond understanding the challenges kids experience as they grow up.... This is a worthy project." (Rudi Pakendorf, Vice President of Development, Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin (USA) – Goodwill is a network of 164*

*worldwide autonomous non-profitable charitable organisations, each governed by a local board of directors)*

*"I love your idea of daily affirmations. One of our In School Mentoring programs began their weekly sessions with an affirmation which was hugely successful.... It's a great idea and I wish you well."*  
*(Jenny Moulder – Program Director, RAISE – youth mentoring programs, New South Wales, Australia)*

## **Appendix Two: Key points from adolescent brain research to help understand the thinking behind these Daily Messages.**

- Scientists are showing that by practicing brain-based skills we can actually change the way our brains look and operate:
  - ❖ Training and practice will improve skills **and** change our brains and build its capacity to use these skills.
  - ❖ Having a growth mindset that encourages adolescents to keep working at these skills will see the development of self-confidence – it's a self-empowering journey.
- What is really important is to develop a positive mindset which is advantageous for the development of the brain.
- What we must do is provide structures with empowerment ie, support adolescents while allowing them to find their voices. (Dr D. Siegel)
- People who practice mindfulness on a regular basis have strong coping skills and are resilient in the face of adversity. "Cultivating these skills can help you to rewire your brain." (Professor John Arden)
- The adolescent brain is only 80% of the way to maturity. The 20% gap is where the wiring is thinnest and this helps explain teenage mood swings, irritability, impulsivity, explosiveness, an inability to focus, to follow through and to connect with adults and the temptation to use drugs, alcohol and engage in other risky behaviour. (Dr Francis Jensen)
- As the PreFrontal Cortex is still developing, adolescents struggle to see ahead and understand possible consequences of their choices, so they are not really equipped to weigh up the relative harm of risky behaviour. This is why access to positive information and experiences is so important (as are interactions with parents/teachers/coaches/mentors and other significant adults in their lives).
- Even though adolescent brains are learning at peak efficiency, much else is inefficient, including attention, self-discipline, task completion and emotions.
- "Adolescence is something they have to do on their own. We can guide them, but we can't do it for them. This is their time for growth and learning, but there is something powerful we can do to help them along the way. We can give them the information they need to light their way forward [the 365 Daily Messages]." (Karen Young, Psychologist)
- Adolescents are not irrational. Their reasoning abilities are likely to be developed by the age of 15, so, if they pause and think [consider the importance of the Daily Message of Inspiration], they will be able to logically assess if an activity is dangerous or not.
- Studies of the brain clearly show that reflection inward or in communication with others, stimulates the activation and development of the Prefrontal Cortex towards its integrative growth.
- Supportive relationships lead to stronger feelings of happiness and healthier lives, while enriched environments stimulate neuroplasticity.
- As adolescents mature, if they know how to keep developing the POSITIVE skills and activities that release DOPAMINE, they are less likely to participate in high risk behaviors like drugs, alcohol, reckless driving, over-eating and inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- Dopamine, when released in a positive sense, will reinforce goal-directed activity.

- Positive humour  boosts the vitality of our thoughts and our emotions and enhances our ability to deal with stress, anxiety and depression.
- As the Frontal Lobes mature (PreFrontal Cortex), adolescents are increasingly capable of moral reasoning and idealism. "They see the world not only as it is, but also how it could be." (Dr Sheryl Feinstein).
- When adolescents experience a spirit of belonging, they feel happy and this adds to their social and emotional wellbeing.
- Physical activity can build brain cells, enhance the development of cognitive processing skills and build strong memory pathways.
- Thinking can be taught.
- The ability of the brain to rewire and remap itself via neuroplasticity is profound.
- Where a young person grows up in a highly stressful and non-nurturing environment, his/her brain develops a greater sensitivity to stress and less propensity for healthy, nurturing behaviour.
- Students who believe they have the chance to be successful are intrinsically motivated to learn. The brain is naturally social and collaborative.
- Adolescents who are high in self-control do better in school, have higher self-esteem, better, healthier relationships and fewer problems with anger.

### **Appendix Three: Developmental Assets – Building Blocks for healthy living**

The Developmental Assets®, developed by the Search Institute over many years ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)) are 40 research-based, positive qualities that influence young people's development, helping them become caring, responsible, and productive adults. Based in youth development, resiliency, and prevention research, the Developmental Assets framework has proven to be effective and has become the most widely used approach to positive youth development in the United States and, increasingly, around the world. The framework has been adapted to be developmentally relevant from early childhood through adolescence. **This framework has been woven into the 365 Daily Messages of Inspiration.**

#### **Who needs them? Why are they important?**

Over time, studies of more than 4 million young people, undertaken by Search Institute, consistently show that the more assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviors and the more likely they are to thrive. Research shows that youth with the most assets are least likely to engage in four different patterns of high-risk behavior, including problem alcohol use, violence, illicit drug use, and inappropriate sexual activity. When they have higher levels of assets, they are more likely to do well in school, be civically engaged, and value diversity. The assets are directly linked to the development of resiliency.

The positive power of assets is evident across all cultural and socioeconomic groups of youth in the United States as well as other parts of the world. Furthermore, levels of assets are better predictors of high-risk involvement and thriving than poverty, family structure, or other demographic difference. However, the average young person experiences fewer than half of the 40 assets.

## The Assets and the Daily Messages of Inspiration

The 365 Daily Messages of Inspiration seek to encourage adolescents to maximise their undoubted potential by growing up healthy, caring and responsible. The aim is to coach and teach them to appreciate the importance of developing some key “things” (building blocks or assets) they need in themselves, such as:

- 1. A commitment to learning**, which includes self-motivation, being actively engaged in learning, completing homework and projects, connecting and caring about school and developing a new habit, for example, of reading for pleasure (3 or more hours per week) or learning how to use a Diary effectively.
- 2. Positive values**, which include caring for other people, promoting equality and social justice e.g. reducing hunger and poverty; integrity, honesty, taking personal responsibility for choices made and behavioural restraint e.g. saying ‘no’ to drugs, alcohol or inappropriate sexual activity.
- 3. Social competencies**, which include knowing how to plan ahead and make choices, having empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills; having a knowledge of and feeling comfortable with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds; being able to stand up to negative peer pressure and dangerous/potentially life-threatening situations; knowing how to resolve conflicts non-violently.
- 4. A positive identity**, feeling that he/she has control over *things that happen to me*; having high self-esteem; feeling that his/her life has a purpose; feeling hopeful and optimistic about his/her personal future.

These **internal assets** (good things we all need in our lives) take time to develop. Significant research shows that the more of these assets young people have, the more likely they are to become positive people of influence in their communities, fulfil their potential at school, resist danger, maintain good health and overcome trouble, setbacks, disappointments and obstacles. In addition, they are less likely to abuse drugs, skip school, act aggressively and violently e.g. bully, fight or attempt suicide.

Significant adults in the lives of adolescents can further assist in the development of these internal assets in adolescents, by promoting a deeper understanding of the importance of them connecting with some key **external assets**, which include:

- 1. Support** from as many of the following as possible: family/whanau, where there are high levels of love and support and where there is great communication (positive self-talk, **discussing** important issues) and trust (parents' advice is valued); three or more non-parent adults, which includes a mentor, teachers, youth leaders etc.; the adolescent feels cared for by neighbours, connected to a caring and encouraging school environment and the adolescents' parents/caregivers are actively involved in helping and encouraging them to do their very best at school.
- 2. Empowerment**, where the adolescent feels valued by the local and wider community; feels able to contribute in a positive way to the wellbeing of the community i.e. is a valued resource; offers some form of community service and, at all times, feels safe at school, home and in the neighbourhood.

**3. Boundaries and expectations**, where the family and the school have negotiated clear rules and consequences and monitors the adolescent's whereabouts; where neighbours plan an encouraging and supportive role; where parents, teachers, mentors and other adults model positive, responsible behaviour (*walk the talk*); where positive peer influence exists and where caring adults (including mentors) encourage the adolescent to aim to be the best he/she can be.

**4. Constructive use of time**, by getting involved in extracurricular activities such as music, dance, drama, cultural activities (3 hours a week); sport or some form of exercise (3 hours per week); is involved in a faith or youth or cultural group for at least one hour per week and spends time at home four to five nights a week (excluding when he/she might have to attend school or other life enriching activities/commitments).

The positive energy, self-belief and role modelling of significant adults **will** help an adolescent discover and build more of these assets, thus enabling him/her to cope more effectively with the triumphs and setbacks of life.

## **About the Founder of Youth Empowerment Seminars (YES!), Robin Cox**

Robin Cox was diagnosed with Cancer when he was nine years old. During the following years he underwent significant radiation treatment and a number of major operations. In addition, in the midst of these operations and treatment, his mother died suddenly. Robin's journey through his teenage years as a Cancer survivor has had a profound impact on his life and led to him developing a passion both for teaching and the mentoring of young people trying to find their way through challenging circumstances to become the best they can be. He achieved State or Provincial selection in a number of sports during these adolescent years and his experience as a School Captain contributed to another of his passions, developing the leadership skills of young people so they can become positive people of influence in their local and wider community.

Robin Cox, B.A., Higher Diploma in Education, is the founder of YES! The organization began in 1987 under the name South African Youth Symposia (SAYS) and its name was changed to Youth Empowerment Seminars in 1999. SAYS pioneered multicultural national symposia, which were aimed at bringing young people of all ages together to prepare for the inevitable change of government and the death of *apartheid* in South Africa. Approximately 6000 adolescents attended SAYS and YES! Workshops and seminars over the years. Symposia also looked at the development, through training, of youth Life Skills, which included conflict resolution training a significant series of skills required by young people in a *post-apartheid* South Africa.

Robin taught for 40 years, was a Secondary School Principal for eight of these years, held a variety of management positions for 22 years, and was always involved in multicultural education environments. During this time he coached sport extensively at regional and national level, was a boarding housemaster or assistant housemaster (for 18 years) and was involved in a number of community projects. He has mentored (at different levels) over 1000 adolescents from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, as well as many teachers.

In 1999 Robin and his family emigrated to New Zealand and, under the auspices of Youth Empowerment Seminars, he ran a series of one day Life Skill workshops for 15 - 17 year old students, focusing on self-image, relationship-building, communication and goal setting skills. Approximately 1000 students attended these seminars, representing 22 New Zealand Secondary (High) Schools and which gave Robin the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the thinking of New Zealand Senior School students.

In 1999 Robin developed a Mentor Training Program for volunteer adult mentors working with students who had been identified with below average self-esteem. He has continued to develop this program, trained over 1,000 volunteer adult mentors and run over 75 mentor training programs or workshops. He has also trained Mentor Trainers and developed a training program to facilitate this process. Robin's Mentor Training Program was accredited by the Auckland University of Technology and the NEPEAN TAFE (Technical And Further Education) in New South Wales, Australia.

In 2004 Robin completed the writing of a Peer Mentor Program for use in schools, which is based on two Peer Support and Peer Mentor Programs he wrote between 1990 and 2002 and which were piloted at schools in South Auckland, New Zealand he was associated with. These programs were developed around pioneering material written by Elizabeth Campbell in Australia in the 1980s and were developed with her encouragement and support. He has trained many Peer Mentors, as well as some Peer Mentor Coordinators.

In 2006 Robin received a Churchill Fellowship and travelled to the United States of America and Canada visiting 23 youth mentoring programs.

In 2006 Robin moved to Australia and, in addition to running Life Skills and career related workshops for students, he developed the GR8 Mates school-based youth mentoring program which was run successfully as a trial in three schools in New South Wales. Trained volunteer adult mentors met for an hour each week during the school term with 14 or 15 year old students identified by the school as possibly beginning to disconnect from their education journey for a variety of reasons, many of these students from single parent homes, to discuss life in general, learn how to set goals and explore career possibilities and requirements.

In 2009 Robin accepted a position as Associate Head of a co-educational school (1350 students, P-12) in North Brisbane, Australia, responsible for the pastoral care of Staff and students. He developed Life Skills programs, Peer Mentor and Peer Support programs, worked with Student Leaders, developed a new Student Leadership model and contributed to the ongoing development of a holistic education model for the school.

In 2012 Robin was invited to India where he ran *Mentoring and Coaching from the heart* Seminars at four schools, attended by approximately 150 teachers, mostly in Senior or Middle Management positions, and a workshop on goal setting at another School which was attended by approximately 130 male and female students aged 15 or 16 years old.

Since 1999 Robin has developed a *Spirit of Mentoring* Seminar which he has run in Australia and New Zealand for educators and non-educators.

In 2014 Robin received an Honorary Fellowship Award from the Australian Council for Educational Leaders.

Robin is the author of seven books, all linked to promoting the Spirit of Mentoring:

*The Mentoring Spirit of the Teacher – Inspiration, support and guidance for aspiring and practising teacher-mentors;*

*Expanding the Spirit of Mentoring – Simple steps and fun activities for a flourishing peer mentor or peer support program;*

*Nurturing the Spirit of Mentoring – 50 fun activities for young people and for peer mentor training;*

*Encouraging the Spirit of Mentoring – 50 fun activities for the ongoing training of teacher-mentors, volunteer mentors, student leaders, peer mentors and youth workers;*

*The Spirit of Mentoring – A manual for adult volunteers;*

*Letter 2 a Teen – Becoming the Best I can Be;*

*Making a Difference – The Teacher-Mentor, the Kids and the MAD Project (a novel).*

Robin is retired and currently resides in Australia, working on developing mentoring resources and programs to encourage young people to become the best they can be.

For more information, check out the YES! Website: <http://www.yess.co.nz> or his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/robin.coxmentor> communicate with him on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robin-cox-adolescent-mentoring-mentor-trainer-and-education-9a7a2128/> or follow him on Twitter @million2016coxy or Instagram #robincoxyes

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