



Dear Principal

Concerns regarding the Christian organisation Life Choices Foundation inappropriately gaining access to NSW Government secondary school students

Fairness in Religions in School (FIRIS) is writing to you to bring to your attention the Christian organisation Life Choices Foundation (LCF) and its affiliated organisation, the Jesus Racing Team (JRT).

In particular, FIRIS would like to bring to your attention the LCF program *It's your life, so, make it count*. which is marketed towards NSW Government secondary schools as a welfare program.

FIRIS is writing to you directly because of the ongoing systemic failure of the Early Learning and Primary Education Directorate to provide principals with information regarding the activities of religious groups in NSW Government schools.

FIRIS also thinks it necessary to provide you with this information because Life Choices Foundation's marketing for its program *It's your life. So, make it count*. does not make explicit the organisation's Christian bias.

Key points:

- Life Choices Foundation (LCF) and its affiliated organisation, the Jesus Racing Team (JRT) cannot be engaged as part of Special Religious Education (SRE).
- Life Choices Foundation's 'welfare' program *It's your life. So, make it count*. cannot gain access to NSW Government school students as a 'curriculum related program' because of its Christian bias.
- Material distributed to students as part of the program is both implicitly and explicitly biased towards the Christian religion (see **Attachment 2**).
- Both **LCF and the JRT can only enter NSW public schools as 'voluntary student activity of a religious nature in schools' (VSA)**. Principals in their supervision of VSA must ensure that parental permission is obtained, that materials being distributed are appropriate, and that proselytising does not occur.

Firstly, please note that both LCF and the JRT **are not** approved by the NSW Minister for Education to provide SRE in NSW public schools (see **Attachment 1**). They are not found on the list of approved SRE providers located at –

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/learning-across-the-curriculum/religion-and-ethics/approved-sre-providers>

Furthermore, approved SRE providers cannot delegate their authorisation to provide SRE in NSW Government schools to LCF or the JRT. SRE providers provide an annual assurance that they are complying with child protection legislation and are monitoring the Working with Children Check clearance numbers of their instructors. They cannot include another organisation in this assurance or make assurances on its behalf.

Secondly, LCF's program *It's your life. So, make it count*. cannot gain access to NSW Government schools as a 'curriculum related program'. The *Other Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools Procedure* states regarding curriculum-related programs with a religious base –

*When considering the use of external curriculum-related programs that have been developed by a religious persuasion, **principals must ensure that these programs do not implicitly or explicitly promote that persuasion.** Programs that promote a particular religious' persuasion should be considered SRE and are unsuitable for instruction outside the provisions for SRE. [Section 1.2] (emphasis added)*

Both LCF and the JRT are Christian organisations. LCF's student booklet distributed as part of the *It's your life. So, make it count.* program both implicitly and explicitly promotes Christianity (see **Attachment 2**). However, please note that the website of LCF does not make clear the Christian bias of the program

Therefore, both **LCF and the JRT can only enter NSW public schools as 'voluntary student activities of a religious nature in schools' (VSA)** in accordance with the *Other Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools Procedure* and the *Controversial Issues in School Policy* and its supporting Procedures.

The Department's *Other Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools Procedure* states clearly that VSA are not part of SRE but may take place under the auspices and supervision of the principal. The document goes on to say that principals in their supervision of VSA must ensure that parental permission is obtained, that the content of the activities undertaken are monitored and that -

*"students or members of religious persuasions **do not engage in attempts to proselytise or convert non-adherents of their religion to their faith** during school authorised activities."* (emphasis added)

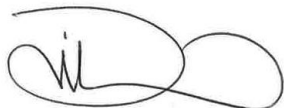
Furthermore, FIRIS believes it is important that principals are aware, before engaging LCF and the JRT, that they have specific responsibilities outlined in the *Controversial Issues in Schools Policy* (CIS Policy) and its supporting Procedures (CIS Procedures).

The CIS Procedures state that **parents/carers must be informed of the proposed content** of externally provided activities, including materials to be used, and that they **must be provided with the opportunity to either consent to or withdraw their child** from the presentation, event, program or activity [2.1]. See also section 3 of the CIS Procedures which states that the parental right to withdraw their child must be respected.

FIRIS also believes that principals need to be aware that the CIS Procedures state regarding materials distributed to students by visiting speakers that they *"are to be reviewed and approved by the principal in advance...The principal cannot delegate the task of approving materials for distribution."* [2.6]

FIRIS hopes that you keep all of the information in mind before engaging LCF and the JRT and request that both organisations only be allowed to enter NSW Government schools in accordance with the *Other Activities of a Religious Nature in Schools Procedure* and the *Controversial Issues in Schools Policy* and its supporting Procedure.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Darrin Morgan
on behalf of FIRIS

11 February 2020