

KidsMatter is a primary school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) and supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.

EDITORIAL

Introducing Kaye Johnson

Many of you will have heard that Mignon Souter, KidsMatter National Co-ordinator, has been on sick leave from the end of April. We are pleased to report that Mignon continues to make steady progress and sends her best wishes to all KidsMatter schools.

I am delighted to be the acting National Co-ordinator. As the principal of a Round 1 KidsMatter school, I have firsthand experience of the positive impact that KidsMatter can make. In my first two months in this position I have met with all Project Officers. I am now looking forward to visiting each state to see the great work schools and their communities have been doing to promote children's mental health.

From 2009 onwards

The KidsMatter pilot project is due to be completed at the end of this year. Although the final evaluation report is not due until the middle of 2009, the KidsMatter partners are impressed with the positive responses from schools.

It has been decided that 2009 will be the year to trial ways of enabling more schools to participate in the KidsMatter initiative. During 2009 there will be opportunities for current KidsMatter schools to share their learning and successful experiences with new schools.

While not all schools in Australia will be able to join in KidsMatter in 2009, they will be able to access some of the materials and resources on-line. Planning for 2009 is currently underway and we look forward to sharing details very soon.

In the meantime, enjoy the stories of KidsMatter schools from Victoria and the ACT and continue your great work.

I look forward to meeting you soon,

Kaye Johnson

KidsMatter Evaluation Update



Teachers and parents from schools participating in the KidsMatter pilot are currently completing questionnaires for the third phase of data collection for the main survey. The evaluation team from The Flinders University of South Australia - the group conducting the KidsMatter evaluation - reports that about 40 schools having now forwarded completed questionnaires. The fourth and final phase of data collection will occur early in Term 4.

The evaluation team has also now identified the 10 schools that will participate in in-depth studies on KidsMatter. The schools are: St Josephs Schofield (NSW); East Torrens (SA); Richmond Primary (TAS); Settlers Primary (WA); Brooke Avenue (NSW); Woodville Primary (SA); Waverley Primary (TAS); Nulsen Primary (WA) Living Waters (NT) and Sacred Heart Primary School (VIC). These in-depth studies will enable the evaluators to learn more about how KidsMatter has been implemented in schools.

For those wishing to know more about the KidsMatter evaluation (including details on data collection timelines and the case-study project) please visit the KidsMatter evaluation website established by Flinders University <http://caef.flinders.edu.au/kidsmatter/>

KidsMatter welcomes our new NT project officer, Michele Oliphant...



My name is Michele Oliphant and I am the (very happy!) newly appointed KidsMatter NT Project Officer. Over the last fifteen years, I have worked in a variety of roles in youth work, project management, mental health and most recently, education. The impetus to become involved with primary schools stemmed from my experiences of working with young people. I felt that many of my clients could have had far better outcomes if they had been able to access positive interventions earlier.

I believe that schools play a crucial role in a child's life; all the school communities I have ever been involved with are made up of dedicated groups of people who are motivated and committed to children's well-being. Schools are a meeting place for all the key-stakeholders in a child's life and as such hold a wealth of knowledge and initiative. I was so excited to learn about KidsMatter as it reflected my beliefs about the need to provide schools with meaningful support and relevant information that tackles Mental Health issues in an inclusive and comprehensive manner.

KidsMatter Project Officer–Indigenous Focus

After months of negotiation and a rigorous selection process, an additional Project Officer has been appointed to explore the relevance and appropriateness of KidsMatter Professional Learning, Component Plans and Resources for remote indigenous communities.

Karen Collins began in this role on May 26 by attending the National Meeting of Project Officers held in Melbourne. She brings a wealth of experience and a long-standing commitment to consulting with indigenous communities.

Much of the logistical work has now completed and Karen officially took up residence on Melville Island on Friday May 30.

We are looking forward to valuable insights being generated by Karen's work and learning with these indigenous communities.

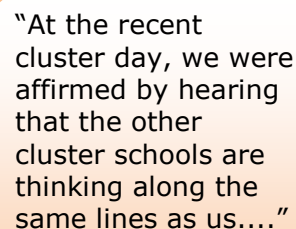
KidsMatter in the ACT

Great Support

In 2008, 3 Round 2 schools in the Australian Capital Territory began their KidsMatter journey. An additional Round 2 NSW school just across the border, has also joined the ACT family. According to Judanne Young, the KidsMatter ACT project officer, schools in the ACT have been keen to support and help each other, culminating in the April Cluster group meeting where schools got together to swap ideas and discuss challenges.

The ACT cluster group is in the process of creating an interagency group that will bring together KidsMatter schools with community services and organisations. The goal is to form working relationships with community organisations and produce a booklet for school staff and families on where support for children experiencing mental health difficulties can be accessed.

The words of staff from St Francis of Assisi show the ACT schools' commitment and enthusiasm for the Initiative: "KidsMatter is a marathon not a sprint... we want to be in it for the long haul, to see that it is important to build a strong, supportive foundation"

A light orange speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom right. It contains a quote in black text.

"At the recent cluster day, we were affirmed by hearing that the other cluster schools are thinking along the same lines as us...."

KidsMatter in Victoria

Lots of Highlights

In 2008 Victoria, 10 Round 2 schools have joined the existing 11 to Victorian schools which keeps the Victorian Project Officer, Caroline Buckley's hands full.

KidsMatter in Victoria in 2008 has had four cluster group meetings where members from the Action Teams have got together to share stories about their KidsMatter successes and challenges. While each school is different, feedback received from Round 2 school staff has been that they are enthusiastic about the KidsMatter program and view it as an opportunity to identify strengths, as well as areas where more work is needed. Parents, carers and others in the school communities are embracing the program and have demonstrated a desire to contribute.

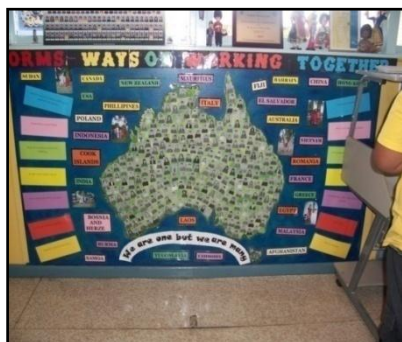
Another highlight in Victoria has been Caroline's delivery of "Four Components in a Day" which gave new staff from Round 1 schools a chance to learn about the KidsMatter framework.

You can read about some creative and inspirational ways schools are implementing their plans in the following sections... for the most part, we have focused on what has been happening in the new Round 2 schools, however, we have included some stories of Round 1 schools that were just too good to leave out...

A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Every face has a place

The majority of Round 2 schools have started KidsMatter with a focus on positive school communities – examining what they were already doing and identifying new ideas and areas that can be further explored. At one school a teacher in a year 4 class was explaining to her students that being part of KidsMatter showed that the school really valued the children that go there. The students responded that they thought it should be a 'Teachers Matter' school too. Needless to say, the teacher agreed.



In this newsletter we focus on what schools in the ACT and Victoria are doing to create cultures of inclusion, connectedness and belonging. Here are just some of the many examples...

Trinity Christian School, ACT

Trinity Christian School has received very positive feedback about their recent Multicultural day. Everyone in the school community thought it was wonderful to showcase the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds of families from the school. Two interns from the Canadian Embassy participated and found it a valuable experience. In short, every one a great day.... so much so that one student was heard to comment "well if they didn't have a good day I think they must be weird!"

Aranda Primary, Aranda, ACT

Aranda Primary Schools commitment to a positive school community is reflected in their school motto which is the Aboriginal phrase "Marima Ergurirai" which means, "Grasp the things that are good". For example, a special effort has been made to welcome grandparents, grandfriends and grandcarers into the school community via a grandfriends' day. In addition, an ESL morning tea was held to make families of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds feel like valued members of the school community.



St Mary's Primary School, Echuca, Victoria



St Mary's take great pride in the school's welcoming atmosphere and its open invitation for all to be involved. St Mary's started the school year with a Mass that focused on Indigenous Reconciliation. This was described as a very positive experience for all involved and especially welcoming and acknowledging of Indigenous families in the school community.

Brunswick North Primary School, Victoria

Brunswick North Primary School has identified their school cafe as one of their most positive

resources. The café opened in 2007 and replaced a traditional 3 days per week canteen service when their much loved canteen lady retired at the end of 2006.



The café is open from 8.30am daily and provides lunch orders and over the counter sales for students and staff at recess and lunch times. The food is prepared on site using fresh and organic ingredients. The cafe is set up so that younger children have something to do while their parents and carers meet there.

The students and staff love the café and the school has been delighted that the parent community has embraced it as well. Parents and carers pop in for take away coffees when dropping their children off at school and regularly stay after morning assemblies or arrive well before the end of the school day to have a coffee, cake and a chat.

The café is a great place for parents to discuss issues and feel a sense of community. The café is also used for meetings and Brunswick North Primary School is planning their very first KidsMatter Parent Action Team meeting there soon.



Sacred Heart Primary School, Victoria

Sacred Heart Primary school is a Round 1 school that is mostly made up of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with students from African, Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds making up the majority of the student body.

Sacred Heart's parent room opened in June 2007 and is well used. One of the many ways this room is used is for regular get togethers of a school knitting group. Many parents and carers of children at Sacred Heart like to join their children at lunch time and bring fresh hot food for them. Sacred Heart has embraced this as an opportunity to build school-family connections, providing chairs for parents and carers so they can be part of lunchtime activities.

St Francis of Assisi, Calwell, ACT

St Francis of Assisi Primary School is a Catholic school located in the suburb of Calwell in Canberra. St Francis has emphasised connections between home and school as a way of promoting a positive school community. Parents and carers are encouraged to contribute to daily school life by becoming parent volunteers and helping with activities such as reading, arts, crafts, maths games and gross motor skills.



Recently, St Francis of Assisi's hosted a school picnic to celebrate the school's 20th anniversary and to officially launch KidsMatter. In addition to staff, students and families, the picnic was attended by local representatives from Woden Daybreak Rotary who presented the school with a plaque marking their support of the school and of KidsMatter.

St Andrew's Catholic Primary School, Werribee, Victoria

St Andrew's Catholic Primary School in Werribee has set aside an area that is available to children at various times throughout the day that has been designed for children who do not feel like playing in the playground. The children are involved in playing games, using the facilities inside the unit and caring for the school animals (including water dragons, turtles, snakes, lizards, chickens and rabbits).



In addition, St Andrew's have implemented a peer mediation program during lunch hours where students from years 5 and 6 assist the children in the junior yard with any problems they may be experiencing. They also have a whole school buddy program with a special focus on years prep and six. This is a great example of how integrating several strategies can create positive and inclusive school environments.

Increasing belonging through the use of the friendship seat/stop/pole

At **St Louis De Montfort** it's called a friendship pole, at St Therese's it's called a bus stop; other schools have a friendship seat. The idea is that children who don't have anyone to play with can wait at the friendship pole and other children will come along and invite the child to play.



This teaches children to initiate friendship and include others, helping schools create a culture of inclusion and belonging. Teaching staff support the initiative by modelling appropriate behaviour and stimulating class discussion on what it feels like when you can't find anyone to play with, with kids brainstorming ways they could help.

In another example use of the friendship seat has been supported by older peer mediators who take on the responsibility of keeping an eye on friendship pole and suggesting games and activities that children can be a part of. Initiatives like this help schools to promote caring relationships and an inclusive environment and make schools a less daunting place for children who are feeling lonely or shy.

More information on how a friendship seat can be used within a whole school approach of building inclusive school environments is available in the article by Dr Bill Rogers (2006, Building playtime communities. *Classroom magazine*, 3, 28-29). Available from: www.scholastic.com.au/schools/magazines/classroom/pdfs/Classroom_3_06_Page28.pdf



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

Knowing me, knowing you and getting along too!

"We soon agreed on the importance of formally teaching social and emotional skills..."

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been shown to be fundamental to children's mental health, academic learning, moral development, and motivation to cooperate and achieve. Here are some examples of how schools from the ACT and Victoria have shown commitment to teaching SEL, in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

St Anne's Primary School, Seaford

Staff at St Anne's Primary School in Seaford recognises the importance of SEL and have made a commitment to educating

the whole child, within a relevant and comprehensive curriculum. They encourage the children to develop SEL skills through the You Can Do It! social and emotional learning program, a comprehensive AUSLAN program and a project room where students can work in a practical way, planning and making a variety of objects.



Benalla Primary School, Benalla, Victoria

Part of Benalla's school mission is to ensure the development of social and emotional skills and core values which lead to success in life. Benalla Primary has also chosen the You Can Do It! social and emotional learning program that aims to help children develop important skills such as confidence, persistence, organisation, the ability to get along with others and emotional resilience.

St Francis of Assisi, Calwell, ACT

During term one, students in years 2 to 4 at St Francis of Assisi took part in social skills rotational workshops to learn about topics like self-esteem, anti-bullying and friendships. St Francis is also looking to implement the social and emotional *Bounceback* later in the year to ensure SEL is taught in a formal and coordinated manner across Kindergarten to Year 6.

St Louis De Montfort, Aspendale, Victoria

The wellbeing leaders at St Louis De Montfort organised a whole school You Can Do It! day where the school was grouped into multi-age family groups. The school has also held a parent information session with Margaret Milne (from You Can Do It!) so that parents, carers and families can gain understanding of how they can support their children's social and emotional learning at home. Feedback received from the school is that children are becoming more aware of other children's feelings.



Check it out...

Recently, the Institute of Families Studies has released an informative and useful briefing on Working with families concerned with school-based bullying. It is available from:

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing11.html>

Schools and families caring for kids!

Parenting support and education is crucial to the success of school-based mental health programs for students. Unique ways that KidsMatter schools are approaching parenting support and education include the inclusion of regular KidsMatter pages in the school newsletters, parenting education evenings and inviting experts in the field of parenting and education to come and talk with the school community. Feedback received is that parents and carers are extremely responsive to the new initiatives and are embracing the opportunity to learn what support and resources are available. Here, we highlight some great examples....



St Francis of Assisi, Calwell, ACT

St Francis of Assisi is sending the KidsMatter parent information sheets home as part of the weekly newsletters. This provides parents with useful information on children's mental health and information on where they can find more information if they are concerned about their child. Recently, St Francis also held a parent information session that included a presentation from Judanne, the ACT project officer.

St Anne's Primary School, Seaford

St Anne's is currently getting their KidsMatter parents room up and running as a place where parents can access resources and meet together. St Anne's is also distributing the KidsMatter information sheets in their newsletters and have held parent information evenings and *Schools as Core Social Centres* parent sessions.

St Andrew's Catholic Primary School, Werribee, Victoria

St Andrew's is currently implementing *AusParenting in Schools* which aims to support children's wellbeing by strengthening the relationships between families and schools, encouraging family involvement and providing resources and information for parents and carers in the school community. St Andrews has also developed a parent room where parents and carers can access books, flyers and resources or meet for a chat.



Link:

For more information on AusParenting in Schools (and lots of other great information for parents) check out the *Parenting Research Centre's* website:

<http://www.parentingrc.org.au/vp/programs/programview.php?id=5&page=overview>

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Looking for B-E-T-L-S

Our new KidsMatter resources on early intervention for students experiencing mental health difficulties have now been published and are being distributed to schools by Project Officers. Initial feedback has been very positive, with school staff finding the depth of information and practical suggestions very helpful in enabling them to better respond to children who show signs of mental health difficulties. The KidsMatter early intervention resources encourage parents, carers and school staff to make careful observations of any concerns they may have. This is where the BETLS come in:



The key things to observe when you are concerned that children may have mental health difficulties are: **B**ehaviour, **E**motions, **T**houghts, **L**earning & **S**ocial relationships. Looking for the 'BETLS' across different situations provides a more complete picture of any concerns and helps with deciding what kinds of support a child might need.

Here are a few examples of what our Victorian and ACT schools are doing to further their early intervention assistance for students...

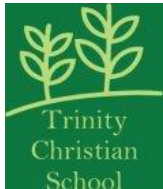
Southvale Primary School, Noble Park, Victoria

A round 2 school, staff at Southvale Primary have shown great enthusiasm for KidsMatter and have already completed all of the professional development for the 4 components. While their focus in the first

part of the 2008 is building a sense of community, Southvale has taken positive steps in addressing early intervention for students experiencing mental health difficulties. In particular, Southvale is involved in fortnightly meetings where any concerns about children's well-being are discussed. They have also made a contact with the mental health section at Dandenong hospital.

St Francis of Assisi, Calwell, ACT

The development of the ACT interagency support network will help St Francis of Assisi, and the other KidsMatter schools in the ACT, to access support and services that are available in the community. This will help children experiencing mental health difficulties to gain the best help possible.



Trinity Christian School, ACT

St Trinity is continuing to update families and teaching staff in the areas of mental health. This term partners from the University of Canberra are hosting a 6 week course for parents who are concerned about their children in relation to body image and eating disorders.

Staff are very supportive of the KidsMatter initiative, as they see firsthand each day, that if children have poor mental health, then they aren't effective learners.



Australian Government
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