



March 2011 KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter: Issue 19

Editorial

There are currently about 350 stories unfolding across Australia that tell how schools are engaging with KidsMatter Primary, and all these stories are different. This is a very good thing. The KidsMatter framework provides schools with a structure for writing their own stories as they work with their communities towards improving the mental health, wellbeing and learning of children. However these are stories in which schools provide their own cast, settings and plot lines. Also, unlike the classic narrative genre with a beginning, a middle and an end, these KidsMatter school stories have no end; they continue to unfold. Every year cast members leave and new ones arrive, and as the nature and dynamics of the community change, so too does the plot.

In each edition of the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter you can read some of these stories; this time from South Australia and Victoria. You can also read ideas and tips for supporting 'new cast members' (children starting school) and access resources promoting their feelings of belonging and connectedness.

As you might already know KidsMatter Primary will be expanding with \$18.4 million in additional funding from the Australian Government. The expansion phase has begun and by June 2014, the aim is to have 1700 additional KidsMatter school stories being written and told. The KidsMatter Primary national team is working to ensure that these school stories will be able to come from any school that makes the decision to take on KidsMatter, anywhere in the country. We will keep you informed of developments.

Jeremy Hurley

Principals Australia
KidsMatter Primary National Coordinator

Tips for starting the school year: Resources for schools, parents and carers



Tips for starting the school year

In our last edition, we featured a resource from the *KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative* which sparked a lot of interest. Based on popular demand and the start of the school year, here are some other tips and information about starting school that could also be useful for the start of the school year.

What children experience

Whilst many children will make a smooth start to school, it is not unusual to have some bumps along the way. Children may have a combination of feelings about starting school, such as nervousness, excitement and anticipation. During times of change, such as starting school, children will respond differently and some children can experience stress. Some children may express themselves with increased or new behaviours. These may include being clingy, restless, withdrawn, throwing tantrums, refusing to follow rules, hitting out, or regressing to earlier behaviour such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking. Some may experience changes in sleep or appetite.

Children may need support with and help to understand and cope with the different feelings and any changes in behaviour they may be experiencing.

How to help: Tips for parents, carers and schools

A cooperative approach involving parents, carers and schools has been shown by research to produce the best results for children schools can often offer a variety of opportunities for families at this time.

Many parents report that they value information provided by schools and would like more, as well as increased opportunities to meet staff, access the school site and other families in the school community. Many parents also report that they would like more assistance on helping their child manage change, and the behaviours that might follow.

Some suggestions for how parents and carers can support their children when starting school include:

Support positive thinking: Speak positively about school, while also listening to children's concerns and reassuring them that it is okay to feel nervous about change.

Inform children: Answer any questions they have, and give them opportunities to become familiar with the school environment and other children and families if possible.

Practise routines: Help your child to prepare for the routines they need, from getting up and going to bed at certain times, to dressing themselves, and the journey there and back.

Promote problem solving: Talk to your child about what they will do in different situations, such as when they are in class and need to go to the toilet. Teach them the process of problem solving.

Use the language of feelings: Help your children to build up their vocabulary, so they can tell you how they are feeling and any difficulties they may be facing.

Read and paint: Books about starting school can help spark conversations with your children, as can using painting or drawing as a tool for helping them to express themselves.

Be aware: Children who have an older sibling at school may not necessarily have an easier time adjusting or react in the same way. They may have picked up ideas about what will happen at school. Talk through these.

Encourage relationship skills: Help your child learn friendship skills such as joining in, listening and taking turns, and talk with them about their relationships.

Expect tiredness: The first days and weeks can be exhausting. Make sure children are well nourished and get plenty of rest. You may need to limit after-school activities temporarily.

Time to talk: From the start make sure your children have opportunities to talk about school, but remember not to overwhelm them with too many questions if they are tired or try to force them to talk.

Get involved: Having parents and carers who are involved in their education and school community can help children develop a sense of belonging. Seek out other families with children at the school.

Don't forget to celebrate: The transition to school can be challenging but it is also an exciting milestone in your child's life. Taking time to celebrate this important event can make it special for the whole family.

More ideas for supporting children starting school can be found here:

<http://www.educationreview.com.au/pages/section/article.php?s=Breaking+News&idArticle=19720>

Belonging at School makes a difference: Resources for schools, parents and carers

Belonging at School makes a Difference

All children need to feel that school is a safe place, where their needs for support, respect and friendship will be met, and where they will be able to get help to work out problems. When these needs are met children develop a sense of belonging at school and this is very important for mental health.

Belonging improves mental health and learning

Children who feel they belong at school are happier, more relaxed, have fewer behavioural problems and are also more motivated and better learners. Making friends and having positive relationships with teachers also helps develop this sense of belonging.

Ways Schools can help create a sense of belonging

- Making the school environment welcoming for all students and families
- Encouraging teachers to get to know all their students and their families
- Identifying ways of improving communication with families
- Making sure that school policies on safety, welfare and discipline are clearly communicated and support a sense of belonging for children and families.



What can parents and carers do to help create a sense of belonging?

- Find out about the school and what your child is learning; participate in information sessions
- Make time to listen to your child tell you about what he or she is doing at school
- Let your child's teacher know if he/she is having difficulties and discuss what kinds of things you can do at home and school to help.

For more information the KidsMatter Primary Component 1 resource sheet *Belonging at School* can be found at <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/>

Connecting at School: Resources for schools, parents and carers

Why Connect at School?

Being connected at school is about parents and carers knowing that they can get support, be listened to and work together with school staff to help children learn and develop. Working together will support children's mental health.

When schools and parents and carers work together children find it easier to understand what is expected from them, are better able to manage, have fewer behaviour problems and also do better at school.

When parents and carers are connected to school it helps them get support when they need it.

Schools can help families connect by having many activities that parents and carers can get involved in. School is a place for parent and carers to make new friends too.

Being connected to the school helps keep parents informed. When parents and carers are informed about what their children are learning at school and have opportunities to get involved they are able to support their child better at home.



How your school can help parents and carers build connections

- Keep in contact with your students' parents and carers
- Find out what are the needs and barriers for parents and carers in your school community
- Use as many different ways as possible to communicate about school activities and events e.g. school BBQ, school website, notices etc.
- Provide a variety of school information sessions and social activities
- Try and encourage parents and carers' contact with each other at your school either informally, through parent social groups or through parent committees.
- Remind parents and carers about the school council and encourage that they join if they have time

For more information the KidsMatter Primary Component 1 resource sheet *Why connect at school* can be found at <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/resources/information-resources/>

KidsMatter Primary News: South Australia & Victoria

South Australia: Expansion equals possibilities

We are extremely excited about the funding to enable KidsMatter Primary to be expanded to a further 1700 primary schools across Australia by June 2014.

There has been a surge of excited interest and planning in South Australia to significantly support more schools in working towards improving the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of their primary aged students.

We are currently scheduled to run five information Briefings in March in the metropolitan area and in some regional areas. These are predominately breakfast sessions which were trialed in 2010 and appear to be a popular time slot (nothing like busy people fitting even more into their day, before their actual day begins!)

We are also in the process of strategically planning how we can provide support in a respectful and timely way to all schools across the State who are interested in implementing KidsMatter Primary. Part of this includes facilitating a "Round Table" discussion at the end of March. This will include inviting people from a range of educational and health sectors to assist with planning at a state level.

An example of one way that we are attempting to work within a Region is our work in the Murray/Mallee area including some initial work in the Murray Bridge Township.



We were fortunate to engage approximately eleven schools from various sectors, focusing on the Riverland area (a beautiful yet complex region, with the mighty Murray River being a huge focal point). Each school is at varying stages of the Implementation journey due to a range of reasons that all school communities can relate to.

One of the positive outcomes from our work together at a community level, is the "Unlocking Well Being" Conference to be held in **Berri on June 10th**. This is supported by both KidsMatter and MindMatters. Crucially and excitingly, the planning committee consists of a wide variety of community representatives including some from Education and Health sectors. The conference is aimed primarily at agencies and personnel who currently work with primary and secondary schools or who would like to work with them. The planning committee has invited a range of facilitators to run various sessions which will be complemented by performances to remind us of the range of ways for 'unlocking' our wellbeing. Our aim is that with community support, this could be an ongoing event.

We are hoping that a range of schools from a wide geographical area will become involved.....eventually we hope to have a "whole Region" approach to mental health and wellbeing. This cannot happen without support from schools, key agencies and of course, the communities themselves. By working together in a planned and sustainable manner we can all contribute to making a difference to the wellbeing of students.

We are looking forward to continuing our work with existing KidsMatter Primary schools and excited by the possibilities in 2011 and beyond!

Lana Jankowiak
South Australia State Coordinator

KidsMatter Primary in Victoria, the present and the future

KidsMatter Primary in Victoria is going from strength to strength. To support more schools than the 100 schools already engaged across the state we have trained an additional 100 teachers, parents, schools, Student Support Services Officers (SSSOs) and a host of others in one or more of the KidsMatter Primary components. We have achieved our aim of identifying and training an Implementation Support Person for each school and the support from sectors and other agencies has meant that schools are gaining more and more support in their journey. We have also had more than a dozen schools identify an interest in becoming a KidsMatter school through the website, a new approach for engaging with the initiative.

With KidsMatter Primary entering this exciting new 'expansion' phase the number of schools and support structures to assist them will grow even further. To map out how this will work in Victoria high level representatives from education sectors and representatives from other associations will meet in March. The future for Victoria will include enhancement to the structures and forums that enable schools to both give and obtain support, engage with community agencies and share ideas and best practice with both health and education professionals.

Overall these structures will ensure that schools are better supported and the practices that focus on student mental health and wellbeing are better embedded into the culture of schools. More schools will mean more great ideas and great stories from the KidsMatter community and above all more students supported through their primary school experience.

Keep up the great work.

Paul Shelton

Victoria State Coordinator

School snapshots: Victoria & South Australia

School snapshot: Victoria

"My nephew goes to a KidsMatter School and says it's great, how can I get my school involved as well?" Whether it be nephews, nieces, friends, children or staff from other schools the word on KidsMatter Primary is definitely starting to spread. More and more of the people coming to briefings already have a knowledge or personal connection to KidsMatter and are not there to ask "what is KidsMatter Primary?" but rather "how can I get involved?" This is testament to some of the great work that is being done by schools and communities under the KidsMatter Primary Framework in Victoria.



One school that has made a great start to their KidsMatter journey is Kinglake Primary School and we thank them for sharing their story so far with us.

We began our partnership with KidsMatter Primary in 2010. The morale of our school community was low, and we needed to strengthen our relationships with our families and build up community spirit. We decided that KidsMatter could provide us with the framework to address the mental health of all members of our school community and assist us to build a positive atmosphere and sense of belonging in our community for Component 1: A positive school community.

The first decision we made was to foster an understanding of our school values and provide opportunities for our students to demonstrate their understanding of them. We provided recognition of this through the development of our 'Kinglake Ace' program. As part of this program student behaviours that demonstrated our eight school values of respect, resilience, responsibility, organisation, friendship, achievement, cooperation and persistence were recorded.

After consistently demonstrating behaviour that reflected our values students were awarded a "Kinglake Ace" meaning they received a wristband and certificate which was presented at our school assembly. In addition, their photo was placed on our "Wall of Honour". This program reinforced and recognised positive behaviour and celebrated student success.

The KidsMatter initiative has helped staff to become more aware of the importance of positive contacts with our school community. As a result, we provided our school community with more opportunities to be involved. These included; twilight sports, family barbecues, afternoon teas, musical production, maths nights, information sessions, theme days, and school assemblies.

In addition, postcards of the school were printed and a decision was made by staff to initiate one positive parent contact per term per student through the sending home of a personally written postcard to parents. The feedback from families was incredible. Many made mention of the delight they felt after receiving a postcard from their child's teacher. In addition, all students received a letter from the principal before school returned in 2011. Preps also received an introduction letter from their new teacher.

The KidsMatter initiative has also increased staff awareness of the importance of making school activities as inclusive as possible. This means barbecues and celebrations cater for dietary and cultural requirements. Theme days include options to allow for the variety of interests of the students. Cultural differences and individual needs are taken into consideration when planning school events.

Staff at Kinglake have always strived to foster a warm and caring atmosphere where students feel relaxed, comfortable and confident to take risks in their learning. We like to consider our school community as a family who support each other and encourage friendship and a spirit of community and a sense of belonging. The KidsMatter Primary initiative has complemented this.

School snapshot: South Australia

Marymount College: A place of belonging

Marymount College is a Catholic Girls Middle School (Years 6-9), located in the south western beach suburbs of Adelaide. The school has an enrolment of approximately 524 students. Marymount College is a 'place of belonging' and the school is committed to ensuring this becomes a reality for all, in a safe, welcoming and supportive community.

Staff at Marymount College recognize the importance of good mental health and its relationship to student learning. At Marymount, every teacher is not only a teacher of their learning area, but also a teacher of wellbeing. In fact all staff in our school have a responsibility for the wellbeing of our students; whether it's through daily interactions, or the smile given to someone in the corridor. Relationship building is considered paramount and staff spend considerable time at the beginning of the year ensuring students develop their relationships with each other and with their teachers.

A whole school approach

KidsMatter Primary had its beginnings at Marymount following a session attended by the Year 6 and 7 Leaders of Student Wellbeing and Learning. They were enthused with the possibilities it could offer us. From here an Action Team was formed that included a parent representative. Professional learning sessions in Component 1 and 2 occurred over a period of time with staff. As it was important to develop a whole school understanding of mental health, Year 8 and 9 teachers also participated in the learning. In order to also develop staff understanding of the importance of a positive school community and to provide all members with a voice and enhance connections between staff, all staff participated in Component 1 training. During this time the school also began the introduction of MindMatters, a complementary program which supports the mental health of secondary students.

Setting a direction and beyond

Feedback received from staff through the survey and the professional learning, enabled the Action Team to identify areas to pursue further. What became apparent was that there were many wonderful initiatives already happening in our school context that fostered positive mental health in our students. We looked at what else we could do, and from this developed our goal of creating a 'welcoming, friendly, creative and inclusive school community for everyone'. As part of this and recognizing that a sense of belonging is a key protective factor for mental health, we embraced 'every face has a place'. One of our whole school Masses was a celebration and recognition of this. Staff also worked together to make improvements to our school's physical environment as this was identified as something that could be more welcoming. Some of these improvements were for staff also as evidenced by some changes in the staff room.

Following the professional learning of Component 2 on Social and Emotional learning, the Year 7 teachers selected the programs, 'Passport' and 'Listen Up' to explicitly teach social emotional learning and incorporated this across a number of learning areas. The Year 6 classes will begin work in this area this year.

Implementing KidsMatter Primary at Marymount has opened up more doors for us, as we heighten our understanding of the importance of mental health and wellbeing and the protective factors for students associated with good mental health. We have been able to take the implementation at our own pace and define areas of priority for our school context, with the support of the KidsMatter framework, the KidsMatter Primary Coordinator and Catholic Education consultancy personnel. We are looking forward to beginning Component 3: Parenting Support and Education as we strengthen our partnerships with our families and the community. Already KidsMatter has been a vehicle to enable us to give a higher focus to wellbeing and mental health within our school community.

KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative & KidsMatter Early Childhood-Updates

Update on the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative Pilot

The Initiative has been met with lots of enthusiasm from Pilot schools and the first two information sessions for parents and carers conducted in Term 4 last year were well received in the school communities. Feedback from individual pilot schools was extremely positive with schools having a great turn out with the number of parents and carers attending the sessions.

Schools are now preparing for the final two information sessions. Session 3, 'Settling In' provides information for parents and carers on skills that can help to make the settling in process easier for children. The session covers tips on helping children cope with starting school by examining their thinking styles and promoting helpful thinking and problem solving skills. Session 4, 'Looking forward', the final information session for parents and carers provides information on social and emotional learning and how parents and carers can support their children in developing these important skills. The session also highlights the importance of families working together with their school to assist their child's learning both academically and socially.

Resource Booklets have also been designed for each information session which provides parents and carers with all the information mentioned in the sessions and additional tips and suggestions to assist children and families.

We look forward to providing a further update on the pilot in the next eNewsletter.



Update on KidsMatter Early Childhood

The latest issue of the KidsMatter Early Childhood eNewsletter, contains resources and information about how to cope with natural disasters, learn about implementation progress for Components Two and Three and read about the value of developing partnerships. The feature story brings news from Queensland and Northern Territory Facilitators.

Go to the next link to read the KidsMatter Early Childhood eNewsletter Issue 3, the first for 2011:

<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec/resources/enewsletter/enewsletter-issue-3/>