

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

2007 - The year that was...

As the year draws to a close, we didn't want to miss the opportunity to reflect on all that has been achieved and accomplished with KidsMatter in 2007. Of particular note has been the 2-day KidsMatter briefing in South Australia in September this year, which saw our second group of 51 schools come on board. Another key highlight has been the round 1 schools finishing their PD sessions and making great in-roads into supporting student's mental health.

We also didn't want to finish the year without introducing you to our KidsMatter Project Officers and schools in Queensland and Western Australia. So, in this edition, you will hear about how both round one and two schools in each of these States have embraced the KidsMatter Initiative.

From all of us here at KidsMatter, we hope you have a great and much deserved break, and we will see you all in the New Year!



Thank you and farewell...

We would like to take this opportunity to also thank Claire Cowen, KidsMatter Project Officer in the Northern Territory. Her dedication and contributions to KidsMatter over this time have been strongly valued. Claire is moving on to spend more time with her two young sons and her family, and we wish her all the very best in the future.

KidsMatter Update

The KidsMatter evaluation has now moved into its second phase with teachers completing follow-up questionnaires. As of early December, about 40 of the 101 participating schools had returned their questionnaires. At this stage, we would like to thank all the parents and teachers who have completed KidsMatter questionnaires during 2008 – your contributions will play a vital role in determining the future of KidsMatter. We would also like to give a big thank you to the school personnel that have taken responsibility of coordinating data collection at their school. For those wishing to know more about the KidsMatter evaluation information can be viewed at the website established by Flinders University <http://caef.flinders.edu.au/kidsmatter/>

Latest developments

The KidsMatter resource development team have put together a set of four posters, complete with child-friendly slogans, to promote each of the four KidsMatter components in schools.

These have already started arriving in schools, and each school is encouraged to use the posters



KidsMatter promotes
a positive school
community where
everyone belongs.



Some creative ideas that schools have had already, include:

- Using the KidsMatter posters as centre pieces, and surrounding them with photos, artworks and information that show how your school is approaching the respective KidsMatter Components
- Hang the posters in the foyer of your school where they are sure to catch the attention of visitors
- Hang the posters in the staff room as handy reminders of the core elements of KidsMatter.

Introducing our Project Officer in Queensland



KidsMatter State Project Officer for Queensland – Michael Hardie

Over the last twenty years, Michael has worked in a variety of roles in health promotion, education and community development. Prior to taking up the position as KidsMatter Project Officer in Queensland, he coordinated a 'resilience project', working with primary school communities in Brisbane and Charleville. This experience has proven invaluable in developing his role with KidsMatter. Michael has a passion for finding creative ways to develop social and emotional learning and has been inspired by the possibilities that are becoming realities in KidsMatter schools.

Introducing our Project Officer in Western Australia

KidsMatter State Project Officer for Western Australia – Cate Engelbrecht

Cate has worked for over eleven years as a psychologist in both education and health sectors. Most of this time Cate spent working as a school psychologist in the Kimberley, although she also managed to find time to lecture at Notre Dame University in Broome; run a private psychology practice for adults and children; and be involved in two separate research projects conducted by Curtin University and the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council concerning the health and resilience of Aboriginal people respectively. Cate also has a Dip. Ed. in Special Needs and recently completed a masters degree in International Health, and believes that KidsMatter has the potential to make an immense difference to all those involved.



Action Team Cluster Meeting, WA

The Action Team members from Liwara Catholic Primary School, Kinlock Primary School, St. Simon Peter Catholic Primary School and Holy Name School attended a Cluster Meeting held in Kings Parks in October which gave them all the opportunity to meet, network and establish collegial support for one another. They were also given the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and experiences from being involved in KidsMatter, to shape the future of the Initiative.

Someone handy in the kitchen even went to the trouble of making these gingerbread men which have a striking resemblance to the KidsMatter logo...



A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Every face has a place!

A positive school community promotes feelings of belonging and connection which are both protective factors for mental health. Schools can enhance connection when opportunities are provided for students, staff, families and the community to participate in a range of school activities. Here are some stories about how KidsMatter schools in Western Australia and Queensland are working hard to welcome the local community into the school...

Nulsen Primary School, Esperance, WA.

At one of Nulsen Primary's recent school assemblies, twelve community agencies put on displays and offered 'show bags' to all families attending.

This was a great opportunity for families and staff to gather information about the many agencies that have



their support behind KM. Agencies included Education Department reps, counselling and carer support groups, child care facilities, Community Policing, and Ministry of Justice to name a few.

Ithaca Creek State School in QLD and *Geraldton Grammar School* in WA, are both planning a similar 'Agency Expo' next year that will involve local services and organisations. Community agencies have been very responsive to this idea, especially in the Geraldton area, and we look forward to hearing more about this in 2008.



Redlynch State College, Redlynch, QLD.

After returning from the 2-day briefing in Adelaide, the Action Team at Redlynch State College in far north Queensland (round 2 school) has worked hard to introduce their school community to the KidsMatter Initiative. At their recent school fete, which was attended by over 4,000 people, they had a KidsMatter stall (pictured) which provided a 'chill out' area for both parents and children. Children could make sand stress balls in the KidsMatter colours, decorate a butterfly or grab a KidsMatter coloured balloon; all whilst parents took some time-out on the comfy sofas and bean bags. The stall was manned by the KidsMatter action team members who were easily identifiable from their t-shirts.



Home Hill State School, Home Hill, QLD.

Home Hill strongly encourages student participation within their school community, and has a very successful 'student parliament' in place which aims to give students a voice. Pictured here (right) is one example of the visual transformation the school has undergone recently, where Year 7 students decorated a school building with colourful butterflies. Home Hill also hosted two book fairs this year, which required strong collaboration between staff, students and parents/carers. These fairs turned out to be big community events with many visiting the school for the first time. This ultimately won them \$5,000 worth of books in a national book fair competition. Congratulations Home Hill SS!

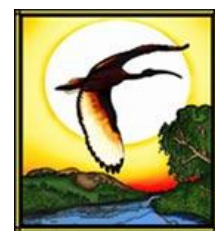


Unity College, Caloundra West, QLD.

Unity College is a very new and state-of-the-art school whose staff are very committed to the KidsMatter goals. A round 2, Unity College has already identified the importance of supporting and building a positive community in what is a rapidly expanding school. They have a holistic approach to education that relates strongly to the KM framework.

The Willows State School, Kirwan, QLD.

The Willows SS is a rapidly expanding school with currently over 1,000 students. Having commenced as a round 2 school, staff at The Willows SS are strongly committed to KidsMatter, and all of their deputies are engaged in the planning process. They are also planning on having a defence force representative on their Action Team as the school community includes many defence force personnel.



Caloundra Primary School, Caloundra, QLD.

Due to considerable staff changeover, Caloundra PS has had a delayed start with their implementation of KidsMatter. Now they are looking forward to welcoming a new principal whose focus for Caloundra in the New Year will be building relationships between staff, staff and students, and staff and parents/families. This is an aspect of a positive school community, as it helps to build a sense of belonging. We wish them well.



Goondiwindi State Primary School, Goondiwindi, QLD.

Goondiwindi State PS plans to focus on building a positive school community in 2008 and several initiatives have already been planned for this. Early next year, Goondiwindi State PS will launch the KidsMatter initiative at their whole school community parent night, which will be combined with a 'Family Resource Expo' at their Community Centre. They are also planning to hold a Youth Mental Health Forum in conjunction with the local Rotary group.



Opening the school gate: Engaging CLD families in schools

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) has published this very useful resource for teachers and school staff on how to engage parents and families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in schools and encouraging their participation in their child's education. It provides a wide range of strategies for planning and running an effective CALD parents' meeting, as well as how to support CALD families in your school. *Opening the school gate* also contains a list of additional resources, including organisations who can be contacted for further advice and help. It is available free to download from:



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

Knowing me, knowing you and getting along too!

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. SEL is more effective for both students and staff when there are coordinated and supported processes throughout the school. Below you can read about how some schools have set out to achieve school-wide implementation of their chosen SEL programs, and how strongly they view the importance of Component 2...

Liwara Catholic State School, Greenwood, WA.

Liwara Catholic SS has extended their SEL programming to the early years by implementing strategies for both their Kindy and Pre-prep students. They are hoping to start building a feelings vocabulary and to help their students start recognising their strengths, so that children will have a good basis for further developing these skills in the primary years.

Sandy Strait State School, Hervey Bay, QLD.

At Sandy Strait, staff from every year level have taken on the responsibility for the steps and tasks needed to achieve whole-school implementation of You Can Do It!, their selected SEL program. This level of involvement has been very highly valued at Sandy Strait as it has given a sense of ownership and empowered staff across the whole school. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is now a formal part of their whole school curriculum plan, and this helps to ensure continuity and consistency across all year levels.



Wondai P-10 State School, Wondai, QLD.

Like Sandy Strait SS, Wondai SS also decided to implement Program Achieve from You Can Do It! Education. Over the course of the year, this SEL program has become embedded within the school's curriculum. One of key things that have supported the success of this program has been giving teacher aide time to prepare excellent classroom support materials.



Tallebudgera State School, Tallebudgera, QLD.

Tallebudgera SS is a round 2 school that has recently commenced their journey with KidsMatter. In their early planning phase, they have identified Component 3 as something they look forward to focusing on in 2008. We wish them all the best.

St. Joseph's School Stanthorpe, Stanthorpe, QLD.

St Joseph's Stanthorpe SS presented at the 'Building Resilience in Communities and Schools' showcase conference at the University of Southern Queensland. Principal Tom Staples, class teacher Johanna Campbell, and Project Officer Michael Hardie were all involved in presenting the key elements of the KidsMatter Initiative to the conference attendees.

PARENTING SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

Schools and families caring for kids!

Parenting support and education is crucial to the success of school-based mental health programs for students. The relationships between school staff and parents/families have a very significant influence on the extent to which parents/families will access information, education and support provided by the

school. Parents/families will be much more likely to access available support and education if they have developed collaborative relationships with the school.

Component 3 has been a major focus for some of the KidsMatter schools. Cate, KidsMatter Project Officer in WA, reports that this Component has been particularly well received by her round 2 schools with most – including *Hilton Primary School*, *Lance Holt School* and *Cooinda Primary School* –having already started planning for this area. Cate believes that having parents from St. Simon Peter at that 2-day KidsMatter briefing in September, helped build enthusiasm for this component.



Settlers Primary School, Baldivis, WA.

Settlers PS has a new Action Team in place that has enthusiastically continued with KidsMatter. They have organised space for a parent room, and are currently in the process of organising a large KidsMatter noticeboard to attract parents and visitors with information and news. They also have plans next year for fortnightly KM newsletters with lots of information for parents.



Upper Mount Gravatt State School, Brisbane, QLD.

Upper Mount Gravatt SS is a round 2 school that has a very energetic and committed Action Team with a strong parent representation. They have plans to open a parent room next year, and they have already held an open parent forum to explore ideas for addressing this Component. Supporting these committed parents is something Upper Mount Gravatt SS has realised is important if they are also to create a positive school community.



Kinlock Primary School, Ferndale, WA.

For most of this year, Kinlock PS has offered parenting programs and operated a very popular parent room that has lots of information for parents and carers. The tea and coffee facilities, along with the lounge suite generously donated by a parent, go a long way to making this a comfortable and inviting place – so much so that this room is now a base for the school support staff to talk with parents needing support.



Pomona State School, Pomona, QLD.

This year, instead of the usual 'Meet the Teacher' sessions at the beginning of the year, Pomona SS held a more casual after school event that involved a free sausage sizzle. It was a relaxed and friendly occasion where teachers and parents/carers could get together. Pomona has also built some strong connections with their local Rotary Club, and hope to establish an 'EarlyAct' community focussed group in conjunction with Rotary next year.



Leeming Primary School in WA is a round 2 school that has invited WA Project Officer Cate, to speak at their 'new parents orientation day' and introduce KidsMatter to their parent/carer community. Similarly, *Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School* and *Rockingham Beach Primary School* in WA are very keen to have Cate introduce and explain the KidsMatter Initiative to their school community at their next

Parents and Friends (P&F) meetings. We look forward to hearing more about this in the New Year.



Burdekin School (Special School), Ayr, QLD.

Burdekin have recently welcomed a new principal to their school, who has been actively involved in building trusting relationships with parents and carers. A strong foundation of trust is important to Burdekin, particularly as a large part of their parent/carer community have children with diverse abilities and needs. Staff at Burdekin often work with various community agencies to provide support for students.



Ideas for surviving the school holidays...

The fast approaching school holidays is often cause for much excitement – that is of course, unless you are a parent or carer who must now think of some creative ways to fill (and survive!) what can be 6, very long weeks...



The *Children, Youth and Women's Health Service* have some important tips to keep in mind:

- Remember children do not need to be "entertained" all the time. Just a change of place or a few suggestions can help them to be very creative on their own.
- Just getting out into different surroundings starts lots of new play ideas for children. Find out about parks and playgrounds in your neighbourhood and around the city.
- Sometimes saying 'I'm bored' is another way of saying 'I want you to play with me', and sometimes the child has not even started to try to think of what to do themselves.
- Try to arrange some individual time with each child if you can, as well as family time - this helps build good relationships and helps your children's self esteem.
- Holidays are a good time to get to know each other and enjoy each other's company. Children love doing things and spending time with parents and carers.

These tips and other useful information can be found at:

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=301&id=1858#3

Here are some other useful resources we have found to help get the ball rolling...

School holiday parent kit

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) in NSW has put together a series of factsheets for parents and carers that contain lists of activities and ideas to avoid hearing those dreaded words: "I'm bored."

The *Activities* factsheet has some relatively inexpensive ideas for keeping the school holidays interesting. Although not all of the ideas will be relevant to your State, they will certainly give you a starting point and get you inspired to check out similar options in your local area. Also, see the *Tackling holiday stress* factsheet which reminds us to take some time-out for ourselves, as school holidays is often a very stressful time for parents and carers. These are both available at:

www.community.nsw.gov.au/DOCS/STANDARD/PC_100224.html

What's on in your State or Territory

kidspot has an online directory to search for school holiday events and attractions that are happening in each State and Territory for children up to the age of 14 years. You can search for both indoor and outdoor activities, as well as activities you can enjoy as a family. See:

www.kidspot.com.au/category+129+School-Holidays.htm

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Getting help is cool in a KidsMatter school!

Early intervention can make a significant difference to children who are experiencing mental health difficulties. Important considerations in early intervention include destigmatising mental health difficulties and encouraging help-seeking behaviours. This is why we chose the slogan '*Getting help is cool in a KidsMatter school*'. Here are some snippets of how Component 4 is working in KidsMatter schools in Western Australia and Queensland...



Labrador State School in Queensland delivered sessions to raise awareness of mental health for staff and parent/carer groups throughout 2007 at Labrador SS with much success. In November, Labrador also presented at the State Health and Wellbeing in Schools Conference in Brisbane, along with *Pomona State School*.

In addition to this, Pomona SS has also worked closely with their local community house, and together they co-hosted day and evening workshops focussing on issues such as coping with depression and anxiety within the family. In their fortnightly newsletter, they also have a 'Kids & Parents Matter' column that is written by a parent.

St. Simon Peter Catholic Primary School, Ocean Reef, WA.

Staff at St. Simon Peter PS have noticed that students experiencing mental health difficulties are becoming more willing to talk about their own feelings and to share their



thoughts. These students are also reporting that they feel more accepted and understood by those around them, and staff attribute this to the increased knowledge of mental health and well being in their school community, "KidsMatter has been the vehicle for recognising mental health and making it OK to 'feel'!" they report. In focusing on Component 4, St. Simon Peter is planning to run small groups to specifically address self esteem, emotion management and anxiety; as well as provide support for children who have siblings with disabilities in 2008.

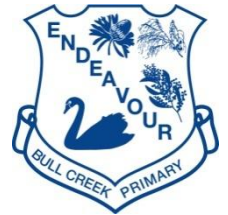


Mater Hospital Special School, Woolloongabba, QLD.

Mater Hospital SS is a very different setting from typical mainstream schools. Theirs is a constantly changing student population with many students having been identified as having mental health difficulties on arrival. For their students, home is often a considerable distance away from the school whilst parents are either inpatients, or experiencing stressful circumstances. As KidsMatter recognises and builds on the diversity of knowledge and experience within schools, this school brings a skill base that is extremely relevant to the Initiative and they have done well to shape the KidsMatter framework to suit their needs.

Bull Creek Primary School, Bull Creek, WA.

During 2007, Bull Creek farewelled both their principal and deputy principal, though remained committed to the KidsMatter initiative. They have keenly participated in all of their professional development sessions with Cate, and have made KidsMatter an integral part of their planning around health. They have also focussed on, and put a lot of effort into, using the Friendly Schools and Families program more effectively across the school.



Liwara Catholic Primary School, Greenwood, WA.



Teachers are becoming more confident in identifying students experiencing mental health difficulties at Liwara, which has meant the referrals to school support staff (i.e. school psychologist) are more specific and informed. This has had a flow-on effect whereby subsequent referrals to external agencies are also more appropriate and given priority. As a result, this helps to reduce the time spent by families on waiting-lists.

Cairns West State School, Manunda, QLD.



Cairns West SS have streamlined their referral processes and developed a referral form that includes the Early Intervention BELS (**B**ehaviour – **E**motions – **L**earning – **S**ocial issues) chart information. The BELS chart outlines the key things to observe when you are concerned that a child may have mental health difficulties, and it encourages you to focus on carefully *observing* children's behaviour to get a clear picture of what is occurring. Cairns West SS have also started supplementing their Student Support Services Team with additional staff, and hope to continue to add staff and experience to this team in the New Year.

Holy Name School, Carlisle, WA.

Holy Name School hosted a 'mental health day' in September this year. A range of activities were organised for children and their parents and carers, including a 'wellness tree' (right) on which people were invited to pin a 'leaf' with a word or phrase regarding what 'wellness' meant to them.



Students also got creative making 'happiness boxes', (left) which they decorated and then placed items inside that reminded them of something that made them smile. Lots of agency and services information was also on hand, as well as a room set up with website links to useful information sites. Clever and creative ideas like these help to destigmatise mental health. Well done!

Along with summer, comes the bushfire season...

Wondai P-10 State School in Queensland was recently the victim of an arsonist which saw their secondary building set on fire and seriously damaged. Although this resulted in quite a dramatic change in the student's routine, staff were impressed with their ability to cope in such circumstances, and believe that the resilience training that has been a part of their timetables this year has contributed to this.

Wondai's experience reminds us all that along with summer comes the dreaded bushfire season. It is important to be aware of the impact these types of traumatic events have on school-aged children. They often understand the reality of what has happened and tend to worry that it may happen directly to them (e.g. that their own home will catch fire). They need opportunities to ask questions and talk about their feelings and fears. It is important to and let them know they can talk to you when they feel afraid.

Bushfires and children is a factsheet that contains some further useful information about the impact of trauma caused by bushfires, on children. It is available from:

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=141&id=1893



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



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