



September 2010 KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter: Issue 17

Editorial

Welcome to the spring edition of the KidsMatter Primary News; the third edition for 2010. Having been a part of the team for only the last two months, it's been a fascinating time - for me and KidsMatter; new people and ideas, an election campaign with new mental health policies, and as I write this, a hung parliament.

One thing that rises above politics in the national education landscape is the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians* that was made by all education Ministers over 18 months ago. At the end of each of the last two decades a similar declaration was made; the new one follows from the 1989 and 1999 Hobart and Adelaide Declarations.

The Declaration contains two goals: the first goal states that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; the second that all young Australians become "successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens".

What strikes me about the Melbourne Declaration is that the second goal cannot be achieved unless serious consideration is given to promoting the positive mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. It places mental health and wellbeing firmly at the centre of the work of schools; it is not an add-on. What surprises me is how few people know much about such a significant piece of work that will give direction and clear purpose to Australian schooling until the end of this decade. To achieve the goals, the people who have a significant influence on children's lives during this important developmental period – teachers, parents, families, carers, and community groups – need to work together to make a positive difference for children's mental health. And this is exactly how the KidsMatter framework and resources aim to support schools.

One of the really satisfying aspects of my work is to see KidsMatter working in school communities on the ground. I encourage you to get a taste of these from this newsletter, and also to go to our website where you can read more (<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/school-stories/>). I'd also like to draw your attention to the section of the eNewsletter on information of the ways that parents, carers, school staff and mental health professionals can support children with additional needs.

Jeremy Hurley
Principals Australia (National KidsMatter Coordinator)

KidsMatter Primary News

Welcome aboard!

Jeremy Hurley our new National Coordinator with Principals Australia and **Stephen MacDonald**, our new WA State Coordinator.

Meet Jeremy

Jeremy Hurley was appointed Principals Australia KidsMatter Primary National Coordinator at the beginning of July. He has worked with Principals Australia since 2001 when he was employed to manage and co-write the CommunityMatters publication for MindMatters. Since then he has worked nationally with principals and other school leaders, primarily on building the sustainable leadership capacity necessary to make a significant positive difference to the wellbeing and learning of the school community. Before 2001, Jeremy was a teacher and coordinator, labourer, writer, potter, curriculum and resource developer and facilitator. He says about KidsMatter, "Kids only have one shot at childhood and have to spend a lot of that time at school. In fact they are mandated to attend during some of the most impressionable years of their lives. This gives everyone who governs, manages and works in schools the responsibility to make sure that they are positive, supportive and productive places where kids can grow into strong and fulfilled people. KidsMatter is there to support schools in this, and that's why I'm here."

Meet Stephen



Stephen brings to the role 18 years of experience in a wide variety of schools and mental health services. Aside from a Bachelor of Education he is currently completing his Honours in Psychology. Before taking on this exciting opportunity he was in a leadership student support position in a k-12 college. This was a position he thoroughly enjoyed and was where he first came across KidsMatter Primary. Prior to working in the school in a teaching capacity he had the opportunity to work in community development with local government. Before his stint in local government he worked for a number of years in a community service organisation working in and with schools in implementing positive school initiatives.

Stephen says about KidsMatter; "KidsMatter Primary for me is an opportunity to influence a large number of schools in the area of mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention. I am excited by the quality of the framework and resources, the significant outcomes and the possibility of assisting a generation of young people, their parents and educators recognise that their mental health is valued."

KidsMatter international news: International Congress for Applied Psychology (ICAP) 2010

The world's leading psychologists united in Melbourne in July to attend the 27th International Congress of Applied Psychology (ICAP). Hosted in the southern hemisphere for the first time, ICAP 2010 involved over 3,400 participants from 67 countries who gathered to hear cutting edge psychological research. KidsMatter was represented proudly at the congress, as the first national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative specifically developed for primary schools.

A KidsMatter symposium was held on Friday the 16th of July and chaired by Professor Lyn Littlefield (Executive Director, The Australian Psychological Society). Five KidsMatter representatives presented on different aspects of the initiative:

- Professor Littlefield provided an overview of the suite of KidsMatter initiatives (Early Childhood, Transition and Primary).
- Dr. Katherine Dix (Flinders University) detailed the successful KidsMatter Primary pilot evaluation findings, and outlined new findings promoting the effectiveness of the KidsMatter initiative for students with disabilities (read the report here: <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/evaluation/>)
- Heather Leary (Principal, Benalla Primary School) engaged the audience with an inspirational account of how KidsMatter helped change the fabric of her school during the pilot, and supported her claims with systematic data demonstrating student progress.
- Margot Trinder (National Coordinator, APS) tracked the post-pilot path and provided the upscaling rationale for national dissemination so more schools can participate in KidsMatter, and the opportunities this provided for cross-sectoral partnerships and mental health professionals.
- Finally, Jo Lawrence (National Coordinator, APS) outlined the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative, and gave concrete examples of what a mental health initiative in early childhood settings looks like.

Overall, ICAP and the KidsMatter symposium were a great success, and a valuable opportunity to tell the world about the great work Australian Primary Schools are doing to support student mental health under the KidsMatter initiative.

Parents and Carers also matter: KidsMatter Transition to School update



The KidsMatter Transition to School team, have conducted a series of focus group discussions between parents and carers of children who recently started school. The discussions provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by parents and carers during the transition period, as well as what information they found helpful and what would be useful for future families during this time. The discussions will inform the development of a range of materials and resources for the *KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative*, which will be piloted nationally over the next 12-months.

Among the materials that have been developed for the Initiative is a suite of information sessions designed to assist parents and carers to support their children prior to, during, and after the commencement of primary school. The sessions draw on current research and literature, and provide parents and carers with information on the importance of a positive transition to school, the many changes children experience, and common emotional and behavioural reactions during this time. Practical strategies for preparing children for school, for assisting them to cope during challenging and difficult situations, for monitoring their adjustment and seeking additional support, and for promoting their ongoing academic, social and emotional wellbeing are also provided.

Our KidsMatter Primary State- and Territory-based Coordinators are currently preparing to train school staff across Australia to pilot the sessions, beginning this year, with parents and carers of children who will start school in 2011. We look forward to bringing you further updates in the near future.

School snapshots

Trinity Christian School: ACT

Trinity Christian School is one of the 101 schools that participated in the KidsMatter pilot. They are a great example of how KidsMatter Primary pilot schools are continuing to sustain the initiative. School Counselor Jenny Ward shares some stories of implementing KidsMatter at Trinity Christian School.

KidsMatter Primary continues to be a strong focus at Trinity Christian School, a pilot school. We have addressed many KidsMatter Component target areas in our school events throughout the year.

School events that have addressed Component 1:

A positive school community and Component 3:

Parenting support and education in particular include:

1. Value of the week being displayed on our Rotary KidsMatter Notice Board, in our diaries, awards and Christian Living Skills Program.
2. Multicultural Day this year was combined with Grandparents day and each class presented a Multicultural item at a concert for parents and grandparents. It was a fabulous time with dances, songs, poems, readings and musical items from a range of different countries and cultures. Each year we try and celebrate our Multicultural heritage a little differently.
3. Secret Women's Business afternoon was a great hit last year for Mother's Day. Around 80 mums, grandmas, sisters and aunts came and enjoyed an afternoon of craft, relaxation, food and fun.
4. This year it's the boy's turn with a "Men Only" Games and BBQ night to celebrate Father's Day. Strictly no girls allowed!
5. Our Welcome to Trinity Christian School Morning Tea for new parents is always popular at the beginning of the year. However, we realised that the new families that come throughout the year miss out. The past couple of years we have held another Morning Tea especially for these families. They each receive a special bag of goodies and information and we have class parents on hand to meet them and make them feel welcome.

We continue to look for new ways to work in partnership with our parents, students and the community and practice being mentally fit and healthy!

By **Jenny Ward**, School Counselor and KidsMatter Primary Action Team Coordinator

Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School: Brisbane, QLD

Kathy Casley and Hayley Galvin from Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School explain the school's enthusiastic methods of implementing KidsMatter Primary Component 1: A Positive School Community and Component 2: Social and Emotional Learning.

Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Primary School (OLOF) is situated in a southern suburb of Brisbane and currently has 120 students enrolled. The school is one of a cross sector cluster of schools that started the KidsMatter journey late last year.



Her Royal Highness, the Queen of England, stamping Passports at the Multicultural Walk-a-thon.



James Horwill, captain of the Queensland Reds rugby union team talks at the OLOF KidsMatter launch

One crucial area that was identified early was working with parents, carers and the wider community in using the KidsMatter framework. With this in mind one of our highlights has been our official KidsMatter launch in July. James Horwill, captain of the Queensland Reds (rugby union), came to talk to the children about how a very serious knee injury made him feel and the strategies he has used to 'bounce back' at a time when it was said he might never play rugby again. James encouraged students to think positively when faced with their own problems.

KidsMatter has built on our success with 'School Wide Positive Behaviour Support'. We had established a schoolwide response to behaviour support, focusing on positive feedback for appropriate behaviour. We developed four school goals and a 'Goals program' to support students with behavioural challenges, with noticeable improvements to student behaviour. From this we were very motivated to also introduce KidsMatter to ensure that we were providing a comprehensive level of support for student wellbeing.

We were already keen to have Social and Emotional Learning throughout the whole school to provide a comprehensive level of support for student wellbeing. The KidsMatter professional learning helped us consolidate the importance of this and choose a program that suited our needs. As a result we have introduced the Bounce Back program in all classes this term. Thanks to support from a local bank, staff will be given professional learning in Bounce Back. With a school community which enjoys all codes of football, the theme of the ball in the Bounce Back program, as well as our Goals Program, certainly has an appeal!

Since introducing KidsMatter at OLOF and focusing on Component 1: A positive school community, we have reflected on the things that we already do at our school to increase a sense of belonging and connectedness, such as greeting students and parents by name and regular social functions for the school community. We have also highlighted areas where we feel this aspect can be further developed.

We see Student Protection as linking in with KidsMatter and next term we will be focusing on these issues, with particular reference to 'my favourite safe places at school'. The school is looking forward to focusing on Component 3: Parenting support and education and Component 4: Early intervention for students experiencing mental health difficulties in the near future.

By **Kathy Casley** (Guidance Counsellor) and **Hayley Galvin** (Class Teacher, Implementation Support Person and Professional Learning Presenter)

KidsMatter Primary around Australia

What's happening in the ACT?

You could be forgiven for thinking that everything is just about politics here in Canberra – although at the time of putting pen to paper the Federal election is still to happen. Here in the ACT the interest for KidsMatter Primary has been growing during 2010 with more schools coming on board.



Dr Katherine Dix, Senior Research and Statistical Officer from Flinders University speaking at the ACT launch of the KidsMatter Primary evaluation

Since February I have spent time promoting KidsMatter Primary through individual approaches with schools and attending networking opportunities with Principals and school counselors. The local launch of the KidsMatter Primary evaluation on 7 April was well attended by local schools and community agencies.

Nine schools commenced with KidsMatter Primary in second term: Arawang Primary, Calwell Primary, Hughes Primary, Isabella Plains Early Childhood, Lyneham Primary, Macquarie Primary, Red Hill Primary, St Francis of Assisi Primary, and Wanniasa School. All these schools have participated in the School Action Team and Implementation Support Person Trainings in June.

In September a reconstructor session is planned to provide ongoing professional learning and support as well as see how schools are progressing with their initial steps of implementing KidsMatter Primary in their respective communities.

Train the trainer professional learning opportunities will be undertaken over the next few months in Component 1: A Positive School Community and Component 2: Social and Emotional Learning with representatives from these nine schools attending.

Early in fourth term there is another opportunity for other schools to commence the KidsMatter journey with School Action Team and Implementation Support Person Trainings offered. I am still awaiting final numbers but at this stage it looks like 8 schools from our three education sectors will be taking part.

Two of the original KidsMatter Primary schools are taking part in the pilot of the KidsMatter Transition to School initiative (see here above for the KidsMatter Transition report). Staff from Trinity Christian School and Gowrie Primary School will participate in a train the trainer day in mid September.



Heather Hill from Macquarie Primary School and Marg Bodel from St Francis of Assisi Primary School in discussion at the June Implementation Support Person Training

What's happening in Queensland?

On the Ground

Schools enthusiasm for picking up the framework and resources and creating incredible possibilities within their schools never ceases to amaze me. I can't hope to represent a fraction of what is going on but here are some examples:

Staff mental health and wellbeing are crucial to implementing KidsMatter and Concordia Lutheran College, Toowoomba came up with an interesting way to get staff thinking about mental health and a positive school community. For the pupil free day (first day back after the break), they had a 'Mixed Emotions Monday'. The challenge was to come dressed as an emotion other than happy or sad. This led to an open discussion about transition times, back to school for staff, students and families and the importance of team building for staff and with families. Two practical outcomes: the following day staff greeted students and families at the school gates and drop off points. Secondly all staff offered three suggestions for community building in the school. Some interesting suggestions are being considered including: 'Nominate a group or individual children to share lunch with a certain teacher'. 'Hand out pancakes during morning drive through to parents for breakfast'. 'Staff swap badges for a day and only answer to the name on the badge'.



A colourful guest at the Murri school health expo helps connect healthy eating to positive mental health

The Aboriginal and Islander Independent Community School, better known as 'The Murri School' in Brisbane, hosted a large scale health expo engaging a wide range of health and community agencies that helped explore the connections between physical and mental health.

A big thanks to Marsden State School for hosting the first 'Reconnector' session in Queensland for implementation support people and giving us a chance to experience firsthand your welcoming and friendly environment.

Big Picture

The rapid growth and diversity of the population in Queensland is reflected in the diversity of schools that have started their journey with KidsMatter since late last year. Twenty nine 'new' schools have signed up from the independent, catholic and state sectors. In recent years each sector has been creative in developing their approach to both social and emotional learning and the use of the KidsMatter framework as a planning and implementation tool for mental health and wellbeing in primary schools.



Brisbane KidsMatter Primary training

Smarter Schools National Partnership Schools (Low Socio-economic School Communities and Literacy and Numeracy) have been a focus across all three sectors (in particular the state sector). Student services staff from the Department of Education and Training have been strong advocates for KidsMatter. As a result the Minister for Education has shown an interest in getting KidsMatter to a much greater number of schools in Queensland. A proposal is presently being developed looking at all the possible ways we can build capacity.

The Association of Independent Schools Queensland has accessed funding to support the thirteen independent schools that are now on board (spreading from Cairns down to the Gold Coast). Within the catholic system interest has always been strong and support has been growing steadily. Brisbane and Townsville have schools up and running (eleven in total) thanks to the efforts of health, wellbeing and curriculum representatives from the two dioceses and Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Recently we were privileged to have health and wellbeing representatives from all five dioceses attending our State Reference Committee, (which we share with MindMatters). All representatives showed great interest in our growth. Health and a broad range of community agencies are also taking an interest in KidsMatter.

Michael Hardie (KidsMatter Primary QLD Coordinator)

Supporting kids with additional needs: Resources for parents, carers and schools



Not all children have the same abilities and needs or are able to participate equally at the same level as other children. It is important that all parents, carers and teachers are aware of those children who may have additional needs receive extra support or encouragement. It is important that a child's peer group is aware of that child's illness or disability so that they can also provide support or encouragement and understanding. In some cases it may also be useful to involve other health professionals to explain to staff about a child's disability so they have more understanding of the issues involved. This will ensure children with additional needs are included and their learning, social and mental health needs are met.

It is important to remember that children with additional needs are not just those with obvious physical disabilities which restrict them from doing things. Children with additional needs also include those with serious chronic, developmental or ongoing illnesses. Depending on the nature of the disability and how it affects the child, it may cause those children to feel different and insecure about fitting in with their peers.

Despite their disability, many children can participate in a variety of ways throughout the school. When the whole school community including other parents, carers, staff, students and the broader community, provides adequate support and understanding to children with a disability, those children are then better able to participate throughout their school and feel included.

Some ways schools can work to include students with disabilities:

- Work with parents and carers to meet children's physical, social and emotional needs.
- Teach children that everyone has a right to be respected
- Provide opportunities for children with and without disabilities to play and learn together
- Promote cooperative, caring and helpful behaviours for all students

How parents and carers can help:

- Encourage your own children to include children of different abilities in their play
- Teach social skills that can help children manage friendships
- Be role models for inclusion by showing through your actions how to be caring and respectful towards others
- Where appropriate, communicate regularly with their school about how the child is progressing.

Visit the KidsMatter Primary website (www.kidsmatter.edu.au) to learn more and to access a range of resources to support children with additional needs.

Information in this article is sourced from the KidsMatter Primary resource pack: Children with additional needs and