



March 2010 KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter: Issue 15

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 15 of the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter and the first for 2010.

KidsMatter Primary is at an exciting stage of growth at the moment and it is hard to keep abreast of all that is occurring across Australia. The National Team continue to work closely with education and health sector personnel to manage the dissemination of KidsMatter Primary in their respective state and territory. As the word continues to spread, the interest continues to grow!

The release of the final evaluation report is the culmination of 3 years of dedicated work by the Flinders University Evaluation consortium. In the past 2 months, members of the team have travelled around Australia presenting the key findings to pilot schools, new schools, education, and health and community personnel. These presentations have provided an engaging forum to acknowledge the work of pilot schools and bring to life the findings in a meaningful and contextual way for the audience.

The beginning of the KidsMatter Early Childhood pilot and the Transition to School Parent Initiative highlighted in this edition, are further examples of the commitment shown by health, education and early childhood in supporting the mental health and well-being of Australian children and families

Chris Champion

KidsMatter National Project Officer

KidsMatter News

Meet the new ACT Project Officer

KidsMatter Primary is proud to introduce Margy Wylde-Browne as the new Project Officer for the Australian Capital Territory.

Margy has worked in a variety of diverse mental health settings over the last twenty five years. These organisations have included an acute clinical hospital, a psychosocial rehabilitation organisation, and a youth mental health agency. For thirteen years Margy managed Mental Illness Education ACT, an innovative mental health promotion organisation concerned with reducing the stigma about mental illness. Margy enjoyed working alongside people with a lived experience of mental illness and finding creative ways for their stories to be shared with young people. Margy is excited to commence work with the KidsMatter team and be part of improving the mental health outcomes for children, their families and the wider school community.



KidsMatter Primary evaluation – Full report now available!

The **full report** of the comprehensive evaluation of KidsMatter Primary is now available online. The detailed findings show KidsMatter Primary has a positive impact on schools, children, parents and carers.

View the report on our website: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/evaluation

Spreading the news about KidsMatter Primary

KidsMatter Primary regularly contributes articles to publications to promote the great work of schools in supporting the mental health of primary school children.

We now have new articles on our website: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/publications

Busy start to 2010 for KidsMatter Early Childhood

2010 has had a busy start, with KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitators delivering *Component 1: Creating a sense of community* Professional Learning to pilot sites around the country. Already there have been many reports of great enthusiasm and energy amongst services. Many sites have started working on their Action Plans for Component 1 using the 'Pink' book (that provides a step by step implementation process) to guide them, and are collecting Family and Staff surveys to help identify their strengths and areas for further development in creating a sense of community.



Evaluators are now on board for the KidsMatter Early Childhood Pilot. Flinders University of South Australia, who also conducted the evaluation of the KidsMatter Primary initiative, have been contracted for the evaluation of KidsMatter Early Childhood. They will be working closely with pilot sites and the KidsMatter Early Childhood partners to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative over the two-year pilot.

The partners are now busy getting ready for *Component 2: Developing children's social and emotional skills*. Watch this space!

KidsMatter Early Childhood Partners

KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative

We are excited to announce that the Australian Psychological Society (APS) is currently developing a new *KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative* that is being funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. The *Parent Initiative* aims to assist parents and carers to understand the issues children face when transitioning to school, to promote positive relationships between schools and families, and to facilitate the development of supportive networks between parents and carers.

The *Parent Initiative* recognises that a successful transition to primary school can increase the likelihood of positive social, emotional and academic outcomes for children, and as such, builds on many existing KidsMatter activities. The *KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative* is highly relevant to the work KidsMatter schools are currently doing in relation to Component 3: Parenting support and education, and utilises the promotion, prevention and early intervention framework of KidsMatter Primary. The *Parent Initiative* will offer schools the opportunity to engage parents and carers at the point of school entry, and to further highlight the school as a key resource for parenting information and education.

In the coming weeks, the APS will be hosting a series of focus group discussions and interviews with parents, carers and school staff to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by parents and carers of children who have recently commenced school and the types of information that would be useful for them during this period. These discussions and interviews will help to guide and inform the development of an extensive range of transition resources that will be piloted in a select number of KidsMatter Primary schools across Australia during 2010 and 2011.

One of the key *Parent Initiative* resources will be a four session parenting information program that will provide parents and carers with evidence-based information and strategies to support their child through the transition to school. This program will be designed so that it can be flexibly tailored to address the individual needs of schools, as well as enable schools to incorporate specific information that relates to their particular setting (e.g., curriculum information, school policies and practices) and child-focused components.

We look forward to keeping you up to date on the progress of the *KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative* in the coming months.

KidsMatter Primary around Australia



What's happening in Victoria?

KidsMatter is now a familiar term in health and education sectors in Victoria. Being recognised as a KidsMatter School is desired as it demonstrates a school community's understanding of the relationship between mental health, learning and teaching. It also affirms a staff commitment to being active participants in the process of embedding and sustaining a strategic approach to the mental health of children in their school.

We currently have approximately 70 KidsMatter Schools in Victoria. Almost 50 new schools in three geographical regions (Grampians, Hume and Southern Metropolitan Region) have joined the 20 pilot schools and are in various stages of implementation. Many more primary schools have expressed interest and we anticipate another wave of schools within those three regions to formally engage with KidsMatter in October 2010. To support these schools with implementation, existing health and education staff have been empowered by their sectors to use the framework and implementation process as a legitimate service delivery model.

A number of factors have contributed to this widespread interest in KidsMatter Primary. Firstly, strong advocacy from pilot schools and the release of evaluation findings detailing the efficacy of KidsMatter has generated huge interest in Victoria. These findings were supported by widespread media coverage announcing continued funding for KidsMatter Primary until 2012. Secondly, a number of overarching state policies in health and education surfaced during 2009 to give weight to KidsMatter's inclusion on a school's agenda. Two significant policies included:

1. the **Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development** articulates a vision that every young Victorian will thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities and
2. **Because Mental Health Matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019** articulates the Victorian Government's focus and commitments in mental health for the next 10 years with specific focus on mental health promotion and prevention early in life (0-25).

These policies, amongst several others including the **Student Engagement Policy**, specifically identified KidsMatter Primary as a recommended framework for meeting key educational outcomes. Thirdly, an overhaul of student support in schools led to the **Strengthening Student Support Services Directions Paper**. This paper identified Student Support Services Staff (i.e. allied health staff) as having a key role in building capacity in school communities, through the provision of teaching and learning advice, professional learning and secondary consultation, and to the development of student wellbeing structures and processes. Finally, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) had already developed the **Student Wellbeing Strategy Plan** and a **School Improvement Framework** (SIF) to support schools in a strategic approach to student wellbeing that contained significant overlaps with the KidsMatter framework. These documents also met key federal and state government requirements and accountabilities in relation to the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF), the National Schools Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

Rarely do you get an opportunity to be involved in something that you passionately believe capable of influencing the quality of life of current and future generations. The National Partners of KidsMatter, the 100 pilot school communities and the eight state/territory based Project Officers are witnesses to a KidsMatter journey that produces significant positive changes to the mental health of school communities. I am extremely grateful for my privileged position and excited for the 50 new schools in Victoria.

Caroline Buckley
Project Officer (Victoria)



What's happening in South Australia?



An evaluation report launch was held at the Adelaide Sailing Club on Monday February 22nd. Although it was a small group of thirty people, we had representation from pilot schools, newly involved schools, Department of Children's Services Regional personnel, Learner/Well Being personnel, Catholic Education Office leaders and Independent School leaders.

We were fortunate to have Professor Phillip Slee, Project Leader and Dr Katherine Dix, Senior Evaluation Officer (Centre for the Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University) present the positive report findings to us.

(picture left: Dr Katherine Dix, Matt Chapman (Learner/ Well Being), Professor Phillip Slee, Greg Dyer (Manager, Support Services)

Implementation

Due to major restructuring of our State school (DECS) regions in 2009, it has been a slow start in beginning the process of implementing professional learning within our State school system.

A number of Briefings have been held, including the Riverland where we hope to start the process with the facilitation of Action Team Professional learning in May. To date, we have all the Catholic schools, a number of State schools and at least one Independent school involved. The Riverland cluster of schools have strong, positive links with one another and we anticipate, with the support of our pilot school Cobdogla Primary, making a wonderful impact on having not only a whole school, but a whole community approach on mental health in the Riverland community.

A Valley Cluster Briefing was held in February and a group of schools (at least 6) will begin the professional learning process in Term 3, where they anticipate introducing KidsMatter into their schools early in 2010. We also anticipate holding Briefings in the Adelaide Hills, Limestone Coast and Yorke/Mid North Regions later in the year.

Catholic Schools

It has been exciting to begin work with five metropolitan Catholic Schools (Loreto College, Marymount College, Our Lady of the Visitation, St Francis Xavier, St Pius X) in late 2009 and continue this in 2010. Representatives from the schools have attended Action Team professional learning, Implementation Support Personnel professional learning and Component 1 professional learning.

It has been wonderful to have support provided by the Catholic Education Office, not only with personnel from the Behaviour Education Consultants team, Cathy Sires and Lee Abela, but with some financial assistance in enabling schools to have teacher release time covered. There is also an expectation that schools involved in implementing KidsMatter will be involved in a Catholic Schools 'Show Case' Conference in early 2011.

(picture right: Louise Sortino and Stav Kontibas, Our Lady of the Visitation, at the Action Team professional learning day)



Pilot School Spotlight

As a State PO I would like to acknowledge the continuing work of the pilot schools who continue to implement the KidsMatter framework within their school community. It certainly helps when there is stability in leadership and staff.

One particular school to acknowledge is Cobdogla Primary in Barmera. (www.cobdoglaps.sa.edu). With the support of the Principal, Mary Shannon, the staff, students and their families continue to work in assisting each other in making the Cobdogla school community a safe and welcoming place to develop and learn. The school was already doing fabulous things prior to becoming involved as a pilot school in 2008. KidsMatter provided the 'umbrella' to bring their various 'projects' together and assist in their planning with new initiatives.

One of the many exciting things happening in the school (apart from a successful community garden, regular parent/carer group, healthy food initiatives, exciting after school care programs, etc), is that students have a language around mental health. When asked "what is KidsMatter" students can articulate that it is about looking after one another, looking after yourself, and being able to express yourself. It is apparent that whilst the adults were involved in discussing 'KidsMatter' there was a parallel process happening which included the students. This has assisted in having an integrated whole school approach to mental health.

The school community has always made me feel very welcome and it has been an honour to have had the opportunity of being part of, and observing the amazing work they do.



Lana Jankowiak
Project Officer (South Australia)

Focus on Mental Health

Children's Friendships: Resources for School Staff, Mental Health Professionals, Parents and Carers.

At any age having friends provides support and promotes mental health and wellbeing. For children in particular, the ability to make and keep friends is critical for social and emotional development. Through friendships children learn how to relate to others and how to be a good friend. Over time, within the context of positive and supportive relationships, children also learn skills that have to do with more effective self-management of their behaviour and emotions; improved self-awareness of their values, emotions, strengths and limitations; as well as the ability to develop empathy and show understanding towards others. They also develop competencies relating to how to work as part of a team, how to resolve conflict and how to manage challenging situations more effectively.

Most children want to have friends. Children who have friends at school are more likely to be more self confident and perform better academically than those without friends. When children have difficulty in making or keeping friends, it often leads them to feel lonely, unhappy, depressed and rejected. Friendship needs and skills change as children grow, and learning positive friendship skills can help children socially so they feel happier and more confident. Children with friends also tend to have a greater sense of belonging and connection at school which results in them being more resilient and less likely to be bullied or to develop behavioural or mental health problems.

There are many ways the important adults in children's lives can support the development of friendships. Parents and carers can assist skill development by:

- providing children with ample opportunities to engage in play and to interact with other children
- listening to children talk about the daily 'ups and downs' of their friendships
- guiding and encouraging children to use problem-solving skills to help address problems that arise in friendships
- leading by example and being a role-model for positive social skills.

Some of the ways that school staff and mental health professionals can assist may include:

- using group-work to allow children to learn and practice positive friendship skills
- integrating social skills development across all key areas of learning
- creating learning opportunities and making use of 'real-life' scenarios to teach friendship skills
- developing positive partnerships and sharing information with parents and carers about how to support children's social development
- being a positive role-model with all students and reinforcing social skills development both within and outside of the classroom.

Visit the KidsMatter website (www.kidsmatter.edu.au) to learn more about children's friendships and to access a range of resources to support children's development of friendship skills.



The KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter is produced 4 times per year. It provides up to date information on the KidsMatter Primary initiative for schools, school staff, parents, carers and other community members who are interested in the Initiative. The eNewsletter also contains information about resources that may be useful for school staff, parents and carers and directs readers to quality information about current children's mental health and wellbeing topics. Sign up to today at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary and watch out for the next edition out in June this year!