



Supporting kids' mental health is a priority at Nulsen

About Nulsen Primary School

Nulsen Primary School is located in Esperance, Western Australia, 740 kilometres south-east of Perth. Esperance, with a population of 13,000, is a popular tourist spot known for its fishing, surf beaches and surrounding national parks.

The school is one of three government primary schools and has a high transient population. The school receives additional resources due to its very low socio-economic index (Band1) and complex student needs. A daily breakfast program is attended regularly by about 20 children and an emergency lunch program is also available for those who need it. The school houses a kindergarten for three and four year olds and a playgroup run by mums.

Building school capacity

Lisa Helenius, Nulsen's school principal applied to participate in KidsMatter. She wanted to maximize and coordinate the way the school could further support and connect with the families in their community.

When the school first looked at the four components of KidsMatter, Lisa said there were two areas in which they felt they needed to concentrate. "First, we really felt we needed help with Component Two – *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* – as we had no planned system of teaching it across the school," Lisa said.

Nulsen had already implemented the Tribes Learning Community process, a program that promotes social and academic development through groups or 'tribes' of students who learn social skills and resilience in a team structure. Ross Tamlin, who has taught at the school for twenty years – the last ten of them as Deputy Principal – said that although the school was happy with the progress of Tribes, KidsMatter has helped ensure the school's programs and activities were more targeted by providing a clear framework.

"KidsMatter has increased our understanding of what underpins mental health and wellbeing. It has shown us, for example, that the children who aren't presenting with obvious mental health and wellbeing issues – the quieter children, perhaps – may actually be in need of some help," Ross said.

Meeting families' needs

Component Three – *Parenting Support and Education* - also posed a challenge. The school identified a number of issues that they felt would be best addressed through a whole-of-community approach that included the school, parents and local agencies.

A lot of different agencies deal with the families in the Nulsen catchment area. As part of their work with KidsMatter, the school looked at their links with community agencies to identify who they could work more collaboratively with to support the families in the school.

One of the key issues the school faces is children starting school with language difficulties that haven't been recognised. A lot of the school's time in the early years is spent identifying these issues and building relationships with parents and agencies to ensure the students get the help they need.

Using the KidsMatter framework, Nulsen identified all the local agencies that were relevant to the families and the work the school was doing and invited them to a meeting to become part of the school's KidsMatter implementation. Nulsen was overwhelmed by the positive response it received. Approximately twenty-four people representing ten different agencies turned up, all wanting to nut out a way of working together to increase the health of the community.

Building Community Connections

An interagency group was formed with representation from government departments, including police, justice, child and adolescent mental health services, community health, education, shire council, community welfare agencies and parent representatives. "The school already had a good relationship with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, but KidsMatter allowed us to say to them, "We really need this to happen". And because of KidsMatter and the interagency group, people from community health are now having greater contact with many families," Lisa said.

Together this group has published a brochure which outlines for all the community what services are available, their key roles and how to contact them. This has been an invaluable resource for the whole community and assists the agencies and school to continue to work together. Some of the agencies have also spoken at school assemblies and set up information about what they offer so families and the school are more aware of the services available.

Nulsen is continuing to develop close working relationships with several agencies and is a great example of how important community connections are for the success of KidsMatter.



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