

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

### Take the Time

The KidsMatter e-news is brimming with stories, ideas and links to great resources. You may wish to print it, so that you can read it at your leisure. We are enormously proud of the work that our KidsMatter schools are doing to make a difference to the mental health of their students. In this edition you will learn how schools in Victoria and Tasmania are engaging in the KidsMatter initiative. Enjoy the read!

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### The KidsMatter Evaluation Team

The KidsMatter Evaluation Team from Flinders University has finalised the evaluation strategy for assessing the KidsMatter pilot. They would like to thank schools for their ongoing support, particularly those staff members who are taking on the critical role of overseeing the evaluation in their school. By encouraging and assisting parents, teachers and students to participate in the evaluation these staff members are ensuring that as much as possible is learnt from the KidsMatter pilot to the benefit of those many school communities expected to participate in the future. For those wishing to know more about the KidsMatter evaluation, information can be viewed at the website managed by Dr Katherine Dix, Senior Evaluation Officer.

<http://caef.flinders.edu.au/kidsmatter/>

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### Latest Developments

The first 50 schools participating in the KidsMatter pilot have started implementing their plans around the four KidsMatter components which act as a framework for schools to address student mental health and well-being. The four components are: (1) Positive School Community (2) Social and Emotional Learning for Students (3) Parent Education and Support and (4) Early Intervention for Students at Risk or Experiencing Mental Health Problems. Much of the school planning around the four components is being driven by the professional development being delivered by the state and territory-based KidsMatter Project Officers. It is clear from their reports that schools are finding the professional development valuable. Action Team members in a number of schools have collaborated with project officers to deliver professional development. This is testament to the skills, knowledge and experience of the Project Officers and to the commitment of schools.

It is exciting to report that the KidsMatter team has begun planning for the expansion of the KidsMatter pilot, which will see another 50 schools introduced into KidsMatter later this year. Once again, leadership teams from each of these 50 schools will come together for an initial 2 day briefing in Adelaide on September 10 and 11. More details of this briefing will be provided in future editions of the KidsMatter e-newsletter....

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### Introducing our Project Officer for Tasmania



#### **KidsMatter State Project Officer for Tasmania - Helen Barrett**

Prior to taking up this position, Helen worked as a project officer with MindMatters, a resource and professional development program to support Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the social and emotional wellbeing of members of school communities. She has worked in Education and Health for over 20 years

and recently completed a Masters in Youth Health & Education Management (Melbourne Uni). Whilst working with KidsMatter schools, Helen has been inspired by the dedication and persistence of the school action teams and staff being open to new perspectives.

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## Introducing... KidsMatter in Tasmania

There are currently three round 1 Tasmanian primary schools participating in the KidsMatter pilot (with another three to commence in September). Each of these schools is very different, but all three have kicked off 2007 with KidsMatter professional development in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). In connection with this emphasis the Tasmanian schools have been working intensively on choosing SEL programs, and on planning and implementing a comprehensive SEL curriculum using the KidsMatter approach.



**Richmond Primary School** is a small rural primary school set in a picturesque, historic town in south eastern Tasmania. Farming and tourism are key areas of employment for the district. Richmond has a strong sense of community and history and the school is central to this. KidsMatter has been embraced at Richmond as a tool to strengthen community resilience.

**Waverley Primary School** is an urban primary school located in an outer suburb of Launceston. Approximately 200 students attend the school. Waverley staff have been working enthusiastically on KidsMatter, with every staff member contributing to one of four component planning teams who take ownership of all KidsMatter strategies, ensuring that they use the framework to ensure that selected strategies match the specific context of their school.



**Distance Education Tasmania** has existed since 1919 and provides access to education for approximately 220 students (kinder-grade 10) who cannot attend a regular school because they are geographically isolated, itinerant, have medical problems, travelling overseas/ interstate, are pregnant or parenting. Teachers keep in contact with their students on a regular basis by telephone, mail, online and home visits, and there are some occasional opportunities to work on group activities on a regional basis.

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## Introducing our Project Officer in Victoria



### **KidsMatter State Project Officer for Victoria – Caroline Buckley**

Caroline's professional background spans twenty years in a variety of roles in education (teacher, guidance officer, school psychologist, educational and developmental psychologist) in a diversity of settings (government, catholic and private schools). Caroline's extensive knowledge and experience is valued by the KidsMatter team and the schools with which she works.

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## Introducing... KidsMatter in Victoria



**St Joseph's School** is situated approximately two hours east of Melbourne off the Princes Highway in the small rural town of Trafalgar which is a centre for farming and small industry. The school was established in 1930 by the sisters of St. Joseph and has a student population of 94. It has recently undergone extensive renovations to the administration and amenities areas, making the school a more attractive, welcoming and functional place. The new building also allows easy wheelchair access.

**Tootgarook Primary School** includes student well being, connectedness and engagement among its major school goals. It seeks to support students, emotionally, socially and academically to become lifelong learners. Tootgarook Primary works actively with the local community to promote connectedness based on local and global awareness, resilience, individual responsibility and passion for learning.





### Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School

Nestled in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, Upper Ferntree Gully PS celebrated its 90th year of education with a total refurbishment. Along with this new building came the establishment of a whole school TRIBES philosophy aimed at building a positive school environment for staff and students. As the only school in Eastern Metropolitan Region involved in the KidsMatter initiative and a primary feeder school for Upwey Secondary College (a school still in mourning following the tragic suicide of two of its students), the community is extremely interested in implementing the KidsMatter initiative.

### Sacred Heart Primary School

A small Catholic school in inner city Melbourne abutting the Atherton Gardens Housing Commission Estate, this school has a reputation for providing a caring, supportive and safe environment for its 100% culturally and linguistically diverse population who are almost all residents of the estate. This school has dual involvement in the Catholic Education Office pilot 'Schools as Core Social Centres' and the KidsMatter pilot but this doesn't mean twice the workload! Regular KidsMatter meetings with the student wellbeing team ensure that objectives from both initiatives can be planned together.



### Hastings Primary School

Hastings Primary School is a small government school located on the western port of the Mornington Peninsula Shire. As a category 7 school it caters to a high proportion of socially disadvantaged students and their families. As the school works through the four KidsMatter components it is supported by a "cast of thousands", with many community agencies included in the action team. The school's priorities are to provide an emotionally secure, safe and responsive learning and working environment, which is valued and cared for by all members of the school community.



**St Bernadette's Primary School** is a Catholic school in the western suburbs of Melbourne whose student population is mainly of Asian, Arabic and Filipino background. Many students are bilingual, attending language schools on the weekend. English is usually their second language. Over the past few months the KidsMatter Action Team has been conducting a thorough audit of all relevant policies, programs, activities, curriculum and procedures currently used at the school so as to identify gaps and ensure that activities planned for KidsMatter effectively target the needs of their community.

**Monmia Primary School** is a large government school located in the North Western suburbs of Melbourne. In addition to their involvement in KidsMatter, Monmia school is currently also participating in an Ausparenting in Schools pilot project. Staff and parents are finding the combination of these two initiatives enables a very strong emphasis on engagement with parents with many changes taking place to support parents at the school. Word is out that KidsMatter is having a big impact at Monmia!



**Christ the King Primary School** is a multicultural school in the western suburbs of Melbourne with a largely culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parent community who place a high value on education. Parents at Christ the King have been 'keen as mustard' to become involved with the KidsMatter initiative so it has been a priority to identify community needs and plan meaningful (and practical) actions that are relevant to the parent community. The Action Team has formed a parent subcommittee, with three parent representatives from three different cultural backgrounds, to accommodate the level of parent interest.



### St Christopher's Primary School

A large Catholic school in Melbourne's North Western suburbs, St Christopher's has a record of academic excellence, having won numerous awards for literacy and numeracy and with a current focus on e-learning research. Undertaking the KidsMatter initiative the school is keen to add a new focus on building community through parental engagement in school activities and expansion of social and emotional competencies.



**St Vincent De Paul Primary School** is a small rural Catholic school in the Gippsland region of Victoria. The school staff have put considerable effort into creating and sustaining a positive school community

for staff and students. This has extended to adapting the induction policy for new staff to ensure that new/returning staff are well prepared to participate in the school's KidsMatter focus.

## A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

### Belonging and Safety

At KidsMatter we emphasise the importance of a positive school community built on a sense of belonging and a feeling of safety. KidsMatter complements the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF), which emphasises schools' responsibility to ensure that students feel safe, supported and respected at school. National Safe Schools Week, 25th May to 1st June, is an opportunity for schools to refresh their safe schools emphasis by taking part in a range of planned activities. See: <http://www.safeschoolsweek.dest.gov.au/splash.htm>



KidsMatter specifically emphasises the importance of children and families developing a sense of *belonging* and *connectedness* at school. Children (and adults) develop a sense of belonging when they experience relationships of care that reliably meet their needs for contact and support. Connectedness is enhanced when a person sees that the best way of meeting his/her needs is through participation in the school community. Some ways that schools foster connectedness are through engaging with students and their families to understand their needs, and through ensuring that students and families are included and involved in school activities and decision-making.

A growing body of research is finding that children's sense of belonging and connectedness at school underpins pro-social behaviours and academic success. Students who experience school belonging and connectedness have been found to be more resilient and less likely to develop mental health problems. Conversely, students who experience isolation and alienation at school are at greater risk of a range of mental health and behavioural problems. In subsequent editions we will explore more ways of cultivating belonging and connectedness at school, and highlight further links between KidsMatter and other initiatives in health and education.



#### References:

- Osterman, K. F. (2000) Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community, *Review of Educational Research*, 70(3): 323-367
- Stewart, D., Sun, J., Patterson, C., Lemerle, K. & Hardie, M. (2004) Promoting and Building Resilience in Primary School Communities: Evidence from a Comprehensive 'Health Promoting School' Approach, *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 6(3): 26-33

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### What some KidsMatter schools are doing to promote a positive school community...

The KidsMatter Action Team from **Monmia Primary School** includes parents, students and staff. As part of promoting a positive school community assemblies now have a regular guest appearance of a "Mystery Staff Member" who is introduced with a 'Sale of the Century' 'WHO AM I?' question requiring the audience to guess the identity of the mystery guest. Refreshments follow weekly assemblies for those parents who are able to 'meet the mystery guest' and share a cuppa.

**Richmond Primary School** in Tasmania began this year with a successful family fun event for the whole school community. As part of their strategy for improving communication with parents they have installed a new parent notice board.

**St Bernadette's Primary School** (Vic) recently arranged a formal launch of the KidsMatter initiative, coordinated by Student Wellbeing Coordinator, Josie Rovetto, which was well received by the parent community. The parent representative on the KidsMatter Action Team, Gabriella Maiuto, recently attended the professional development day (citing it as the best workshop she has ever attended!) and has been a valuable contributor to the KidsMatter Action Team and an important link to the parenting community.

**Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School** (Vic) has adopted a whole school TRIBES philosophy aimed at building a positive school environment for staff and students. With every classroom teacher now TRIBES trained,

TRIBES is due to be showcased to the wider school community with student facilitators demonstrating their philosophy and skill at the inaugural TRIBES parent information night later this term.

**Tootgarook Primary School** (Vic) has taken up the challenge of enhancing community connectedness. With the backing of Bendigo Bank, a Community Resource Building has been built at the school, which will serve not only the students and families of Tootgarook Primary but the whole Tootgarook community. School students, with the help of their Art Teacher, have been involved in designing and creating a set of school values boards for permanent display in the new community building. The official opening celebration is scheduled for Thursday May 10th. We wish them well!

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

### The KidsMatter Approach

As outlined in our March newsletter, research in Australia and internationally has demonstrated the importance of social and emotional competence for children's mental health, as well as for supporting children's academic learning and pro-social behaviour. Active teaching of social and emotional skills at school provides students with the tools to engage positively with others and to manage their emotions effectively. KidsMatter schools select and implement a comprehensive social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum that stimulates and supports children's development of social and emotional skills throughout primary school. This requires systematic instruction and guided practice appropriate to each stage. Pictured here are members of the Tootgarook School where formal timetabling of Social and Emotional Learning into a whole school approach has facilitated rich interactions between the junior and senior school body and the wider school community.



### What some schools are doing to promote social and emotional learning for students...

#### Tootgarook Primary School

Formal timetabling of a weekly hour-long Social and Emotional Learning session that involves the whole school has facilitated rich interactions between the junior and senior school bodies and the wider school community. Tootgarook School has also selected to implement BOUNCEBACK! for all year levels and is creating a curriculum framework, cross linked with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards interpersonal development strands, for all years prep to six. Peer mentoring has also been a popular program at Tootgarook Primary, with 90% of children in years 5 and 6, having voluntarily completed peer mentorship training.

**Richmond Primary School** started their Social and Emotional Learning journey by doing an audit of what resources (kits, books, programs, videos etc) were already in the school which can complement SEL teaching. Then, following a KidsMatter professional learning session, they chose BOUNCEBACK! as their new core program and set up staff meeting time for collaborative planning and implementation. A complementary program at Richmond Primary has involved students in the establishment of a peer mentorship program.

At **Waverley Primary School** staff are planning a comprehensive SEL curriculum which targets core skills outcomes such as students' ability to manage their own emotions and be aware of effects on others. They are generating child-friendly language to identify the five core SEL skills so as to promote SEL messages in school communications. Teachers at Waverley have recognised that SEL is not just for classroom teaching but is something that needs to permeate all interactions with students. They are considering how merit awards given in assembly could reflect SEL language so as to recognise SEL skill development in students. They are also noticing how teaching SEL promotes positive approaches to discipline. For example, teachers on playground duty can prompt children to use SEL skills, including positive ways of expressing emotions and resolving conflict.

#### Distance Education Tasmania

The DET primary team has been planning the development of a social and emotional curriculum (based on evidence based programs) which can be taught via correspondence and online lessons. They are starting with a unit on courage which will be a consistent theme right through the primary years. Paper based curriculum materials can be supplemented with online lessons and discussions.

### Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School

In addition to Upper Ferntree Gully's implementation of TRIBES, students have been introduced to explicit weekly SEL classes utilizing BOUNCEBACK and are quickly developing social and emotional competencies.



### Hastings Primary School

To promote positive peer relationships Hastings Primary has established multiple-age Homesteads, where classes from all year levels come together for structured activities on a weekly basis. For SEL Hastings staff have selected Program Achieve for its 'Can Do' messages. They are keen to provide structured and explicit SEL classes that will develop social emotional competence and assist students to develop a sense of belonging to the school community.

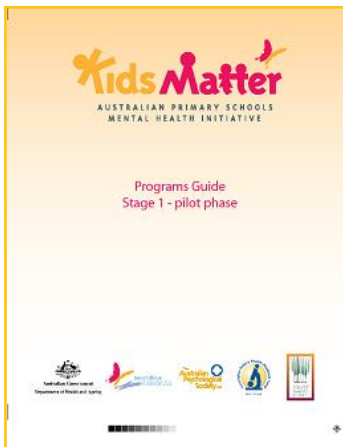
### Christ the King Primary School

A major focus this term has been the adoption of an integrated SEL curriculum. Through an inclusive and collaborative process (after perusal, review, 'top 3' selection, staff rating and many red wines) school staff have decided to use Program Achieve as their primary resource for the formal implementation of SEL in Term 3, 2007. The leadership team are now planning and preparing their delivery to ensure that the Victorian Essential Learning Standards are integrated into the new SEL framework.

St Vincent De Paul Primary School has chosen the Friendly Schools and Families program as its SEL resource. They are being assisted in its implementation by Pam Mathieson, Wellbeing Coordinator at the Catholic Education Office.

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**Link:** Further information and research into social and emotional learning in schools is available from the Collaborative for Academic and Social Learning. See: <http://www.casel.org>



### The KidsMatter Programs Guide

The KidsMatter Programs Guide is a resource to complement the KidsMatter Implementation Manual. Currently the Programs Guide is only available to schools that are part of the KidsMatter trial. It has been designed to assist schools that are working on their KidsMatter component plans to make informed choices when selecting school mental health programs. There is a diverse range of mental health programs available for use in Australian schools and it can be difficult and confusing for schools to know which programs to choose. The school mental health programs that are available in Australia have been reviewed for this Programs Guide, with the aim of assisting schools to choose appropriate and effective mental health programs that will meet their particular needs. It is important to note that inclusion of a program in this guide does not constitute an endorsement by KidsMatter. Similarly programs or resources referred to in any edition of the KidsMatter e-newsletter do not constitute an endorsement but are provided to help schools make decisions related to their context.

## PARENTING SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

### The Role of Schools

Sometimes schools and staff wonder why KidsMatter emphasises parenting education and support as part of their business. They are also unsure of what this means for the work they do. International research has shown the positive effects of good parenting on children's mental health and on school achievement. Australian research has found that parents often consult teachers about the emotional or behavioural problems their children experience more than they do mental health professionals. Staff and schools can therefore play a key role in helping parents and families access effective support through providing information, appropriate resources and linkages to parenting education services.



KidsMatter encourages schools to:

- Provide opportunities for families to develop support networks
- Cultivate collaborative parent/carer-teacher relationships
- Facilitate the provision of parenting information and education

Professional development for this KidsMatter component has recently commenced.

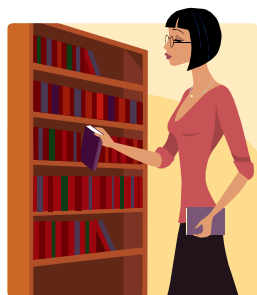
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### St Joseph's School Trafalgar

As part of our Kids Matter involvement we have set up a display area for parents. This is resourced with a variety of parenting, well-being and educational books, posters and flyers with local services available within the community. Parents are encouraged to browse or borrow from the selection. The Kids Matter initiative has brought our attention to this as one of the ways we can inform, welcome and encourage parents in our school community.

### Distance Education Tasmania

The Distance Education Tasmania primary team has commenced a regular KidsMatter section in the DETales school newsletter so that parents/ families are kept in touch with KidsMatter progress.



### Waverley Primary School

Creation of a dedicated parent room within the school has been a great success along with regular school newsletter items so that parents/carers are getting the same messages about mental health promotion.

### Monmia Primary School

Parents' sense of connection to the school is being strengthened as the new parent resource room takes shape under the careful eye of our newly appointed parent liaison coordinator.

### Tootgarook Primary School

All staff, students and their families were invited to our whole school community welcome in February. Following classroom visits and tours all families participated on the oval in a tabloid of fun activities. Then staff prepared and served a community Bbq. Overall feedback was extremely positive with many families looking forward to attending our next school function. We also held a Parent Literacy Forum that was well attended, particularly by parents new to our school community.

### Sacred Heart Primary School

Assimilation for students and their families is an important focus for this school community and the establishment of a parent room (to provide opportunities for parents to meet together informally (and SAFELY) in addition to providing parent education sessions (Helping you child with school work, budgeting, parenting in Australia etc) has been one focus of the KidsMatter initiative to date. A high attendance of over 60 at the session on budgeting/financial management reminded school staff of what the most important concerns for these families are.

### Hastings Primary School

The focus at Hastings Primary has been on reducing barriers to family attendance at information sessions, parenting nights, parent-teacher interviews and social school events. The establishment of a parent resource centre and the employment of a parent liaison coordinator (thanks Rotary) together with the provision of more opportunities for family involvement are our focus at the moment. The recent 'FROG FUN EVENING', where families were involved in 5 frog related activities (including making a frog bog) was well attended and caught the eye of interested local media!



### Links:

The *Parenting Research Centre* engages in a range of research activities to help parents raise children well. Their focus is generating new knowledge of how parenting practices affect children, and how best to engage and support parents in this rewarding but often challenging task. This site also includes information on a number of parenting programs that are widely available. See: <http://www.parentingrc.org.au>

\* *Information about the Ausparenting project involving Monmia Primary School is also available via the Parenting Research Centre site.*



The *Relationships Australia* website includes a range of information on family and parenting issues including advice sheets, information about parenting courses and details on services available in all states and territories - <http://www.relationships.com.au>

In Victoria the *Better Health Channel* website provides information for parents on a range of parenting issues. Information is available from:  
[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Parenting\\_theme\\_page?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Parenting_theme_page?OpenDocument)

The *Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health* also provides information on an extensive list of parenting and health topics in several community languages. These are available at: [http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/pub/index.cfm?doc\\_id=855#current\\_info\\_sheets](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/pub/index.cfm?doc_id=855#current_info_sheets)

## EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

KidsMatter emphasises early intervention because we know from research that mental health difficulties are common for Australian students. We also know that when children and families are able to access effective mental health intervention early it can make a significant difference to their lives. However, the evidence suggests that very few Australian children and their families get help from professionals with mental health expertise (Sawyer et al, 2000).

Because they get to know the children in their classes and spend time with them regularly, primary school teachers are in a position to notice changes in children's behaviour that may indicate the need for further assistance. KidsMatter professional development for early intervention helps staff identify students who may need extra support for mental health difficulties. Knowing what to take notice of and where to go for help enables teachers to feel more confident in dealing with children's difficulties and helping them access support.

KidsMatter has also been helping schools establish processes to follow up children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. This role is coordinated by school welfare teams made up of experienced staff members who work in conjunction with school psychologists or counsellors. As well, schools are developing partnerships with key mental health services in their local areas that can provide assistance to schools, to children and to families.

In these ways schools can play a vital role in helping to ensure that children with mental health difficulties are able to receive professional assistance that can make a positive difference.

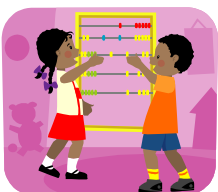
### Reference:

- Sawyer. M. G. et al (2000) *The Mental Health of Young People in Australia*, Mental Health and Special Programs Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. Available online at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/mental-pubs-m-young>

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While KidsMatter professional development in this area has only just commenced, some of our schools already have a head start. For example:

**Distance Education Tasmania** is keen to raise the awareness of teachers and parents about mental health issues and strengthen the support networks. Currently the school is investigating how health promotion information could be made available to students and families via newsletters, online discussions, activity days and when teachers do home visits.



**Richmond Primary School** in Tasmania has held professional development for staff to learn how to respond when children are affected as a result of their parents' mental illness.

At **Sacred Heart Primary School** in Fitzroy, Victoria, which has a very high proportion of students whose families have come to Australia from Sudan as refugees, staff have undertaken professional development with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, which has been working closely with Sudanese refugee families.

Waverley Primary School staff in Tasmania have created a learner support room which is being resourced as a quiet learning space for individuals and small groups. They are interested in working with community services proactively to ensure better outcomes for students who may be at risk.



**Links:**

The *Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture* (VFST) offers a range of services, including counselling and advocacy for torture survivors as well as information and educational services for those working with refugee groups. Their website provides links to resources useful for schools who may be working with refugee communities. See: <http://www.foundationhouse.org.au>

The *National Resource Centre for Children of Parents with a Mental Illness* (COPMI) provides information and resources for teachers, adults and children that explain the impacts for children when a parent has a mental illness and suggest ways to help children manage. See: <http://www.copmi.net.au/>



**AND A FINAL WORD ON ROTARY....**



More than 35 schools have now submitted their applications for funding from the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund to support the implementation of KidsMatter in their school. Some schools have used their funds to purchase packages and professional development to teach social and emotional skills to students whereas others are looking to establish areas in their school where parents can meet and access parenting and wellbeing information and resources. A number of Local Rotary clubs have now presented plaques to KidsMatter schools acknowledging both Rotary and the schools commitment to improving the mental health and well-being of young Australians. The accompanying photo shows student leaders Abby Vartan and Jason Dodwell of Pomona State School in Queensland receiving a plaque from local Rotary president Carol Johnston.



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing



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