Context – focus on wellbeing
Students who attend Yuendumu School speak two or three languages, and English may not be the first one. The school has a number of challenges in supporting students in their learning and literacy.

In 2009 the staff and community agreed their priority was to support the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of students. They wanted every student to feel safe, respected and welcome, and KidsMatter Primary provided this approach, and the opportunity to strengthen family and community partnerships with the school.

Early days with KidsMatter Primary
Yuendumu School became involved with KidsMatter in 2009 when five staff members attended a briefing session in Alice Springs. The mix of staff and community included the Principal; a teacher; the Home Liaison Officer; the Yapa Warlpiri Language and Culture teacher and a Yapa Assistant teacher. Recently Michele Oliphant, the then KidsMatter Northern Territory Coordinator, recalled that participants wanted to make KidsMatter more culturally appropriate, and include a community engagement process to link students and families with the school and services.

Growing them strong in spirit
The next steps were not as straightforward as planned. After Component 1 was delivered, the Home Liaison Officer suggested that the training ‘just did not work’ for the Yapa Elders on the Action Team. The concept of building a positive community needed to be centred on Yuendumu school and its families. In addition, the Elders asked for the content to be more inclusive of the Warlpiri culture.

So Component 1 was adapted and delivered again to a wider group including all Yapa staff, several community members and the new Principal. Because mental health had some negative associations, participants discussed its meaning for the Warlpiri context.

One of the most productive outcomes of the discussions was the idea of ‘growing their spirit stronger’ which became the vision statement for educating students at Yuendumu School.

From four pages to one
After Component 1, the school identified around four pages of items on the ‘to do’ list to build a positive school community. Examples of items listed included...
the need for: the Principal and teachers to be visible in the community; inviting families into the school for events; and providing a range of information in both Warlpiri and English. After 18 months of working through the items and focusing on new ways to involve the community, the list reduced to one page.

"... While the school has finished all four components, it is now a matter of revisiting the journey to continue to capture new ideas and make sure achievements don’t fall away as new staff come on board. Embedding social and emotional learning is a matter of continuous improvement, with the current focus on delivering core messages in a Warlpiri context across the school."

Ann-Marie Simpson, KidsMatter Team Leader

Linking to the community
Staff recognise that the school is a hub of the local community and it offers a range of support and education services. KidsMatter provided the incentive to focus on wellbeing for individuals, and the community, in general.

The concept of wellbeing for children is mapped out in the Warlpiri context; newsletters are in both Warlpiri and English; teachers participate in a ‘walking bus’ each morning; weekly certificates are provided for students who attend school regularly; and parents are invited to assemblies when their child receives an award. Recently 22 parents and community members attended an assembly followed by lunch in the Parent Room. Programs such as the Parent and Community Engagement (PaCE), Family as First Teachers (FaFT) and Central Desert Shire Playgroup bring parents into the learning environment and contribute to the whole-school approach to wellbeing.

The creation of the Parent Room enables parents to participate in activities such as technology classes and healthy eating. It also provides a range of resources and a supportive environment.

What has changed?
The practice of teaching social and emotional learning in the classroom has been established. Component 4 cemented processes to support wellbeing and strengthen relationships with community and visiting services.

Following through
Relationships between the community and school had been growing since KidsMatter was introduced.

A group of over 40 people attended Component 3 training including 27 staff members and 15 community members, Elders, and health and youth agency workers.

By the time the school completed the four components, staff had attended 453 hours of staff training, and community members had also participated in sessions. The four Components were completed over two and a half years.

Yuendumu School
Northern Territory
- Is in a remote Indigenous community
- Is located in about 290 kms north west of Alice Springs
- Is in a community that mainly speaks Warlpiri
- Enrolls about 180 students from preschool to senior years
- Involves parents in adult education

www.yuendumuschool.nt.edu.au