Woodridge State School - it’s about mental health

Woodridge began implementing KidsMatter in Term 2 2011. The school was interested in the idea of the framework to build on wellbeing work developed over time.

How big can an Action Team be?
After the presentation about KidsMatter, 25 staff expressed interest in joining the Action Team. It was great so many were committed to improving mental health at Woodridge. It was also challenging because it was difficult to expand roles to accommodate so many. The decision to form four subgroups solved the challenge, and the sub-groups are:
1. Staff wellbeing
2. Attendance
3. Parent engagement
4. Cool to be kind or anti-bullying.

Teachers elected to join groups and they meet on an as-needs basis.

Lisa Acutt says: The sub-groups add value and build capacity. It’s not a big stress but it’s about small things we can do and try out. It’s about mental health.

Focus on students
The Action Team began a Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) register. Each staff member and student received a heart-shaped card containing 20 small hearts that represent acts of kindness. As they complete an act, students and staff colour in one small heart. When all hearts are coloured in, the card is placed on the RAK tree in the school hall. By the end of 2012 it looks as if there will be around 15,000 acts of kindness on the tree.

Staff wellbeing
Around half the staff opted into a secret buddy system for 2012. The idea is to care for a colleague in small ways that create a sense of caring and support.

The school has a ‘Happy Box’ in the front office, and staff write positive notes and observations about the work of colleagues. Three notes are drawn out each week at staff meetings to acknowledge individuals and their contribution to wellbeing.

... Our Principal was a big driver introducing KidsMatter. We liked the idea of doing the survey early in the process. It helped us see what we were already doing, and map gaps and areas where we could improve our support of students.

Lisa Acutt, Guidance Officer

... We want students to know their feelings are okay and that we will understand and support them. We want to give them tools to be resilient, and knowledge about options for solving issues.

Renee Walter Grade 7 teacher

www.kidsmatter.edu.au
A business card for change
In Term 4, students and staff received a business card for passing on random acts of kindness. The purpose is to assist students to experience what kindness looks and feels like in the school and beyond. Students and staff are encouraged to pass on cards to people outside the school to spread messages of kindness and cooperation.

Parent engagement
This subgroup wants parents to know that the school values them. It wants them to feel welcome. Several events brought parents into the school in 2012 including: pancake breakfasts for parents on the first day of each term; Mothers Day High Tea; and an event for Fathers’ Day. Increasing numbers of parents entering the school environment indicate growing links to the community.

Attendance sub-group
The Mobility Support Teacher promotes attendance during enrolment interviews, and makes home visits to families not strongly connected to the school. Another initiative building stronger links is the Transition Matters for new students.

As Anna Lynch, the Mobility Support Teacher says: we have had some ‘turn arounds’ in attendance because we are making stronger links to families.

The Transition Matters program is a new initiative. It enables smoother transition from Childcare centres to better prepare Prep children (and their parents) for school.

Welcoming space for students
Leadership support has been very important for developing ideas about positive mental health at Woodridge. Funds were allocated to refurbish an existing space to create a student wellbeing centre.

Jackie Maksoud, Behaviour Support Teacher, describes the area: We created a relaxing warm space. Students access this space during break times and enjoy activities in a safe and fun environment. Every

Who they are, matters
The school is committed to teaching social skills explicitly. A focus lesson is taught in every classroom each week. The Behaviour Advisory Teacher circulates a PowerPoint with lots of images, and teachers use them to discuss feelings and emotional health.

Strategic work for mental health
Action Team members value the KidsMatter framework. They say it’s made their work for mental health ‘more strategic’.

Tamsyn Sward, Special Education Teacher

… All Team members take the opportunity to get things done and make a difference. We are inclusive and seek out others who can support us to facilitate a stronger focus on mental health at all levels – students; parents and staff.

Samantha Thomson, Grade 7 Special Education Teacher

Friday lunchtime, we use it for a group, ‘New Kids on the Block Club’, which gives newly enrolled students opportunities to talk with each other about what it’s like to change schools.

Woodridge State School
Queensland

- Is located 22 kms south of Brisbane
- Has an enrolment of 740
- Has more than 30 cultural groups in its community
- Has a large group of refugee students
- Has an Elder in Residence

www.woodridgess.eq.edu.au/wcms