Strong foundations of mental health

It’s about five years since Cooinda Primary School became a KidsMatter Primary pilot school. It had a reputation for having an established group of staff and being a caring environment. KidsMatter provided a new opportunity to further support students. The strong foundation of wellbeing at Cooinda also includes KidsMatter Primary Early Childhood and two Action Teams which coordinate mental health and wellbeing initiatives across the school.

Two awards

In 2012, the success of staff continuing to develop initiatives with KidsMatter at Cooinda has been reflected in two significant awards. In August, the school received the annual John Laing Award for Excellence in Implementation of KidsMatter. Recently the Western Australian Act-Belong-Commit community health-based campaign presented an award to the school for assisting the community to support mental wellbeing. The citation stated that: at an early stage, Cooinda PS put a lot of effort into researching a range of high quality; evidence-based social emotional learning programs and has continued to ensure that this area of learning is a priority for students.

Teaching emotional health

Principal, Anne Fletcher, explained that staff completed the training for the four components over 18 months. She outlined the comprehensive process to select a social emotional learning (SEL) program, You can do it! Education. This was our biggest challenge – examining the worth of the available SEL programs. It took us six months because we wanted to be sure that we were going to use a program that teachers would value. It had to be based on good research and made explicit links between emotional wellbeing, developmental stages and achievement in learning.

Recently results of a parent survey reflected the language of the five keys used in You can do it! Education such as: Confidence; Organisation; Getting along; Persistence and Resilience. Parents stated that these were skills and capabilities that they wanted their children to experience in primary education.

Working with Early Childhood

In 2012 about 90 students are in the Early Childhood area of the school. The KidsMatter Early Childhood Coordinator has helped implement age-appropriate processes for You can do it! Education. Characters who symbolise the five keys are represented by puppets and children in the early learning years begin to understand what it means to be confident or persistent.

“... We want the children to learn to recognise their feelings, and their capacities are growing because we explicitly teach this every week. We want students in our Early Childhood classes and their parents to know that feelings and developing positive relationships are important starting points for school.

Rosemary Smith, KidsMatter Primary
Early Childhood Coordinator
Engaging the community
The school has taken several approaches to engage with families. One of the most successful formats used over three years is the KidsMatter Forum at Parent Night.

Examples of other activities where the school has made links to the community are: KidsMatter Cuppas, and Play Café where up to 20 parents and 30 children participate in structured activities.

The school has also funded a Community Liaison Officer who is now used for a support person for Play Cafe. The focus is to make ongoing efforts to promote links within the community in all school functions and communications.

Challenges
While the school has a strong base for developing community awareness of emotional health and wellbeing, there are some challenges.

... We have to keep it ‘on the boil.’ The ideas and structures for developing and strengthening emotional health are strong in the classroom. I think our challenge is to assist students to remember emotional health skills in the playground. We want to make these visible, and we’re planning to create the five keys in a big format that we can fix to a wall in the playground. This would help a duty teacher to ask students: ‘Which key do you need here?’

Anne Fletcher, Principal

Assisting new families at Kindergarten
The Smart Start program for Kindergarten students and their families has grown out of the KidsMatter Primary Cuppa and the need for a new approach to connect with new families.

... We’ve invited each family who wants to enrol their child for Kindergarten in 2013 to a series of three sessions in Term 4. We divided the families into groups allowing time and space for individual enrolment processes; information sessions with the community nurse and other agencies; and details about Kindergarten. Families get to know each other and it’s great to see interactions between the children, and together they learn about the school.

Anne Fletcher, Principal

School Profile
Cooinda Primary School
Western Australia

- Is located in Bunbury, 173 kms south of Perth
- Enrols 400 students
- Has an onsite Pre-Primary and Kindergarten Centre
- Promotes the motto, Pride, Courtesy and Sincerity
- Was a pilot school for KidsMatter Primary in 2007

www.cooinda.wa.edu.au