Working in partnership: KidsMatter schools and health and community services

What are community partnerships?
Community partnerships are working relationships between schools and health and community services to provide additional support and resources to children, families and schools. The way these partnerships look and how they work often differs from school to school. A partnership could begin with a conversation between schools and health professionals or it could be a more formal relationship where children from a school are referred to a health and community service if there are concerns about their mental health and wellbeing.

Why are partnerships between schools and health and community services important?
Partnerships are important to schools and health and community services for many reasons, including:

- schools can be made better aware of appropriate referral pathways for children
- health and community partnerships and informal networks help to improve children’s mental health and wellbeing
- children with identified mental health needs and their families can access effective support through their school’s links with health and community professionals
- schools and health and community services are given greater opportunities to work more effectively together.

How does KidsMatter Primary help schools and health and community services develop partnerships?
KidsMatter Primary is a great example of a partnership between education and health organisations. KidsMatter Primary helps schools and health and community services to connect and build partnerships so children and families can access timely and effective mental health support. KidsMatter Primary can help schools and health and community services to build relationships in a variety of ways. For example, KidsMatter can help schools by:

- bringing health and community service and school staff together at KidsMatter Primary events
- meeting with health and community service staff to develop local information resources and strategies for promoting referral protocols to schools.

KidsMatter Primary may also be able to help health and community services link with KidsMatter Primary schools to:

- run group programs for children
- run parenting groups or workshops
- offer professional learning sessions to school staff on children’s mental health and wellbeing
- provide secondary consultation to school staff about children’s mental health concerns
- suggest useful resources
- identify the most appropriate referral pathways for children and families.
What do partnerships between schools and health and community services look like?

There are no set rules about what partnerships between KidsMatter Primary schools and health and community services should look like. For example, a partnership could consist of a school inviting a health and community service to a school event to allow children and families to become familiar with the staff and their roles. Or it might be a more formal ongoing arrangement where a health and community service runs professional development sessions for school staff or a program for children at school. However they work, health and community partnerships are all about establishing, developing and maintaining relationships between schools and health and community services for the benefit of children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Reflective practice questions for schools

• What are you doing at your school to develop and sustain partnerships with health and community services in your community? How do you promote these partnerships to the school community?
• What referral pathways do you currently have for children and families who require support?
• What service gaps can you identify?
• If you identify a new organisation, how would you approach them?
• In what ways could health and community service staff support your Action Team?

Reflective practice questions for health and community services

• What is your health and community service doing to form partnerships with schools?
• In what ways are you currently working with schools? How do you communicate with schools about your service?
• What do schools need from you to make effective referrals?
• How else could your service work with schools?
• Are there mental health promotion events you could engage schools with?
• What programs and resources could you share with schools?

“In our school we make a concise effort to be aware of all the services that are available in our community so we can be recommending and have a great knowledge of what we are recommending to parents”

Del, Teacher, Leighland Christian School

Other resources

KidsMatter has a collection of online health and community resources to aid the development of partnerships:

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community