

## Learnings gathered by AGCA from the MM Plus demonstration schools

The learnings below were derived from a triangulation of sources. The sources included interviews of demonstration school staff, reports on implementation and impact of the programs and resources, “*Sharing our learning*” professional Development sessions conducted jointly by APAPDC and AGCA MM Plus staff, and discussions with students at selected demonstration schools.

The learnings were then clustered according to three different areas of capacity building as well as the additional area of ‘the program experience.’

The Learnings were verified by the MindMatters plus evaluation conducted through the Australian Institute for primary Care at La Trobe University, Victoria.

## No.1

### Building the capacity of the school community ( A whole school Approach)

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **enabling factors** in building the capacity of the school community to support Students With Support Needs in mental health and well being*

1. **Active leadership** including formal leadership by the principal and school executive and informal leadership by advocates within the school community which is communicated to all is critical for ongoing student and staff support
2. **A diverse welfare team** including a range of staff and in some cases, the principal and/or community members
3. **A formal, practical referral process** for within and outside school referrals, developed collaboratively
4. **A system for supporting all students, embedded in curriculum and classroom methodology** within which strategies for supporting STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT NEEDS IN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING can be integrated
5. **Clear processes to ensure early identification** of student mental health needs
6. **Preliminary planning in place before change process begins** with built in opportunities for reflection and refinement over time
7. **Changing school structures and organisation to support mental health promotion, prevention and intervention can occur when leaders understand the potential benefits for staff and students.**
8. **School structure and organisation needs to support mental health promotion**

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **challenges** to building the capacity of the school community to support STUDENTS WITH SUPPORT NEEDS IN MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING:*

1. **Not having a 'student welfare' type team** responsible for co-ordinating support for Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Well Being across the school
2. **Not having clear evaluation, monitoring and review practices** within the school planning process for MindMatters Plus
3. **Insufficient awareness of the value of collecting baseline data** at the beginning of the project
4. **The absence of an existing, integrated approach to understanding and promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of all students and staff.**
5. **Where these pre-conditions are not in place, longer times will be needed and/or they may need to be the first priorities for action.**

## No.2

### Building the capacity of students with high support needs in mental health

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **enabling factors** in building the capacity of students with support needs in mental health and well being:*

1. **Involving students as partners in mental health promotion increases their understanding of mental health and their motivation and skills for supporting their peers**
2. **A positive school culture, which celebrates and recognises diversity and responds decisively and effectively to bullying and harassment is a platform for health promotion and intervention.**
3. **Less structured school activities can promote opportunities for engagement and connection**
4. **Students need to have a connecting relationship with at least one person**
5. **The greater the gap between a student's current level of functioning and the school's expectations of learning and behaviour, the more structured support will be needed for the student.**
6. **Students value informal relationships where they know teachers personally and are known by them too**
7. **Students are more likely to seek help if they feel confident in their environment, and when their sources of help are known to them, readily accessible, and confidential.**
8. **Student friendly support services are those where students are comfortable to seek help for themselves or other students.**

*The following point has been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **challenges** to building the capacity of Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Well Being*

1. **Identification of is a complex process that can alienate and stigmatise students, but which need not do so if undertaken thoughtfully.**

### No. 3

#### Building the capacity of the staff within a whole school approach

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **enabling factors** in building the capacity of school staff:*

1. **Building staff knowledge and insights into mental health and its relationship to behaviour can:**
  - increase the confidence of staff to relate to and support individual students with high support needs
  - assist in building a common language and understanding of mental health so that the implications for school planning in areas such as discipline and the curriculum can be discussed more easily
  - lead to planned identification and collaborative intervention for students with additional needs
2. **Strategies to support staff wellbeing are critical**
3. **Staff benefit from opportunities to share training and experiences and discuss relevant issues with staff from other demonstration schools.** Opportunities to share learning with other schools not involved in the Mind Matter Plus demonstration were also seen as ways to reinforce and refine learning
4. **Processes to facilitate the involvement of all staff** (teaching and non teaching) in support of *Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Well Being* are important in gaining shared responsibility for these students.
5. **Positive relationships with parents/carers** were seen by all schools as a positive support for staff
6. **Regular communication with all staff assisted in maintaining momentum.**

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **challenges** to building the capacity of staff:*

- i. Finding ways to allocate time for reflection, planning and sharing within the normal operation of the school.
- ii. Staff working with *Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Well Being* need strong collegial support

## No. 4 The Program Experience

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **enabling factors** in using the programs to build the capacity of schools to support Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Wellbeing (needs to be consistent spelling either way)*

1. **Programs are most effective when implemented within a whole school approach**
2. **Many 'pastoral care' leaders/teachers have identified the potential of approaches used in the programs for strengthening universal pastoral care programs and curriculum learning**
3. **Training in some prevention and intervention programs has provided teachers with a useful conceptual framework** (ie Cognitive Behavioural Theory) which they have then been able to apply more widely
4. **Support for students at school can be provided on a continuum** including universally (eg. all students attend one day seminar on resilience) selectively ( e.g. the pastoral care program for all year 8 students uses material from *Heartmasters*), targeted ( students who have experienced significant loss and/or grief are supported through *Seasons for Growth*)
5. **Different strategies and programs suit different age groups**
6. **It is beneficial to build sequenced learning from year to year to deepen mental health literacy**
7. **Programs were more effectively implemented when school planning ensured:**
  - 'a good fit' between the program and the school's needs and capacity
  - best use of available resources including school counsellor/psychologist/nurse/specialist teacher and community professionals.
8. **The involvement of program providers with whole school staff and community** (which can include Education and Health District Office staff, allied health professionals and parents) **can improve the effectiveness of implementation and sustainability of programs.**
9. **The opportunity to trial different programs and resources acted as a catalyst to analyse what could be done to lift the whole school capacity and improve support for all students.**

*The following points have been identified from at least one source in the MindMatters Plus project as being **challenges** to using the programs to capacity to support Students With Support Needs In Mental Health And Well Being*

1. **Where a program is not implemented well (due to issues such as lack of teacher confidence, commitment or understanding) the benefits of the program are likely to be compromised**
2. **Building trusting partnerships that are based on shared understanding with community professionals takes time**
3. **Program providers often did not have the capacity (and they may not have seen it as their role) to assist schools to plan for the integration of their program into a whole school approach**
4. **The cost of some programs**
5. **The requirement from some programs to adhere to strict program parameters is difficult in the school setting.**