

MindMatters Plus: INFO SHEET NO.15

Building Sustainable Support Systems in Schools

A case study from St Michael's Collegiate



Our story is of one school which developed a variety of pathways for students to connect with support systems. Our plan was to build upon and strengthen the programs and support systems that we had in place. Our philosophy, which evolved over time, was a belief that each student is an individual and therefore has individual needs to be met. This meant that each individual needed a pathway that was appropriate to them. Importantly we needed to ensure that everything we did was embedded in school practices, that it fitted within existing frameworks or could be accommodated and that teacher, students, and families were aware of the programs and pathways and the ways of accessing them. Thus the 'myriad' pathways model evolved. (See Attachment 1 Have You Got a Problem?)

School System Sustainability

Our goal was to strengthen and increase capacity in four key performance areas: staff, students, parents and at a system level. For staff we wanted to increase knowledge, promote staff well being and provide professional development to introduce our programs. For students we wanted to work on three inter-related but discrete areas which we classified as: knowledge and skills, 'connectedness' to school, and values and attitudes. In the knowledge and skills area we introduced students to programs including Habits of Mind, Reach Out!, Kids Help Line, Heart Masters, and Cool Kids. In relation to connectedness to school we introduced a program we called Social Skills. For values and attitudes we included as part of our program two new elements - one, a drama program, and the second, a Year 8 'initiatives' program and we continued with four key elements of our existing program in this area: Community Program, Leadership Program, Living Our Values Project, Transition Y6-7 Program

With parents we created a consultative process in which our parents would be full participants and we undertook to:

- provide relevant information for them on programs such as Help When You Need It, Reach Out!, Heart Masters
- conduct information forums and 'expert' nights with guest speakers
- strengthen access to information through the Web surround
- include parenting tips in weekly newsletter.

We sought and gained the support of our Parents Council to the project's aims.

We improved a variety of our current provisions to help sustain the project. Firstly, the Information Technology infrastructure was improved. The web page developed on the school intranet was designed by the girls with an emphasis on being very student friendly, readily accessible and attractive to

the girls. This was introduced and its use explained by the girls in a whole of school assembly.

Secondly the Student Representative Council devised a 'pathways map' to describe pathways mechanisms. This visual plan was widely published in the school diary, available in common rooms and made known to parents. Later we expanded this map to include specific mental health issues and pathways to General Practitioners in consultation with the Australian Division of General Practitioners. (A version of the pathways map for students with urgent mental health problems is included at Attachment 2). The third aspect involved creating a Book Mark for distribution to all students Y7-12. The Bookmark was designed and created by the Year 10 student task force.



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The final element to which we attribute our success was the recording and charting of our goals, outcomes and successes. This continual maintenance of our progress provided a constant reminder of our goals, our programs, and our achievements and how changes were implemented. This gave us a basis for assessment and evaluation. We believe that our planning and processes in this regard were vital, as our documentation helped us to measure our success. The use of a mind map (see Attachment 3) to chart our progress was vital in this process as were the evaluations done by the Evaluating teams.

“There must be something that everyone will connect with”

Our key tip for sustainability is the belief that “There must be something that everyone will connect with” in the support process. Put simply, the holes in “the net” that support the girls must be small enough so that the net catches them before they fall through. To ensure this we needed to provide parents with ways of helping and connecting with their children, the teachers with known pathways for addressing student needs, the students with the knowledge of the pathways for support and most importantly the pathways needed to be visible, meaningful, and helpful. It was also important to provide students with social skills and knowledge to deal with ‘life’ challenges.

Finally, we were also conscious of the need for celebration and sharing of the program and this became a powerful component of ongoing sustainability. The project was successful; the school community knew what was happening, to celebrate our successes and achievements. This was done through articles in our weekly newsletter and term paper, presentations in assemblies, parent information evenings, student-led forums and parent association meetings. These helped to ensure success and high visibility.

Our ‘take home message’ contains three main suggestions to ensure connection and sustainability:

- Building on to and strengthening strategies which ensure all students have a legitimate voice and involvement in decision making around mental health issues
- Involving a critical mass of parents in mental health matters through a range of strategies including different forums and times
- Embedding mental health across pastoral care and the school curriculum so that all students, staff and parents understand a common language practised in policy and programs.

Lyn Johnston and Julie Rimes

Mind Matters Plus Team Members
July 2006





GOT A PROBLEM

Worried about school work/projects?
Fighting with a friend?
Just want to talk?

OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?

THIS IS WHAT YOU CAN DO

WHO	<p><u>STAFF</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HOUSE DEAN / TUTOR - MS J. - MRS H. - STAFF MEMBER YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH 	<p><u>CHAPLAINS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DR. L - MRS. O - REV. E 	<p><u>COUNSELLOR</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MRS. W
	<p>ANY PROBLEM OR THEY CAN REFER YOU TO THE RIGHT PERSON TO TALK TO</p>	<p>ANY THING YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT - NOT JUST SPIRITUAL.</p>	<p>ANY PROBLEMS, ISSUES OR CONCERNS</p>
	<p>ANYWHERE AROUND SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS ARE VERY APPROACHABLE</p>	<p>E'S OFFICE IS OPPOSITE THE CHAPEL DR W AND MRS O AT THE BACK OF CANANORE</p>	<p><u>CANANORE</u> INSIDE THE DOOR. MRS. W'S OFFICE IS THE FIRST DOOR ON THE LEFT UNDER THE STAIRS</p>
	<p>JUST DROP IN AND SEE THEM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LEAVE THEM A NOTE. - DROP BY THEIR OFFICE - OR SEND AN EMAIL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GET A REFERRAL FROM YOUR DEAN - LEAVE A NOTE IN THE BOX OUTSIDE MRS W'S DOOR PHONE:xxxxxxxx
WHAT			
WHERE			
HOW			
<p><u>JUST REMEMBER</u> Speaking to any of these people can be as confidential as you want it to be. You should be able to feel comfortable with whoever you are talking to.</p>			<p><u>WHO PAYS</u> THE SCHOOL WILL PAY UNLESS PARENTS ARE AWARE</p>

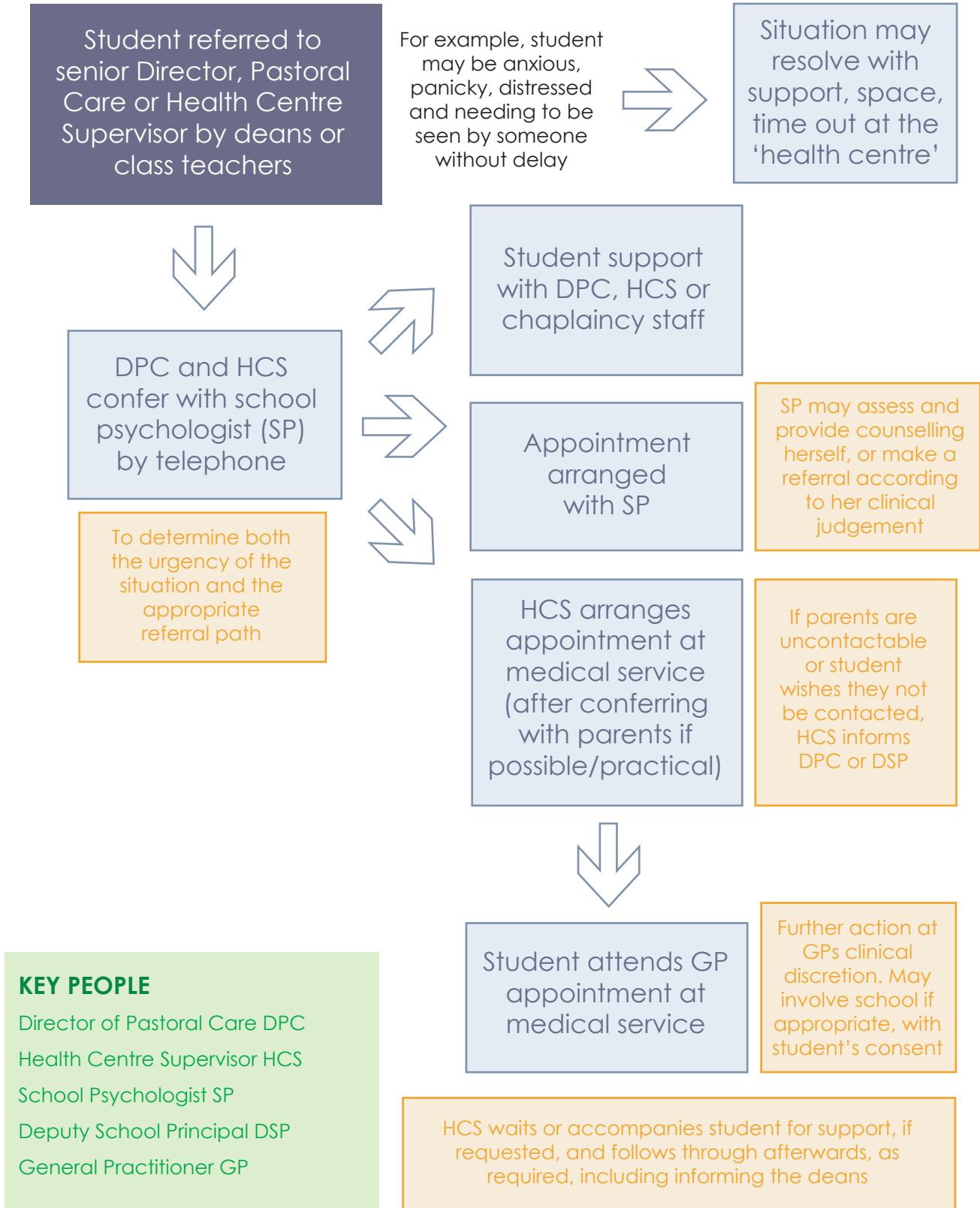
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ATTACHMENT 1: STUDENTS WITH URGENT MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS REFERRAL PATHWAYS

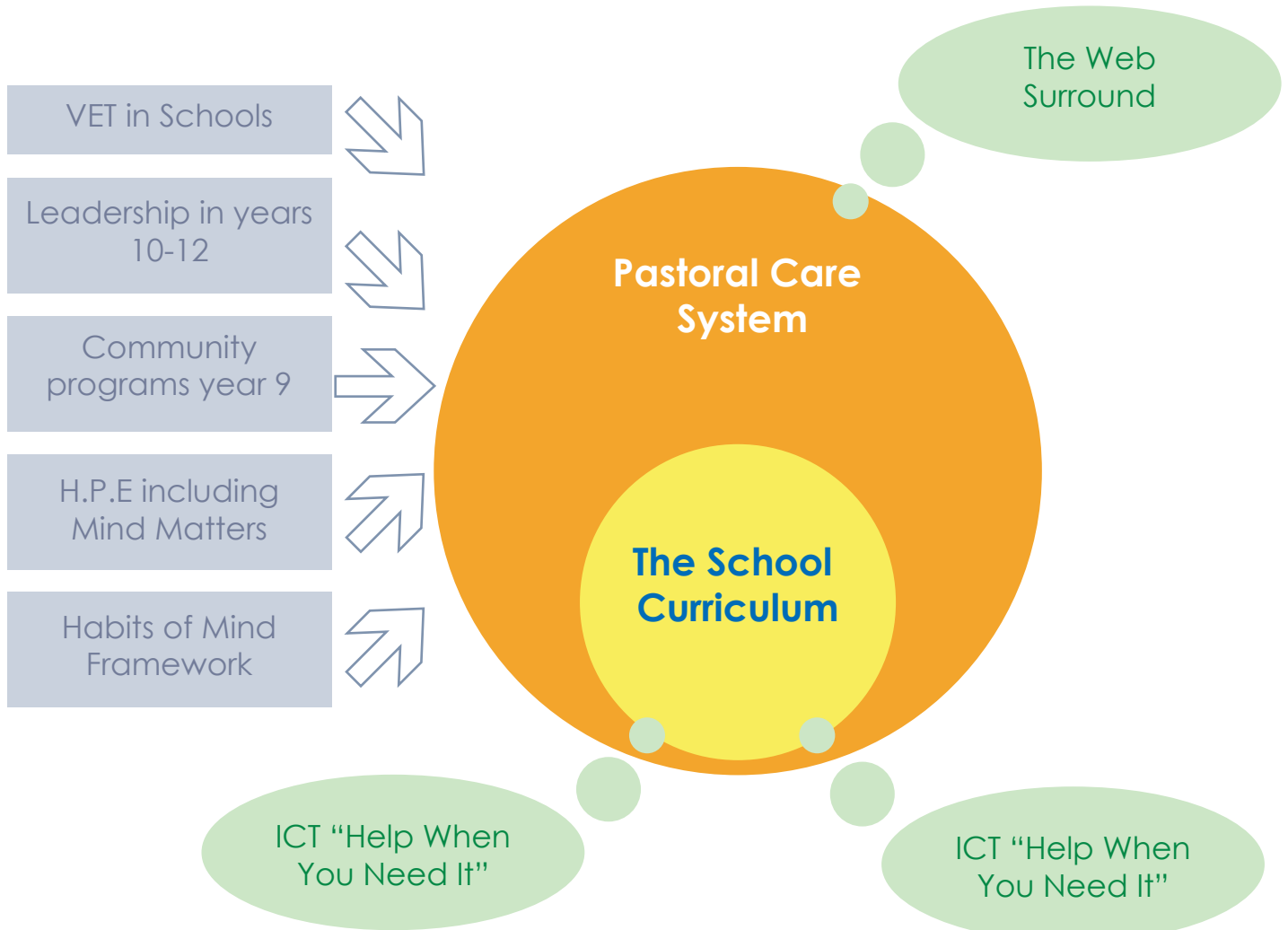


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ATTACHMENT 3: Building Resilience Conceptual Map Phase One – The way we were



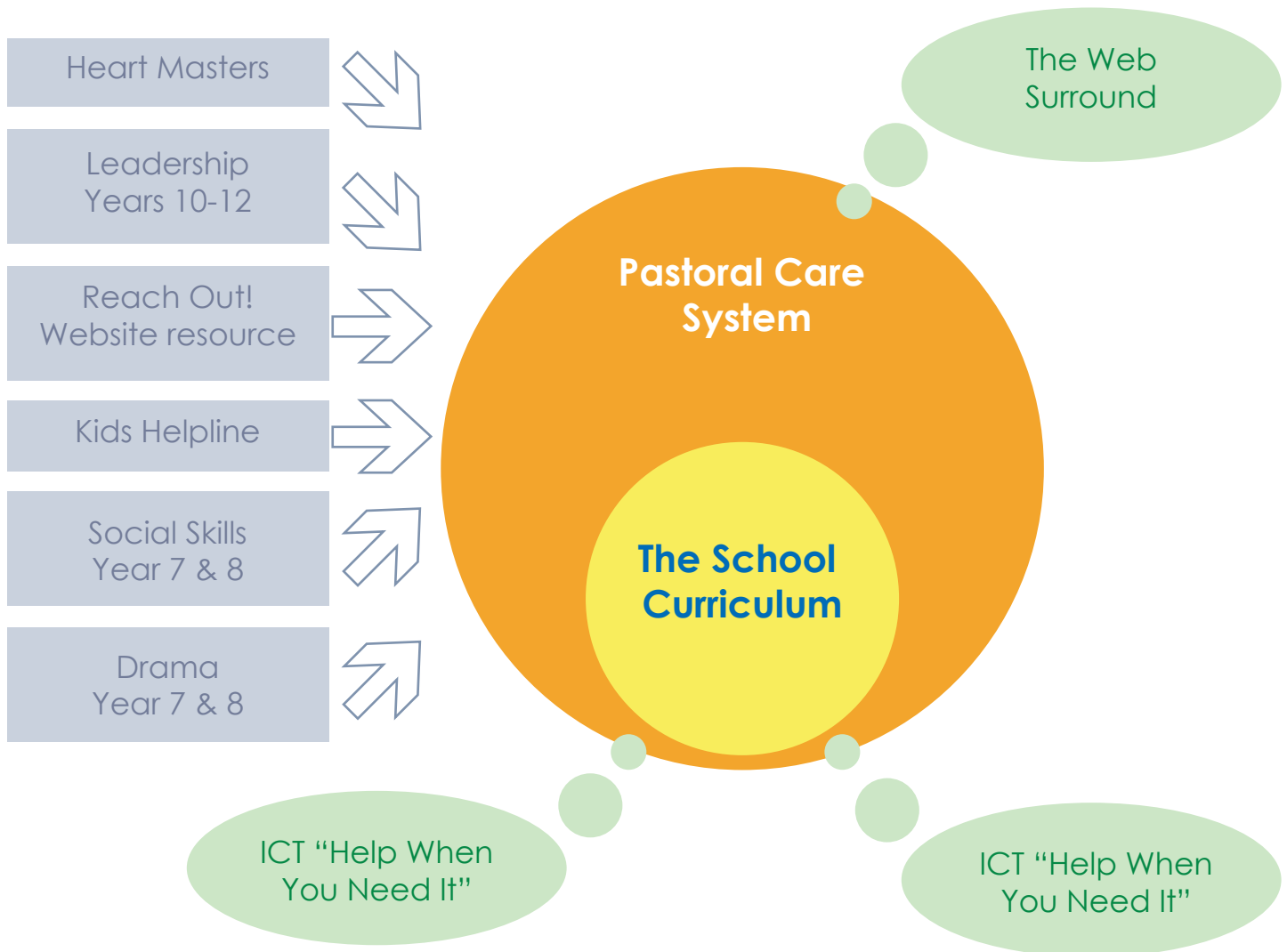
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ATTACHMENT 3: Building Resilience Conceptual Map Phase Two – Our Initial Grant Application



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ATTACHMENT 3: Building Resilience Conceptual Map Phase Three – Where we are now

