

Committee on Children and Young People
Public hearing – 7 May 2021

Responses to questions taken on notice
Advocate for Children and Young People

ACYP Oversight Hearing – Questions on Notice

SHiFT Anti-Bullying Pilot Program

Mr Peter Sidgreaves: I have a question around the pilot SHiFT program, the anti-bullying program. I would like to know the results of the pilot and how it went, what the lessons learnt from that pilot were and potentially what best practice for dealing with bullying looks like?

Ms Jodie Harrison: Could we go back to getting an explanation as to what the SHiFT program was and expand on it to?

Mr Peter Sidgreaves: Could we get some information about the pilot and how it operates?

During Terms 2 and 3 of 2019, ACYP together with the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Education, developed and trialled an anti-bullying program in two NSW Government schools (James Fallon High School, Albury and Eagle Vale High School in Campbelltown). Nine students in Years 8 and 9 from each school participated in the pilot.

Aim:

Engage students in a co-design process to implement a student-led behavioural and cultural change initiative which will positively impact the quality of interpersonal interactions between students, teachers, and other staff.

Objectives:

- Increase opportunities for open discussion between students, teachers, and other school staff in relation to interpersonal interactions within the school, in particular issues such as bullying and conflict.
- Improve student's knowledge of behaviour change strategies which can be used to improve interpersonal interactions between students, teachers and other school staff, in particular what young people can do to support their peers in situations where they are a bystander.
- Increase teacher and school staff understanding of how students would like them to identify and respond to situations of interpersonal conflict between students.
- Improve capacity of students to be self-determining in regard to developing solutions which create cultural change within the school.

Outputs:

- Bring together a representative group of year 8 and year 9 students to develop and implement a student-led behaviour change program amongst their peers.
- Program components:
 - Pre-program survey with students to assess the quality of interactions between students at school.

- Teacher training session prior to program commencement to discuss survey results, results from ACYP consultations with NSW children and young people in regard to their experiences of bullying, and identify staff role in supporting students with the change initiative.
- 5 x 1.5hr fortnightly sessions over a 10 week period.
- Program sessions 1 and 2 will explore the nature of interpersonal interactions within the school and explore student’s ideas about how to achieve behavioural change.
- Session 3 and 4 will work with students to co-design a “Make Change” whole-of-school initiative to support positive behavioural and cultural change in the school.
- “Make Change” initiative will be implemented between sessions 4 and 5.
- Session 5 will provide the opportunity to de-brief after the “Make Change” initiative as well as explore ways to sustain the cultural change promoted by the initiative.

Outcomes:

- Increase in the number of positive, respectful interactions reported between students and each other and students and staff.
- Demonstrated improvement in student’s capacity to respond constructively and supportively in situations of interpersonal conflict with their peers where they are a bystander.
- School staff report increased understanding of how students would like to be supported in addressing interpersonal conflict amongst their peers.
- Students report an increase in the number of responses by teachers and school staff which positively impact the outcome of interpersonal conflict between students.
- Positive cultural change in relation to interpersonal interactions within the school between students, teachers and other school staff.
- Improved levels of student wellbeing as a result of being able to participate in a process which allowed them to identify and develop their own solution to an issue important to them.

Session Outline

Session	Content
One (1.5hrs)	<p>Identify change they would like to see in the school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at what they value about how people (students and teachers) at their school interact with each other, what strengths exist that they can build upon. - To make the school the best it can be, look at what they would like to change about the way people interact - Develop a Bank of Behaviours which is a list of ideas for ways people can interact positively across a range of different situations and that will start to change the culture within the school. - Introduce Pay-It-Forward concept: highlights the role of peers and social networks in creating cultural change.
Two (1.5hrs)	<p>Explore what change is possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection on learning from practice with Bank of Behaviours and Pay-It-Forward exercises. - Create vision for “Make Change” youth-led initiative. This will occur between session 4 & 5

Three (1.5hrs)	“Make Change” Design & Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project planning for Make Change activity
Four (1.5hrs)	“Make Change” planning – continued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finalise planning for the initiative
	Make Change Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement initiative across the school
Five (1.5hrs)	Post Initiative Debrief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debrief following the initiative - Reflect on learning. - Evaluate successes and challenges - Discuss thoughts regarding sustaining future cultural change.

Evaluation:

- ACYP facilitators conducted an evaluation of each session immediately following the session and asked students what they did and did not like about each session and how they felt about the program.
- Overall, students’ feedback was positive after each session – they enjoyed working as a group and engaged in the project.
- As the sessions progressed, participants become more confident speaking about the content and identifying initiatives to create cultural change.
- In terms of facilitation, the feedback at the end of each session allowed us to amend any of the content or activities in future sessions to respond to discussions or needs.
- Evaluation of the program presented some challenges as while there was a core group of students present for each session, different students turned up to workshops each week.

Lessons Learned Through Trailing Shift Program Pilot

Recruitment of young people

- Representative group of whole student body, students need to see themselves represented.
- We asked schools to pick a representative group however there is a need to recognise this can be difficult as students who have not been part of an experience like this before may be wary of agreeing to be part of it without knowing what to expect.
- The school which did not use the Roots network survey and made their own choice about which students to include had more success getting a diverse group of students involved. The school who used the Roots network survey said that it had more difficulty getting students to take part in the program as they had perceived the survey was related to popularity and this created anxiety about involvement in the program and it became more difficult for the school to recruit students.
- The teacher training session run prior to program commencement provided a good opportunity to explain why recruitment of a diverse group is important. On reflection it could have been good to have more time to work with the school about this. Perhaps provide more information about the program to the teachers and students so they have a better understanding about what to expect from the program.

Program Focus

- Interpersonal interactions within the school: covers spectrum of interactions between students, teachers, and all school staff, rather than narrowing it down to students only.
- Using the word “bullying” narrows what the program looks at. Students identified many more factors that impact interpersonal interactions beyond bullying. All the positive behaviours they came up with have the capacity to reduce bullying by creating new social norms. Bullying was mentioned a bit but there was much more discussion about how people treat each other in a number of different contexts.
- When we allowed students to explore the full range of interactions between people in the school they were able to talk more broadly about how they wanted to see all people interact with each other in the school.
- Through the process of exploration both groups independently came up with “Respect” as the theme for their change initiative.

Program Content

- It was important to gain an understanding of each school’s individual context/circumstances. While a roll out can happen, each school is different and each project will be different. By using the consultation framework below we were able to allow students to identify the context for their school.
- Need to include strengths-based framework. It was good to start with a consultation about “what is working well” “what is not working so well” “what would you like to see more of” as this allowed students to identify what their school does well that they can build upon in relation to interpersonal interactions. Students came up with lists that included: individual behaviours between students, interactions between students and staff, and environmental factors.
- Content started with looking at individual behavioural change and shifted to collective action. This structure worked well as it allowed students to practice ways to change behaviour and then apply it to collective change. Bank of Behaviours and Make Change postcards worked well to draw out examples of behaviours and what they would like to see in their school.
- Students enjoyed hands on/experiential activities most. They also really enjoyed filming each other which provided a good excuse to get everyone to be quiet while small groups fed back their work to the class.
- Access to IT can be an issue, sometimes even though teachers have done their best to book a room with audio-visual capabilities it may not be available on the day. You cannot rely on this and need a back-up plan in case you cannot use power-point.
- In-between each session we collated the information students gave us and presented it back in a summarised form for the following session. Students have responded well to seeing facilitators present a feedback a summary of the themes from the previous session at the start of each session (visuals with pictures of the young people worked well) as it helped them see what they had spoken about and the progress they were making. This is also a good opportunity to show some of the film footage as well.

Youth-led

- Important not to suggest anything to students but to allow them space to explore what issue they want to address and how to do this. This is crucial for them to take ownership of the program.
- This can take time, students at one school reached this point faster than the other. It helped to be able to be flexible about this and allow time for students to feel comfortable with being about to come up with their initiative rather than jump in too soon. In the case of the second school this meant adding an extra session into the plan to continue working on the Initiative development.
- Once we shifted to looking at developing the Make Change Initiative we found it is useful to be more directive with students to help them develop an action plan.
- We found a campaign format was a useful structure once we started planning the Make Change Initiative. It allows for students to be creative in terms of what they decide to do but gave them a framework to work within: launching the campaign, identifying key behaviour change messages that they want students to understand and developing a series of activities/actions where students can demonstrate commitment to behaviour change messages, and a whole school event/action to celebrate the behaviour change.

School staff support and logistics

- Important to have support from school staff – Principal, Wellbeing Team etc. It is good to have a link between the school, facilitators, and students as the school have final say about what happens so it is helpful for facilitators to feedback to students what the school says is possible and the best way to implement their Initiative suggestions.
- We found it was important to check in with the school before each session to confirm the session details, make sure rooms were booked, students know to attend, and to check if there is something going on that day that may prevent students from attending the session – schools are very busy and this program won't necessarily be top of their mind.
- One school was able to allocate the school social worker to sit in on the group when she was available. This worked well as it helped students to see that the school was supportive of what they want to do and it also provided the school with the opportunity to see what the students think is working/not working and what they would like to see happen. This can be difficult for under resourced schools.
- Even if staff are unable to be part of the program it is important to feedback and debrief with the school about what the students came up with in each session.
- Once students have decided on the Make Change Initiative it, it is good to present this proposal to the School Principal and get them to determine what support they can give the students. This is the point where the project becomes a partnership between students and the school.
- Running this program is quite resource intensive, from our experience it is much more effective when it is a partnership between the school and any external organisation facilitating the program. This includes having meaningful engagement from both the school leadership and classroom teacher that is on the ground.
- While appreciating how busy teachers are; it was important to have a staff member remain the class during the session. This ensured continuity between sessions and enhanced cooperation between the staff, students and facilitators.

Gender Dysphoria and the ANZCCG

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Has there been subsequent meetings since the cancellation of the last one?

Yes. The ANZCCG meet face-to-face in November 2019, the former Advocate did not attend this meeting. The ANZCCG has met virtually on 30th April 2020, 26th May 2020, 21st July 2020. 18th August 2020, 20th October 2020, 15th December 2020, 3rd March 2021 and 5th May 2021.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Was this matter that I raised and sought to have placed on the agenda raised by you with the NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian to have placed on the agenda?

Yes. The Advocate raised the issue of gender dysphoria at the ANZCCG meeting on 18th August 2020. As discussed in the hearing, it was noted that each member of the ANZCCG had received the correspondence from Mr Donnelly and the Advocate informed them that they were providing him with a response.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Why no medical experts were invited to participate in the briefing and consultation of all the children’s advocates and guardians from around Australia and New Zealand at that meeting? Why were medical experts not invited to participate in the briefing?

At the May 2019 ANZCCG meeting, the session in question, in no way claimed to be a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. As is the function and mandate of the ANZCCG the group choose to prioritise and elevate the voices and experiences of children and young people. The session itself, as discussed in response to questions on notice last year, gave a small group of trans and gender diverse young people the opportunity to discuss with the Committee their experiences.

As is usual practice, prior to the ANZCCG meeting, members were asked to propose topics they wish to be discussed and then the final agenda was endorsed by the Committee prior to the meeting. This particular topic was requested by Ms Jodie Griffiths-Cook, the Children and Young People Commissioner in the Australian Capital Territory.

Consent around accessing mental health services in School

Mr Peter Sidgreaves: On the comments of consent that Ms Charlton made, is that something that is consistent or inconsistent across government schools or non-government schools?

Informed consent from students who self-refer to the school counselling service

The Advocate has gone through their consultation data and outside of the conversation, Ms Charlton was referring to with the YAC this topic has not been raised by children and young people.

In regard to this question, the Advocate reached out to the Department of Education and received the following advice.

This advice refers to school counsellors and school psychologists in NSW Public schools regarding consent and self-referral. The school counselling service comprises school counsellors with dual qualifications in psychology and teaching, and school psychologists who have post graduate qualifications in psychology. In the NSW Department of Education, school counsellors and school psychologists abide by the code of ethics and requirements of the Psychology Board of Australia.

Prior to providing services, psychologists are required by law to inform clients about what to expect regarding the nature of the treatment/interaction. This should include the limits to confidentiality, rights of access to files, and to whom reports will be sent.

A student who self-refers needs to be old enough and/or mature enough to be able to understand the confidentiality and privacy issues that apply and the obligations that the counsellor has to report certain information. The student then needs to be able to provide their consent to undergo counselling based on this understanding.

It is the responsibility of the school counsellor or school psychologist to determine whether or not a young person is capable of understanding these issues and therefore possesses the ability to give informed consent to receive the services of the school counsellor/psychologist.

There is no specified age at which a young person is deemed capable of giving informed consent.

As part of the process of obtaining informed consent, a school counsellor or school psychologist should determine whether the young person:

- Can understand the nature of the proposed psychological service
- Can understand the benefits and risks of the proposed psychological service
- Can understand the consequences of receiving or not receiving the proposed psychological service
- Has the capacity to make an informed choice; and
- Can understand the limits to confidentiality.

In the primary school setting, it is recommended that the consent of the parent or carer be sought before a school counsellor or school psychologist assesses or provides psychological support to a child. However, if there is a concern for the immediate safety or wellbeing of a child, then the school

counsellor or school psychologist must act in the child's best interest, which may override the need for parental consent prior to seeing the child.

This does not imply that school counselling staff undertake a therapeutic program with primary school-aged children without involving parents and gaining their consent. Good practice would indicate taking the whole system to which a child or young person belongs into consideration when planning intervention.

Informed consent from parents when a student is referred to the school counselling service

In all activities related to the individual psychological or educational assessment of school students by the school counsellor or school psychologist, except in the case of student's self-referral, the parent or legal guardian will be involved from the outset.

As previously mentioned, this is the process for NSW Public Schools, the Advocate is unable to speak to the process in non-government or independent schools.

As this is an operational matter, we recommend referring any further questions to the Department of Education, the Association of Independent Schools NSW (AINSW) and Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW).

Wellbeing and Health In-Reach Nurse (WHIN)

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: The reason I ask is that we now have the manifestation of multiple roles. I am not saying that is a bad thing at all, but we have schools nurses and we have school counsellors, and school counsellors preceded schools nurses. In some cases we have chaplains, and there could be a fourth category quite separate from teachers. I am interested to understand the demarcation lines so that we do not have a crossing over of roles.

As discussed in the oversight hearing, the Advocate was asked to sit on the WHIN Operational Rollout Working Group to provide feedback on where the need was greatest to place these resources based on what we have heard from children and young people. In regards to how these roles interact with existing schools resources and infrastructure, this is a questions best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: With respect to the rollout, you say that the evidence is that the Government has informed you through the briefings that it has recruited up to 50, or 50 school nurses. When are those nurses going to be placed into schools? Was this explained to you?

As discussed in the oversight hearing, the Advocate was asked to sit on the WHIN Operational Rollout Working Group to provide feedback on where the need was greatest to place these resources based on what we have heard from children and young people. In regards to the detail of the program in terms of recruitment and timeline for implementation, this is a question best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: With respect to the program, have you been informed how many schools the nurses are going into in New South Wales? What is the timeframe for the placement of them?

As discussed in the oversight hearing, the Advocate was asked to sit on the WHIN Operational Rollout Working Group to provide feedback on where the need was greatest to place these resources based on what we have heard from children and young people. In regards to the detail of the program in terms of recruitment, and timeline for implementation, this is a question best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: Is that 100 nurses across New South Wales public primary and high schools?

Yes. The Advocate understands that under the 2020-21 NSW Budget, the Government made a commitment \$46.8 million over four years to deliver 100 new school-based nurses to support student wellbeing in identified primary and secondary schools.

The Hon Greg Donnelly: Can you also advise on notice whether they have mental health qualifications that are attached to their registered nurse qualification?

As discussed in the oversight hearing, the Advocate was asked to sit on WHIN Operational Rollout Working Group to provide feedback on where the need was greatest to place these resources based on what we have heard from children and young people. In regards to the detail of the program in terms of qualifications, this is a question best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: With respect to the role of the school nurses as explained to you by the Government, with briefings I presume from bureaucrats from the Department of Health and the Department of Education, what is that role and function? Did they provide a briefings paper to you in regard to the role and function?

As discussed at the oversight hearing, the Advocate was asked to sit on the WHIN Operational Rollout Working Group to provide feedback on where the need was greatest to place these resources based on what we have heard from children and young people. The Advocate has not received an individual brief or briefing paper on this program. In regards to the detail of the program in terms of role and function, this is a question best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.

The Hon. Greg Donnelly: If you were provided with any documentation electronic or otherwise that explains what the role and function of the school nurses is, could you please provide on notice.

The Advocate has not received any documentation on the role and function of the school nurses. For further information on the role and function of the schools nurses, this is a question best directed to the Department of Education and/or Ministry of Health.