



## Interstate Forum Report

### March 2011

Peer Support Australia conducted an Interstate Forum for Peer Support Coordinators funded by the Department of Health and Ageing. These Coordinators were chosen based on their experiences of the Peer Support Program. A cross section of schools was selected providing information from those who were relatively new to the Peer Support Program and those who have been involved for several years.

Teachers from 9 Primary schools attended on 25 March 2011. Teachers from 9 Secondary schools attended on 28 March 2011. The Peer Support Coordinators came from schools in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and Northern Territory and included the mix of sectors; Government, Catholic and Independent.

### Purpose

- to reflect on the Peer Support Program and ways it can be further enhanced
- to incorporate learnings into future strategic directions

### Outline

The following outlines broad topics which were discussed during the Forum.

#### A - Implementing the Peer Support Program

Focus questions included:

- How did the school become involved in the Peer Support Program?
- How is the Program being implemented?
- What are the key ingredients for success?
- What are the benefits of the Program?
- How could the Program and its resources be improved to support implementation?

#### B - Impacts on the Peer Support Program

Specific issues which could impact on the Program were discussed including:

- the universality of the Program (a one size fits all schools approach)? What are the implications?
- the main reason the school decided to implement the program (eg resilience, peer relationships, leadership)
- promotion of the Program to:
  - own school community; and
  - other schools.
- moving through stages of implementation over several years:
  - supporting the process; and
  - exemplary implementation.

#### C - Vision for the future

- future directions of the Program
- the Program in 3 to 5 years time

## **Primary Coordinators**

### **Learnings**

The following summarises the key points taken from the discussions from primary schools.

#### *Positives*

- effective leadership program
- positive feedback from staff and students
- strong focus on Social and Emotional Learning
- evidence based program
- works well when the Principal is positive about program
- assists transition
- leadership training for students
- Year 6 are much more confident after implementation
- definite impact on early primary students
- linked to curriculum
- resources are developed
- embedded in school philosophy
- whole school program - developing connections across school

#### *Barriers - internal*

- no specific coordinator allocated by school
- timing of school implementing the program poor
- not enough time and thought given by school staff to peer group formation and therefore, behaviour issues
- Year 4/5 not always engaged and Peer Leaders need support of teachers
- staff attitudes - previous experience and negative perceptions, crowded curriculum, time, one more thing to do
- timetabling
- literacy levels of leaders when pairing

## **Secondary Coordinators**

### **Learnings**

The following summarises the key points taken from the discussions with secondary schools.

#### *Positives*

- leadership opportunities
- change in school culture
- creates a sense of community
- delivers pastoral/wellbeing messages to students
- leadership training for students
- provides an opportunity for students to be of 'service' to the school community
- connections between younger and older students
- resources developed for use
- structured program with training and resources
- transition for Year 7/8

#### *Barriers - internal*

- logistics - competing demands on time and curriculum
- leaders need to be trained and supported well
- literacy levels of students
- student engagement
- timetabling issues
- commitment of staff
- operational difficulties
- lack of support for leaders
- difficult to fit into structure of middle school

## Essential for success

- Principal and executive on board
- passionate driver - sustainability when Coordinators leave the school
- focus on curriculum
- rationale statement for specific targets ie Principals, Staff, Parents, Peer Leaders
- regular training of staff to invigorate
- training of Peer Leaders over 2 days
- mix of teachers, various experiences, ages and grades
- specific role for Year 5 students to encourage their participation and engagement

## Key Messages

- developing positive connections throughout the school and wider community
- once established, minimal work for teachers to maintain
- social growth for everyone
- convenience - effective structure and resources developed to enable ease of implementation
- connectedness across school
- teachers need to take an active role to support students with literacy and behaviour
- leadership opportunities for a range of students
- for some students school is the only place they connect
- well connected school leads to less bullying
- fosters sense of belonging
- interaction between different year levels and the connections they form
- leadership for all students
- social interaction and bonds form across the school
- skill development and opportunity to practise these skills
- leaders develop public speaking skills
- developing skills to be a well rounded person
- develops empathy amongst students
- face to face with peers is the unique factor
- interaction with different teachers
- compliments other programs and allows students to practise what they learn
- other programs can fall along the wayside due to time constraints as they are left to class teachers to organise. The Peer Support Program is a whole school program with a Coordinator - once timetabled is more likely to happen.

## Possible Future Directions

Discussions regarding possible directions also took place.

Considerable time was spent discussing the impact and use of technology within the Peer Support Program. The Coordinators in attendance were adamant the Peer Support Program and the interaction of the groups should remain as a face to face process. However components of awareness raising and support materials for teachers could be developed in an electronic format.

The following highlights some suggestions:

- variety of ideas for future modules and focus (ie secondary relationships)
- contract - schools to enter into a contract with Peer Support Australia to ensure their practice of implementation is effective
- online resources ie surveys, support material components of the modules, e newsletters
- literacy levels of students incorporate different literacy levels
- sustainability of a peer led approach throughout the year
- schools purchase licence instead of hard copy resource
- greater use of website for 'members' access

## Appendix

The following schools attended:

### Primary

- Burwood Public School, Burwood, NSW
- Emmanuel Catholic School, Mackay, Qld
- Leanyer Primary School, Sanderson, NT
- Mother of Good Counsel School, Cairns, Qld
- Queen of Apostles School, Riverton, WA
- Spreyton Public School, Spreyton, Tasmania
- St Brigid's Catholic School, New Norfolk, Tasmania
- St Patrick's School, Emerald, Qld
- Townsville Central State School, North Ward, Qld

### Secondary

- Broome Senior High School, Broome, WA
- Corpus Christi College, Willetton, WA
- Marrara Christian College, Sanderson, NT
- Ogilvie High School, New Town, Tasmania
- O'Loughlin College, Karama, NT
- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Sadadeen Campus, Alice Springs, NT
- Rokeby High School, Rokeby, Tasmania
- St Mark's Anglican Community School, WA
- Taminmin College, Humpty Doo, NT

### Feedback from participants after the forum

- Thanks for everything. I had a fantastic experience. It was great.
- It was a great day and I have shared the ideas back at school.
- Thank you once again for the opportunity to participate in the meeting. It was interesting hearing the different experiences and ideas.
- Thank you for the opportunity to spend a day with like minded people. As a teacher it was a treat to be invited to talk about what we already do well as well as the challenges we have. I found the Forum inspiring and it ignited enthusiasm in me. We just completed our two day leaders training at my school. It went really well and I felt more confident this year as a trainer and the coordinator. Thanks again, and it was really nice to meet the Peer Support Australia team and put faces to names.
- Thank you for the opportunity to come down and speak with you all. I am a very passionate supporter of Peer Support Australia. I can only hope that you guys were able to get enough of the information that you were wanting to get.
- The forum was so valuable and engaging. I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet so many talented and passionate professionals.
- Thanks for all your hard work organising the event and the excellent communication and support you provided. It was a fantastic event and something I was proud to be a part of.
- I really enjoyed attending the forum and certainly took a lot away with me. So fresh back at school my first port of call was my Principal who as yet hasn't been trained or really aware of the program.
- Sincere thanks again for the wonderful forum in Sydney and all the ongoing work by the entire Peer Support team. I look forward to the report and the future development of the program.
- Thank you for such a fabulous opportunity to meet you all and participate in a really worthwhile review.