

Evidence Base

National Suicide Prevention Strategy

“The Peer Support Program has been really beneficial to our students. It has encouraged older students to develop better relationships with younger students across the school.”

Principal, Western Australia

Research Project

Peer Support Australia has conducted evaluations focusing on the impact of the Peer Support Program as a suicide prevention initiative. This evaluation formed part of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) projects for Department of Health and Ageing. The results suggest the Peer Support Program promotes mental wellbeing, resilience and social connectedness.

As part of the project an Evaluation Package was designed and developed for schools who implement the Peer Support Program. The aim of this package is to enable schools to evaluate the impacts of the Peer Support Program on their students and the school community over time.

Within this context the evaluation data generated by teachers and students in both primary and secondary schools across Australia demonstrated the implementation of the Peer Support Program had a positive impact.

Results in primary schools

The main reasons identified by schools for implementing the Peer Support Program include:

- opportunities for authentic student leadership
- building student friendship networks
- overall impact on the school community
- vertical student connections within the school.

Other results:

- students were more likely to approach Peer Leaders for help
- reduction in inappropriate playground behaviour
- students have a strong sense of self
- building school spirit.

For Peer Leaders:

- being supportive of younger students
- demonstrating resilience
- growing in self confidence
- developing leadership skills.

Results in secondary schools

- reduce the incidence of bullying behaviour
- change attitudes towards bullying behaviours in the culture of the school
- provide greater awareness of the different types of bullying behaviours
- provide support for the longer term benefits of the intervention program.

Other results:

- students were more likely to approach Peer Leaders for help
- students demonstrating resilience
- students having a stronger sense of self
- building school spirit
- improving student mental health.

For Peer Leaders:

- supportive of younger students
- demonstrating resilience
- growing in self confidence
- developing leadership skills
- improve their future employability.

Results from Teachers

Teachers identified specific impacts for the school as a whole, students generally and Peer Leaders. The results prove the development of the following:

- communication skills
- social skills
- coping strategies
- decision making
- problem solving.

Additional results demonstrate an increase in student:

- self confidence
- stress management
- enjoyment at school.

The research also indicates students have the ability to:

- think positively
- make new friends
- improve relationships with peers and teachers.