

Evidence Base

The University of Western Sydney

“The Peer Support Program makes a significant contribution to schools’ endeavours to provide positive outcomes for students.”

Dr Louise Ellis,
The University of Western Sydney

University of Western Sydney

A three year longitudinal study confirmed the Peer Support Program has a positive effect on young people and their school communities.

Educationalists have long recognised the transition from primary to secondary school, coupled with change created by biological, psychological and social developments can be challenging and potentially disruptive. The early adolescent years have been identified as a critical turning point for many young people.

“The positive results suggest the Peer Support Program is worthwhile, especially in changing the attitudes to bullying, which is one of the study’s significant findings.” Dr Louise Ellis

Methodology

This research involved surveying more than 2300 students from a number of secondary schools in the Sydney metropolitan area over a period of three years.

The research comprised four separate studies and a number of measuring instruments to analyse the effectiveness of the Peer Support Program.

Subsamples of the original group were used to measure specific longitudinal effects on both the Year 7 students and the Peer Leaders. Control groups and baseline data were used for comparison.

The inclusion of focus group discussion gave the students the opportunity to provide specific feedback and further supported the overall conclusions.

“A number of teachers who were involved in the Program independently remarked...they had noticed significant improvements in teacher-student relations.” Dr Louise Ellis

Findings

The findings demonstrated the Peer Support Program improves students’:

- self confidence
- relationships with peers
- enjoyment of school
- perception of support from others
- academic self concept
- attitudes to bullying behaviours.

Developing lifelong learning

The Peer Support Program enhances students’ skills in:

- problem solving
- decision making
- managing stress
- organisation
- leadership
- coping with difficult experiences.

“...these findings suggest the Peer Support Program provides an excellent mechanism for facilitating social interchange across year groups and hence, creating a positive school climate.” Dr Louise Ellis

Significantly, the research confirmed the changes occurring in students’ mental, social and physical wellbeing were sustained over time.

“Evidence of sleeper effects were found for pro bully attitudes, self confidence, perceived peer support, cooperative teamwork, time efficiency, problem avoidance and self efficacy.” Dr Louise Ellis