AUSSIE OPTIMISM DISSEMINATION PROJECT REPORT

For

THE OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH –
WA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

And

WA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & TRAINING

JULY 2009

By

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School of Psychology
Curtin University of Technology

July 2008 – June 2009
Executive Summary

The Aussie Optimism Dissemination Project is a collaborative research project between the Western Australian Office of Mental Health, Department of Education and Training and Curtin University’s School of Psychology. This project involves the ongoing implementation and training of a school-based mental health promotion program which has shown efficacy in preventing internalising problems in young adolescents as well as promoting social and emotional well-being.

Several project outcomes have been identified as contributing to both the integrity and sustainability of the Aussie Optimism Program; in particular the:

1. Train-the-Trainer workshops – One workshop was run in the first half of 2009, with six participants. These workshops help to ensure sustainability of the program in Western Australia and quality control for the school community, as they can have access to trainers who can conduct the teacher-training workshops and provide coaching and support as needed;

2. Teacher-training workshops – Fifteen workshops were run in the 2008-2009 financial year with 124 DET and non-government school staff (teachers, school psychologists etc.) trained in Aussie Optimism. These workshops serve as the front-line of the program as they provide the training for teachers to learn how to use the program and resources and;

3. Evaluation of student mental health – gives an indication of the impact of the program has on student’s experience of anxiety and depression, and drug and alcohol problems.

The Aussie Optimism research team also continues to actively promote and share research findings from the earlier dissemination phase, with local professional groups and national and international conferences and meetings.
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1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Aussie Optimism Program is an evidence-based intervention program for upper primary school children that enhances mental health and prevents depression and anxiety.

The project aims to:

- Extend the Aussie Optimism Dissemination Project to further secondary dissemination efforts in both metropolitan and rural Department of Education and Training education districts in Western Australia;

- Extend the dissemination of this program to non-government schools and;

- Conduct a 3-year follow-up of students who participated in the original dissemination trial in 2003.

In line with these aims, the project for the 2008-2009 year has three components to report on:

- Train the trainer workshops: The training of Department of Education and Training staff and/or staff from the Non-government School Psychology Service to train and support teachers in the implementation of the program;

- Teacher training: The training of teachers in program implementation; and

- Evaluation of student mental health outcomes

2 PROGRESS REPORT


Train-the-trainer Resources

The Positive Thinking Skills Trainer’s Manual is currently being revised. This process was required because of revisions made to the Positive Thinking Skills Teacher Resource, which included new research and knowledge relating to the development of children’s cognitive processes and emotional competence. The new Positive Thinking Skills Trainer’s Manual has been trialed in a rural community and is currently being edited and proof read. Once all revisions are made, all current Aussie Optimism trainers will be invited to attend Positive Thinking Skills – Train-the-Trainer workshop.

Train-the-trainer Workshops

One Train-the-trainer workshop was conducted at Curtin University in March 2009 for 7 school psychologists from the Western Australian Department of Education, a Senior Education Officer from Brisbane Catholic education, a Senior Lecturer from...
Queensland University of Technology, and the Research Coordinator for Aussie Optimism: Positive Thinking Skills as well as an international representative from Brain Revolution in Singapore.

The trainers represent an invaluable addition to the Aussie Optimism Training team, especially within the rural schools area. It should be noted that Aussie Optimism now has trainers in 11 out of the 14 districts in Western Australia.
The trainers and districts/affiliations are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainer</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Districts/affiliations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maree Dawes</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Albany District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie Collocott</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>West Coast District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy Hart</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>West Coast District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Conte</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Mid West District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon Steven</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Mid West District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia Truong</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Swan District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Down</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Swan District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharinaz Hassan</td>
<td>Research Coordinator</td>
<td>Curtin University of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernadette Wood</td>
<td>Senior Education Officer</td>
<td>Brisbane Catholic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Campbell</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Queensland University of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl Chia</td>
<td>Director/ Paediatric Physiotherapist</td>
<td>Brain Revolution (Singapore)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All trainers have been supplied with a training kit and the resources and manuals to provide training to the teachers in their districts. All trainers (in Western Australia) will be paired with a university-based trainer to conduct their first workshop and receive ongoing support via phone and e-mail. For interstate and overseas trainers – support will be via evaluation reports, phone calls and email only.

**Evaluation of the Train-the-trainer Workshop**

The Train-the-trainer workshop was evaluated in terms of meeting the needs of the new trainers for information, skills, and knowledge. Their satisfaction and overall rating of the workshop was also evaluated. A 5-point response choice scale was used, and as shown in Table 1, high to very high ratings were achieved across all variables.

Trainers also rated how confident they felt to conduct Aussie Optimism implementation workshops for teachers and their attitudes to mental health promotion, before and after the Train-the-trainer workshop. These results, shown in Table 2, indicate a significant increase between pre- and post-workshop self-efficacy scores \(t (10) = -5.142, p < .05\) , indicating that participants’ confidence and self-efficacy for implementing the Aussie Optimism program had increased after completing the Train the Trainer workshops. However, no significant difference was found between pre- and post-workshop attitude total for mental health promotion \(t (9) = -1.585, p > .05\). This result indicates that participants already had positive attitudes towards mental health promotion prior to the beginning of the workshops.
Table 1.
Means (standard deviations) of trainer feedback for the March 2009 Aussie Optimism Train-the-trainer workshop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to Practice</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>(.302)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Knowledge</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Skills</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>(.467)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Content Level</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>(.522)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Content</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>(.505)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Depth of Coverage</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>(.505)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Clarity</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>(.522)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Stimulation</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>(.467)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Handouts</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>(.467)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Rating</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>(.405)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 5-point response choice scale where 1 = very irrelevant, no contribution, not appropriate, very poorly integrated and 5 = very highly relevant, very high contribution, very highly integrated, very highly appropriate. N = 5.

Table 2.
Trainer outcomes for the April 2008 Aussie Optimism train-the-trainer workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-workshop</th>
<th>Post-workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Total for Mental Health Promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ten participants provided qualitative feedback, which covered the program’s content, delivery and resources. All of the comments contained positive elements and included statements such as:

- “Aussie Optimism is a fantastic program! The resources are great. I am looking forward to training teachers and also running my own AO group! Great workshop. Thank you so much for the opportunity to participate!”

- “The workshop is effective in training new trainers like me. The program is well structured and well prepared. Well done Clare and Margaret and thankyou for inviting me to join the workshop. Personally, I think the program is very useful for me as I can practice the positive strategies and skills on my own children.”
“Excellent-very personable trainers. Also very supportive and educative.”

**Train-the-trainer Support**

Support has been ongoing to the continuing trainers, via phone contact, e-mail, meetings and co-facilitation of workshops. The two new trainers from Swan were supported by Ruth Drake-Brockman at their first Social Life Skills implementation workshop and Margaret Ho supported the new Midwest trainers during their recent trainings.

All trainers were invited to attend a meeting in early February 2009 for updates on recent research outcomes whilst also giving them an opportunity to exchange experiences, tips and develop new support networks (see Appendix A for minutes).

### 2.2 OUTPUT 2 TEACHER TRAINING: JULY 2008 – JUNE 2009

**Implementation workshops**

Twelve workshops were run by Department of Education trainers in the 2008-2009 financial year. A total of 90 teachers, school staff and psychologists were trained in Western Australia, along with 1 research coordinator and 1 welfare officer. Three workshops were run by the Non-government schools psychological service, with 34 participants.

Curtin University trainers provided co-facilitation to the Canning, Narrogin, Swan and Midwest Districts during their initial workshops. Table 3 shows the distribution of workshops across Education Districts in Western Australia.

**Table 3.**

*Number of Implementation workshops completed June 2008 – June 2009*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of Education &amp; Training District</th>
<th>Social Life Skills</th>
<th>Optimistic Thinking Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fremantle - Peel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren-Blackwood</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West-Coast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberley</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrogin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government psychological service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of Department of Education implementation workshops

All implementation workshops were evaluated in terms of participant satisfaction, and changes in knowledge and self efficacy to teach Aussie Optimism modules. Table 4 shows means and standard deviations for pre- and post-workshop scores.

### Table 4
Mean score changes in teacher self-efficacy and knowledge following workshop attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-workshop</th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-workshop</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>11.73 (3.35)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>17.97 (2.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life Skills Knowledge</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5.85 (1.75)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>7.36 (1.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic Thinking Skills Knowledge</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4.49 (1.57)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.61 (3.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Knowledge</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>7.32 (2.30)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>7.98 (2.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Self-efficacy scale range 5-25; Social Life Skills knowledge scale range 0-14; Optimistic Thinking Skills knowledge scale range 0-17; General knowledge scale range 0-13.

The results of this evaluation indicate that teachers who attended Aussie Optimism implementation workshops reported a significant increase in confidence and self efficacy to teach the program modules ($t(86) = -20.010, p < .000$) after completing the workshops. In addition, significant differences were found between pre- and post-workshop measures for knowledge of the Social Life Skills program ($t(64) = -6.318, p < .000$), knowledge of the Optimistic Thinking Skills program ($t(34) = -9.684, p < .000$), and general knowledge of mental health promotion for children ($t(84) = -2.145, p < .05$).

Teachers’ satisfaction with the implementation workshops was evaluated and the results in Table 5 show means and standard deviations for workshop feedback questions. Overall, high to very high ratings of teacher satisfaction were recorded.
Table 5
Means (standard deviations) for teacher satisfaction with implementation workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>(SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to Teaching</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Knowledge</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>(.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Skills</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>(.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Content Level</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>(.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Content</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>(.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Depth of Coverage</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>(.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Clarity</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>(.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Stimulation</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>(.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Handouts</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Rating</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>(.52)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 5-point response choice scale where 1 = very irrelevant, no contribution, not appropriate, very poorly integrated and 5 = very highly relevant, very high contribution, very highly integrated, very highly appropriate. N = 53-54.

Comments:
The following comments are taken from evaluations of the workshops conducted by Department of Education & Training and Non-Government Schools Psychological Service Aussie Optimism trainers for the 2008-2009 financial year:

Comments relating to the program:

- “Very useful... it fits into other programs well and also covers how to promote positive emotional health.”
- “Very effective package for teachers with little experience or new to the profession. Easy to follow, set program, little work needed for preparation.”
- “The program is most suitable for where we are at as a school.”
- “As a relatively new teacher this has given me an outstanding array of strategies to implement in the classroom.”

Comments relating to the workshop:

- “Excellent PD- small group gave lots of time for questions and discussion.”
- “Good information to know about students in your class which will affect their learning capabilities. Hands on, fun activities. Some statistics and information was surprising.”
- “Excellent presentations- relevant and time given for questions/discussion during day. Left feeling optimistic and energised, ready to begin!”
- “The practical/role play activities gave participants an opportunity to unpack modules and interact with course materials. These broke up the presentation and were valuable learning opportunities.”
Evaluation of Non-government implementation workshops

Table 6

Mean score changes in teacher self-efficacy and knowledge following workshop attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-workshop</th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-workshop</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12.00 (3.38)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17.27 (2.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life Skills Knowledge</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.88 (1.13)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8.00 (1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic Thinking Skills</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.87 (2.75)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.52 (2.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Knowledge</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7.13 (2.29)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.64 (1.75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Self-efficacy scale range 5-25; Social Life Skills knowledge scale range 0-14; Optimistic Thinking Skills knowledge scale range 0-17; General knowledge scale range 0-13.

Table 7

Means (standard deviations) for teacher satisfaction with implementation workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to Teaching</td>
<td>4.12 (.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Knowledge</td>
<td>4.39 (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Skills</td>
<td>4.09 (.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Content Level</td>
<td>3.94 (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Content</td>
<td>3.97 (.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness of Depth of Coverage</td>
<td>3.82 (.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Clarity</td>
<td>4.24 (.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Stimulation</td>
<td>3.70 (.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Handouts</td>
<td>4.42 (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Rating</td>
<td>4.39 (.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 5-point response choice scale where 1 = very irrelevant, no contribution, not appropriate, very poorly integrated and 5 = very highly relevant, very high contribution, very highly integrated, very highly appropriate. N = 53-54.

The results of the evaluation of the non-government schools indicates that non-government teachers who attended Aussie Optimism implementation workshops reported a significant increase in confidence and self efficacy to teach the program modules (t (30) = -9.600, p < .00) after completing the workshops. In addition, a significant difference was found between pre- and post-workshop knowledge of the
Optimistic Thinking Skills program \((t\ (21) = -14.474, \ p < .00)\). However, no significant difference was found between pre- and post-workshop knowledge of the Social Life Skills program \((t\ (7) = -1.688, \ p > .05)\) or pre- and post-workshop general knowledge of mental health promotion for children \((t\ (29) = -1.066, \ p > .05)\).

Teachers’ satisfaction with the implementation workshops was evaluated and the results in Table 5 show means and standard deviations for workshop feedback questions. Overall, high to very high ratings of teacher satisfaction were recorded.

Overall, these results indicate the integrity of the Train-the-trainer program in providing the knowledge, skills and support to trainers required for them to provide high quality training of the Aussie Optimism program to teachers and school staff.

### Additional Workshops
Several additional Aussie Optimism workshops were run during the 2008-2009 financial year. These included fee-for-service workshops; Curtin based workshops for students and interstate implementation:

- **Fee-for-service – Social Life Skills & Optimistic Thinking Skills**
  Six school staff (teachers and school psychologists) and one representative from Brain Revolution (Singapore) attended the Social Life Skills workshop as part of the Train-the-Trainer process. The representative from Brain Revolution also attended the Optimistic Thinking Skills workshop.

- **Curtin-based workshops – Education Students**
  Working in collaboration with the School of Education – Primary Education, at Curtin University, two 2-day workshops covering both Social Life Skills and Optimistic Thinking Skills were conducted on the 14th and 15th of July 2008 and 10th and 11th February of 2009. These workshops were attended by 39 Education students and 7 Clinical Psychology students. Both sets of workshops were well received, providing early education and primary education teaching students with practical experience and understanding of the importance of mental health promotion. Clinical Psychology students who attended the 14th and 15th July, 2008 workshops also received specific training in the programs so that they could run targeted groups for children who are already showing symptoms of depression and anxiety. These group based programs can be implemented as part of student placements in the Curtin Child Psychology Clinic or on external clinical placements in the community.

- **Positive Thinking Skills Pilot – Teacher Training**
  A Positive Thinking Skills workshop was held on the 26th June, 2009 for 10 teachers in Narrogin. The purpose of this training was two-fold: 1) to provide teachers with the skills to run the revised Positive Thinking Skills program in their classrooms. A Clinical Psychology Masters student will be evaluating the efficacy of the program (see Appendix B for Project Abstract); and 2): to trial the new Positive Thinking Skills Trainer’s Manual.

- **Interstate Workshops - Queensland**
  Dissemination interstate continued throughout the 2008-2009 financial year with a combined Social Life Skills and Optimistic Thinking Skills workshop conducted by University of Queensland Trainer Matthew Hand for 8 teachers from Mount Maria...
College. New Aussie Optimism Trainer Bernadette Wood conducted a Social Life Skills workshop for 9 teachers from several schools in Queensland and an Optimistic Thinking Skills workshop for 3 teachers.

- **Interstate Workshops – NSW**
  NSW trainer – Andrew Van Oploo has been training teachers using a different model to implement the programs in low socioeconomic schools. As his schools are located in rural NSW with student populations that are highly transient and prone to absenteeism – he has been training teachers and co-facilitating the programs in the classroom. This has allowed him to familiarise himself with both the content and the unique circumstances facing the students, providing a more individualised experience for students with significant risk factors for mental health problems.

- **Rural Training Experiences – WA**
  Midlands’ trainer, Jon Attwell has adopted this model due to similar circumstances. The schools in his district are situated in remote areas and are not heavily populated. As such, it is difficult to conduct large training workshops for several schools at a time. He has been conducting shorter training sessions over several days to schools in the region and co-facilitating the modules with the classroom teacher. All teachers in the school have been trained regardless of year group to ensure consistency in language and ethos. In small communities all teachers invariably come in contact with all students whether in the school itself or the community. This model has worked well and more schools are asking for Aussie Optimism. Jon has recently had a paper accepted for Mental Health in the Bush - Rural & Remote Mental Health Conference in November 2009 to outline his novel approach to implementation.

### 2.3 OUTPUT 3 DISSEMINATION EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

#### Secondary Dissemination Outcomes

The evaluation of the dissemination outcomes is measured in terms of the number of schools using the program. Student mental health outcomes are also reported from the original dissemination project – 3 year follow-up.

#### Schools & Aussie Optimism

For the 2008-2009 financial year forty-two schools were implementing the program as indicated by the Aussie Optimism sales database which records the number of orders from schools. A total of 2728 student booklets (1631 Social Life Skills, 1015 Optimistic Thinking Skills and 77 Positive Thinking Skills) were purchased, suggesting that schools that used the upper primary programs were implementing both Social Life Skills and Optimistic Thinking Skills as a comparable number of students had received both programs. The smaller number of students accessing the Year 4 & 5 Positive Thinking Skills program relates to the withdrawal of this program in mid 2008 for revision. The revised program is currently being trialled and will be released once the outcomes of the trial are available.

#### Dissemination Research Project – Results of 3-year Follow-Up

The Aussie Optimism Research team have completed the fourth follow-up of students and parents who completed post-intervention questionnaires at the end of 2005. The researchers have now assessed all consenting at risk students who have reported scores above the clinical cut-off on the emotional symptoms scale of the Strengths
and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) at any assessment point from 2003 – 2008. Students completed a computerised diagnostic interview (DICA) for indications of anxiety and/or depressive disorders and suicidal ideation.

**Results**

In the previous report submitted January 2009 (Aussie Optimism Dissemination Project Report Jul-Dec, 2008) results were available for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This measure completed by the students revealed that there were significant differences on the hyperactivity subscale whereby both the intervention groups had significantly lower scores than the control group (Intervention Group 1: \(t(367) = -1.979, p < .05\)); Intervention Group 2: \(t(377) = -2.109, p < .05\) ). With regards to the peer problems subscale, only intervention group 2 had significantly lower scores than the control group \(t(377) = -2.215, p < .05\) however there was a trend towards significance for intervention group 1 \(t(367) = -1.945, p = .053\).

Results are now available for the at risk student population (students with scores above the clinical cut off on the SDQ at any follow-up point). Whilst a total of 320 students were identified, only 158 provided consent to participate in the computerised diagnostic assessment and 33 refused to complete the interview when contacted by a research assistant. Thus only 125 students completed the assessment. Of these 125 students, 12 reported a clinical diagnosis (see table 8 for more detail), 7 of which had more than 1 diagnosis and only 1 student was newly identified.

During the computerised assessment, questions regarding suicidal ideation were asked (this only occurred in relation to how students responded to questions re: depression). Two students revealed that they had thoughts about death and dying in the past.

**Table 8**

*Distribution of diagnoses across intervention groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Intervention 1 Intervention &amp; training</th>
<th>Intervention 2 Intervention, training &amp; coaching</th>
<th>Control Delayed intervention &amp; training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Major Depressive Disorder</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Past Major Depressive Disorder</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dysthymia</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separation Anxiety Disorder</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic Disorder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalised Anxiety Disorder</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Phobia</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3 PROJECT PRESENTATIONS & PROJECT UPDATES

Presentations
The following conference presentations have been conducted in 2009:


Project Updates

**Aussie Optimism: Feelings and Friends – Years 1-2 and Years 3**
Revisions of these two resources have been completed and were trialed in the Curtin Psychology Clinic by two Clinical Psychology Masters students with 2 groups of at risk children (children with elevated scores on psychological assessment).

- **Findings for the year 1 & 2 program:**
  - Significant reduction in parental reports of anxiety, emotional problems and peer relationship difficulties.

- **Findings for the year 3 program:**
  - Significant increase in student’s emotional competence;
  - Significant decrease in students’ rating their perception of how difficult things have been for them; and
  - Significant reduction in parental reports on anxiety, Strengths and Difficulty - total difficulties and emotional problems.

---

1 Names underlined are indicative of the presenter
Positive Thinking Skills
The Positive Thinking Skills’ (for grade 4 -5) Teacher Resource has been revised to incorporate new research and information on developmental processes in middle childhood.

Advertising
A new updated flyer has been designed and was sent out to all the primary schools that were involved in the original dissemination across 2003 -2004 and to all the high schools involved in the evaluation across 2007-2008 (see Appendix C). For schools that had more than 10 students participating, a report was sent out to the principal comparing their students’ result with the whole sample (see Appendix D for sample report).

4 FINANCIAL REPORT

The audited financial statement will be forwarded at a later stage. Currently the Finance Department at Curtin University is experiencing a high volume of requests for statements due to the end of financial year.
5 Activity Reports

5.1 Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Train-the-Trainer

Title of Report: 12 Month Activity Report
Due Date: 25 July 2009
Organisation: Curtin University
Service type: 1.3.2.0.1
Service name: Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Train-the-Trainer
Service population:
Service area:

This report relates to activity undertaken during the period 01 July 2008 to 30 June 2009.
This report relates to the same service as presented in the 12 Month Financial Report.
The information presented is in line with the service activity definitions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Details</th>
<th>12 month period ending: 30 June 2009</th>
<th>Same period last year</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of service contacts</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours of service contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of consumers</td>
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</table>

I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge, information and belief that, the information provided above is a true and fair reflection of the organisation’s service activity during this period and has been provided in line with the terms and conditions of the Service Agreement with the Department of Health.

Senior Operations Manager

Chairperson

Signature: Signature:

Name: Clare Pollock Name: Clare Roberts

Date: Date:
5.2 Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Teacher Training

Title of Report: 12 Month Activity Report
Due Date: 25 July 2009
Organisation: Curtin University
Service type: 1.3.2.0.2
Service name: Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Teacher Training
Service population: 
Service area: 

This report relates to activity undertaken during the period 01 July 2008 to 30 June 2009. This report relates to the same service as presented in the 12 Month Financial Report. The information presented is in line with the service activity definitions.

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<th>Service Details</th>
<th>12 month period ending</th>
<th>Same period last year</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Hours of service contact</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Positive Thinking Skills – Student Booklet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Positive Thinking Skills – Parent Booklet</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Staffing Information</th>
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<th>Same period last year</th>
<th>Variance</th>
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I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge, information and belief that, the information provided above is a true and fair reflection of the organisation's service activity during this period and has been provided in line with the terms and conditions of the Service Agreement with the Department of Health.

Senior Operations Manager    Chairperson
Signature:                   Signature:
Name: Clare Pollock          Name: Clare Roberts
Date:                        Date:
5.3 Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Evaluation of Student Health

Title of Report: 12 Month Activity Report
Due Date: 25 July 2009
Organisation: Curtin University
Service type: 1.3.2.0.3
Service name: Mental Illness Prevention: Aussie Optimism; Evaluation of student health
Service population:
Service area:

This report relates to activity undertaken during the period 01 July 2008 to 30 June 2009.
This report relates to the same service as presented in the 12 Month Financial Report.
The information presented is in line with the service activity definitions.

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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Number of consumers</td>
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Materials produced (please list):

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<th>Variance</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Total FTE</td>
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<td>-0.389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge, information and belief that, the information provided above is a true and fair reflection of the organisation's service activity during this period and has been provided in line with the terms and conditions of the Service Agreement with the Department of Health.

Senior Operations Manager
Signature: Clare Pollock
Name: Clare Pollock
Date: 19

Chairperson
Signature: Clare Roberts
Name: Clare Roberts
Date:
Appendix A – Minutes from Trainer’s Meeting – February 2009

MINUTES OF THE AUSSIE OPTIMISM DISSEMINATION PROJECT

TRAINER’S MEETING

Friday 20th February, 2009
9.00am – 12.00pm

1. IN ATTENDANCE

Yvette Harrison, Alicia Wills, Sam Blackburn-Read, Christine Baker, Philippa Molloy, Linda Nicholson, Jon Attwell, Terry Andrews, John Ferguson, Jeanette Hulcup, Jenny Mair-Wieman, Fran Sagar, Rosie Rooney, Shari Hassan, Clare Roberts, Damian West and Margaret Ho.

APOLOGIES

Ruth Drake-Brockman & Jan Robinson

2. TEACHER TRAINING

Speaker: Damian West

- The total number of workshops for 2008 was 14 with 111 participants trained in *Social Life Skills* and 53 participants trained in *Optimistic Thinking Skills*.
  - The results from the training workshops revealed that in areas of self-efficacy and specific knowledge regarding each of the programs and general knowledge of mental health promotion all increased significantly post-workshop evaluation.
  - Workshop ratings show that 6% of the teachers trained rated the workshops as average, 47.2% rated them as good and 45.5% rated them as very good.

- At the end of 2008 questionnaires were sent to all participants who had received training that year. The questionnaire assesses whether teachers who have been trained in the program actually implement the program.
  - Fifty-three (33%) of the 161 workshop participants responded:
    - 34% (*n* = 18) of teachers trained had implemented at least one of the *Aussie Optimism* programs;
    - 28% (*n* = 15) had implemented *Social Life Skills*; and
    - 11% (*n* = 6) *Optimistic Thinking Skills*.
  - For those teachers (*n* = 35) who had not implemented the program in 2008 the reasons given included:
    - No time (23%, *n* = 8);
    - The teacher was not teaching upper primary school classes in that year (4%, *n* = 2);
    - The program did not address a school focus area (6%, *n* = 3);
    - Nineteen participants (54%) were not currently employed in a teaching position (this high number may reflect the fact that a high proportion of teachers had retired or moved to positions in administration or support roles).
number of student teachers and clinical masters’ students were trained in 2008);

- 1% said the program was not relevant to their study needs;
- 1% said it was too costly; and
- 1% said that they were not comfortable with the material.

- **COMMENT:** with regards to all the reasons listed above for why teachers were not able to or were unwilling to implement Aussie Optimism – coaching from the AOP trainer would have been useful. Especially in relation to feeling uncomfortable with the material and also helping them to define what the particular study needs are/areas of focus for the school.

- Results showed that more teachers implemented SLS vs OTS. However for those teachers who implemented the OTS program – it was rated quite highly in terms of success.
- Of those respondents who taught an *Aussie Optimism* program, 22% felt it fulfilled all of their goals, 61% felt it fulfilled most of their goals, 22% felt it fulfilled none of their goals.

- **COMMENT:** important for AOP trainers and school psychologists to help teachers articulate what their goals are prior to starting the program.

- It should be noted that because of the low response rate it is difficult to generalise these findings.

### 3. TRAIN-THE-TRAINER

**Speaker:** Margaret Ho

- One of Aussie Optimism’s main aims is to train education and community health workers in the implementation of prevention programs.
- Since 2007, there has been a focus on dissemination in rural and regional WA and the non-government school sector.
- In 2008, 50% (*n* = 3) of the trainers were from rural/regional DETs, 33% (*n* = 2) from Non-government schools psychological services.
- In 2009, looking to fill vacant metropolitan DETs and continue to expand to rural/regional DET, applications have been received for:
  - Swan
  - West coast
  - Geraldton
  - Albany
  - QLD – Catholic Education
  - QLD – Resilience & Disability Project
  - AOP – Current Positive thinking research coordinator
- TTT has been scheduled for 16th – 20th March.
  - We have also had a request from an international organisation (Brain Revolution; Singapore)

### 4. COMMENTS FROM TRAINERS IN ATTENDANCE

**Speaker:** All trainers in attendance
Specific comments in relation to challenges/victories thus far and plans for 2009:

- General concern over numbers attending workshops
  - Within certain metropolitan DETs – there is some over-saturation
  - Within country schools – difficult to obtain relief, travel is quite strenuous; resources are expensive and in some instances are bought but not used.
    - Different models may need to evolve around support and travel e.g. travelling to a “more” central school instead of running workshops at the DET office, going into the school and helping to run the program with the teacher (in-vivo) training to help build up confidence (this is currently happening in NSW).
- Concern over whether or not teachers are “volunteers” or “forced participants” as this can disrupt the dynamics of the group and how involved or enthusiastic the teachers are.
- Boddington SHS – feedback re: using AOP – modules are taking more than 1 hour to work through
  - Coaching would be of use here. Talking through with the teacher re: which activity is taking longer, brainstorming ideas on how to use time more effectively, running activities in small groups rather than as a whole class etc.
- Narrogin SHS – wanting to use chaplains to help with AOP and as a support for the teacher as well.
  - AOP is one of the “recommended” programs that Chaplains are encouraged to train in and implement.
  - Comment – Broome SHS is currently using this model whereby the Chaplain and the Kimberley AOP trainer run a class together with the students.
- Use of AOP in high schools
  - Hard to use in whole class setting unless it is explicitly placed in the timetable.
    - Suggestions: use with indicated groups – this has been successful or use all staff who have been trained to implement in their different subject areas.
    - Canning DET experience – train all year 8 and year 9 coordinators to use AOP in an extended form/ tutorial.
- Other comments/concerns
  - Coaching – difficult to provide coaching when unsure who is implementing
    - Comment – when a school orders resources – relevant DET trainer will be informed
  - Marketing – NGSPS – sends letter to schools re: social and emotional well-being and what programs are available.
    - Putting things in newsletters may also be helpful
    - Have a strategic plan at the district level
    - Use mental health maps
      - Help schools plan their goals
Comment – Kidsmatters provides a resource outlining different programs for use in schools: 

- Independents schools are requesting their own training
- As country DET schools are struggling with numbers for training – perhaps invite independent country schools to join.
- Kimberley DET – new PD re: Peer Support Australia: 
http://www.peersupport.edu.au/

- Comment – Margaret emailed University of Western Sydney re: evaluation of findings as website (link provided above) did not provide much information on research. I have a copy of the thesis if anybody is interested.
  - Results show that this program is effective for school connectedness and for transition – but it is not a program designed to prevent depression and/or anxiety. Still quite a new program (developed in 2004) and there do not appear to be any other evaluations of the program – but this could be ongoing (e.g. Aussie Optimism was evaluated on several occasions before results were released).
- Comment – there are a lot of programs out there – important to use programs that have been evaluated.
  - Training slides – new slides for discussing statistical evidence for Aussie Optimism – see attached, courtesy of NGSPS (appendix 1)
  - Teacher well-being slides – see attached (appendix 2)
    - Comment – may be of use when talking about the program to potential schools

5. Aussie Optimism and Teacher well-being

Speaker: Clare Roberts

- Clinical Masters’ student’s thesis looking at whether a mental health prevention program (Aussie Optimism Program) delivered by teachers, aimed at preventing anxiety and depression in children and adolescents, has any impact on the teachers’ job-related affective well-being. Two facets of teacher job-related well being were investigated in this study; job-related anxiety and job-related depression.
  - Results: teachers who had received training and coaching to implement the intervention reporting significantly lower levels of job-related anxiety and depression when compared to participants in the control group.

6. FEELING AND FRIENDS PROGRAM – UPDATE

Speaker: Margaret Ho & Rosie Rooney

- From the initial program which was developed to promote social competence in year 1 to 3 students – two programs were developed to meet the developmental age requirements. Subsequently a year 1 & 2 program was developed and a year 3 program was developed.
  - Both programs were trialled with at risk students in the Curtin Psychology clinic as part of 2 Clinical Masters’ students’ research.
    - Findings for the year 1 & 2 program
Significant reduction in parental perspective on anxiety, emotional problems and peer relationship difficulties.

Findings for the year 3 program
- Significant increase in student’s emotional competence.
- Significant decrease in students’ rating their perception of how difficult things have been for them
- Significant reduction in parental perspective on anxiety, total difficulties and emotional problems.

7. POSITIVE THINKING SKILLS – UPDATE

Speaker: Shari Hassan
- 42-month follow-up of students who received the program in 2004 (year 4)
  - Currently 190 students have completed the questionnaires, 96 DICAs completes and 7 students have completed the NHMRC assessment for suicide risk.
- For 2009 – students who were not found in 2008 or who did not complete a questionnaire will be tracked.
  - Schools will be asked to assist in locating students and packs will be re-sent home.

8. PLANS FOR 2009

Speaker: Margaret Ho, Clare Roberts and Rosie Rooney
- Conferences
  - Aussie Optimism has submitted 2 papers presentation at the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association conference – papers accepted. (see appendix 3 for abstracts. For more information visit: http://www.agca.com.au/
  - Aussie Optimism will also be submitting 2 papers to the Australian Association for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy – papers not yet submitted. For more information visit: http://www.aacbtwa.org.au/nationalconference
- QLD – Catholic ed senior education officer, student support and development will be attending train-the-trainer workshops in March
- Professional development for trainers
  - Trainers interested in attending professional development days relevant to mental health promotion/resilience but are not able to get funding – can ask for some financial assistance from AOP research team. Please call or email Clare or Margaret for more information.
- Healthway grant 2009 – this is to evaluate the revised version of Positive thinking skills both on a universal level as well as with at risk students.
Appendix B – Project Proposal

Title: The Prevention of Depressive Symptoms in Children in a Rural Setting

Student Name: Ana Lacey, Clinical Masters Trainee
Supervisors: Dr Clare Roberts and Dr Rosie Rooney
Associate Supervisor: Dr Bob Kane

Abstract

Participants will include children aged 8-9 years of age and their families, from the Merriwa District High School and Narrogin District High School, randomly assigned to the Positive Thinking Skills (PTS) program or waitlist control.

Expected outcomes:
- Compared to the control group, children attending the PTS program will report lower levels of depressive symptoms;
- Higher levels of social and emotional functioning;
- Lower levels of anxiety symptomatology.
Appendix C – Update Flyer

The Aussie Optimism Program is a comprehensive mental health promotion program for upper primary and lower secondary school. The program is linked to the Western Australian Curriculum Framework and other Department of Education and Training policies such as Students at Educational Risk. It is ideal for young adolescents who are making their transition to secondary school or are attending middle school.

What is Aussie Optimism?

The Aussie Optimism Program includes four components. There are three school-based components, Aussie Optimism: Positive Thinking Skills, Aussie Optimism: Social Life Skills and Aussie Optimism: Optimistic Thinking Skills. There is also a family-based component: Aussie Optimism: A Program for Parents and Families.

Extensive Research

The Aussie Optimism Programs have been evaluated extensively and are associated with:

- Increase in pro-social behaviour;
- Reduction in anxiety and depression;
- Higher self-esteem and social skills;
- Reductions in suicidal ideation; and
- Significant decreases in illicit drug use.

Recent Results

In 2008 the Aussie Optimism research team finished their 5th and final follow-up of the students who took part in the original dissemination project in 2003 – 2004. Whilst only 37% of the students and parents took part in the follow-up, results mirror the previous 2005 follow-up results with students who took part in the programs generally having less emotional difficulties and peer problems. Preliminary analyses also show lower rates of drinking and smoking.
18 February 2009

Dear Principal,

Thank you for allowing Aussie Optimism to continue their research into child resilience and emotional well-being.

In 2007-08 Aussie Optimism followed up several students at your school who had taken part in a widespread dissemination research project when they were in primary school in 2003 and 2004. This letter outlines the 2007-08 Year 10 assessment and makes comparisons with the 2005 Year 8 assessment. To enable comparisons, the student results represent average scores for students who completed the questionnaire on the two occasions. These results are for students from your school only. This 5th and final follow-up of students entering into grade 10 provides important information on adolescent students’ mental health and well-being.

Assessment Questionnaire

The results relate to responses on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completed by students (www.sdqinfo.com). This is a screening device used to measure children’s report of mental health problems, as well as their social strengths.

The individual scales measure symptoms of hyperactivity (“I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate”), emotional problems (“I worry a lot”; “I am often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful”), conduct problems (“I get very angry and often lose my temper”; “I usually do as I am told”), peer relationship problems (“I have one good friend or more”; “Other people my age generally like me”), plus a total difficulty score. On these scales, lower scores indicate fewer difficulties.

A pro-social behaviour scale is also included (“I try to be nice to other people, I care about their feelings”; “I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill”). On this scale, higher scores indicate more pro-social behaviour.
Results
The bar graph below shows average scores of the X College students for each scale at the end of Year 8 following the transition to high school, at the end of Year 10 and also in comparison with all the other students who took part in the 2007-08 follow-up.

Statistical analysis compared Year 8 and Year 10 average scores. There was a significant increase in pro-social behaviour for students from X College. Scores for the other subscales including the total difficulty score remained unchanged. Average scores for all scales were in the normal range at Year 10.

In comparison with the whole group sample (n=563), the X College students (n = 21) scored lower on all the subscales including the total difficulty score.

Concluding Comments
The assessment results show that from year 8 to year 10, students at X College reported no increases in emotional or behavioural problems and increased their pro-social skills. All areas of social and emotional functioning were within the normal range.

The Curriculum Council acknowledges the role of children’s interpersonal skills and self-management in the development of identity. In early adolescence and periods of transition young people are more focused on developing their own identity and therefore experiment with new and different styles of social interaction and self-management. This developmental period is therefore characterised by a general increase in difficulties.

This is the final assessment of the students who have been involved in the Aussie Optimism Dissemination Project. We would like to once again thank administrative staff, teachers, students and parents for their involvement in this project. Your ongoing involvement is testimony to your commitment to the mental health of young people.
We hope this information is useful to your school’s efforts to promote the social and emotional well-being of students. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Margaret Ho (Research Coordinator) on 9266 2757. You may also like to visit the Aussie Optimism website for more information:


Yours sincerely,

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