



Inquiry into Youth Suicide in NT Australia

Submission by Principals Australia - MindMatters

9/1/2011

mind matters
Leading mental health and wellbeing

We thank the Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the NT for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into Youth Suicides in the NT.

MindMatters is a national initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and implemented by Principals Australia Inc.

The MindMatters initiative was developed in recognition of the need to address the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Based on the World Health Organisation Global School Health initiative and the National Health Promoting Schools framework, MindMatters supports promotion, prevention and early intervention for schools.

MindMatters has been successfully attended by over 150 000 participants from education and health over the last 10 years.

MindMatters has been recognized as a leading initiative in secondary schools in Australia. MindMatters supports a whole school approach to the mental health of young people, including links to community agencies, support groups and promotes help seeking.

MindMatters' classroom resources promote self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

A component of the MindMatters resources has involved professional development for staff around self harm, suicide prevention and high risk taking behaviours.

Over the past eight years MindMatters has worked with Anangu Education Leaders from the Aboriginal Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Lands communities to adapt the MindMatters resources, making them culturally appropriate and Anangu friendly. The Community Development approaches and processes identified by Anangu education leaders, teachers, workers and community members, may help Government Departments and agencies currently delivering or intending to deliver services through the APY Lands Communities. The positioning of Anangu in identifying and leading delivery processes has resulted in high level local ownership.

No.	Term of Reference	Comments
b	<p>Programs and services targeted at Youth aged 17-25 years of age with particular emphasis on Suicide Prevention education and awareness in Schools;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and implemented by Principals Australia . Objectives include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed promotion, prevention and early intervention activities for mental health and wellbeing in Australian secondary schools. 2. Enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful. 3. Develop the social and emotional skills required to meet life’s challenges. 4. Help school communities create a climate of positive mental health and wellbeing. 5. Develop strategies to enable a continuum of support for students with additional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing. <p>Enable schools to better collaborate with families and the health sector.</p> • MindMatters uses a whole school approach to mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention based on the principles of the World Health Organization's Global School Health Initiative and the Australian National Health Promoting Schools Framework. • Schools are key settings for preventative work and educators, principals of schools and people who understand and work within or closely with schools are best placed to manage the implementation of mental health initiatives in these settings. • MindMatters has achieved considerable success in health promotion. Throughout the introduction of the MindMatters kit and resource materials the mental health literacy of young people, staff and community who have used the materials has been enhanced considerably. One success story is the work of <i>MindMatters Anangu Way</i> developed and led by Anangu Education Leaders from South Australian Aboriginal Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Lands communities. Refer to attachment <i>MindMatters Anangu Way, achievements to date</i>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have reported the stigma attached to talking about mental health and mental illness to have reduced. • Help seeking for young people has improved in schools that have used MindMatters for a whole school approach to health and wellbeing with overall improved health and wellbeing outcomes. • As part of MindMatters training workshops for teachers, a specific session has looked at suicide prevention in relation to the role of the school and the positive role that teachers and other adults can play in talking about the issue of suicide prevention in safe ways ie ways that do not harm. • MindMatters is the longest standing mental health initiative in the history of Australia for secondary school students and this sustainability has been largely due to the ability to work closely with the mental health sector by 'translating' clinical research and knowledge into processes and products that schools and communities find both appealing and relevant. <p>National MindMatters evaluations are available on the following link http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/about/evaluation/evaluation_landing.html</p>
c	<p>The role, responsibility, co-operative co-ordination and effectiveness in the response and policies of agencies such as Police, Emergency Departments and general Health Services(Government and non-Government) in assisting/ responding to young people at risk of suicide;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MindMatters whole school and community approach encourages schools to proactively build such links with their community agencies – before a critical incident occurs. An effective process of collaboration between schools, agencies and police can assist in better supporting individuals and the follow up of their health care. • MindMatters promotes and encourages referral pathways for schools and community agencies to support ongoing help seeking and care for students. • MindMatters provides tools for responding to critical incidents for schools to support varying degrees of risk

d	The role of targeted programs and services that address particular circumstances of high-risk groups, and identification of the strengths and weaknesses of existing suicide prevention responses;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MindMatters has a particular focus on students experiencing high support needs in mental health. Our 2 day professional development has been well attended by school counsellors, psychologists and student welfare staff. A database of resource programs that schools and agencies can access has been developed as a part of the MindMatters resource and is accessible online • MindMatters is also mindful that targeted programs should be used as a part of a universal role approach to mental health promotion for whole school populations. • Schools regularly access and use a range of support programs to meet the needs of all students especially those requiring extra support and assistance, including pathways to health agencies. • MindMatters promotes an Post-vention approach whereby follow up with individuals and groups can deter contagion factors
e	The adequacy and appropriateness of suicide prevention programs aimed at 17-25 year olds;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MindMatters maintains close links with the Life is for Living framework information as one avenue to keep latest research in this area up to date. • Providing students with the skills of understanding stress and coping, dealing with relationships, recognising warning signs, help seeking and developing resiliency are appropriate ways to address suicide prevention. • MindMatters works within a whole school community approach which means that health literacy is being developed in adults and well as young people. • In the APY Lands Anangu education leaders, teachers, workers and community members have been involved in adapting the MindMatters resources to be culturally appropriate and delivered by Anangu. This work is known as MindMatters Anangu Way and sits within the Keeping them Safe child protection framework. • The National suicide prevention strategy has been a driving force in the implementation and ongoing support of MindMatters as an intervention that is

		appropriate for secondary school aged young people. The partnership between health and education that has resulted is one that needs to be maintained.
f	The accuracy of suicide reporting in the NT, the factors that may impede accurate identification and recording of suicides and attempted suicide rates (and the consequences of any underreporting on understanding risk factors and provision of services to those at risk).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a number of factors which can impede accurate identification and recording of possible suicides in Australia. • MindMatters helps to provide classroom teachers and support staff with a mental health literacy to improve their understanding and capacity for supporting and identifying pathways for those students in the high risk area, with a focus on protective and risk factors. • MindMatters helps to create a greater awareness of the signs that may predict the onset of a mental health issue. • The MindMatters whole school and community partnership approach encourages schools to proactively build such links with their community agencies – before a critical incident occurs. An effective process of collaboration between schools, agencies and police can assist in better supporting individuals and the follow up of their health care. • MindMatters promotes and encourages referral pathways for schools and community agencies to support ongoing help seeking and care for students.

Attachment One

MindMatters Anangu Way, achievements to date.

Context

It is well documented that the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people falls below that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Vast amounts of funding have been targeted to close this gap. A positive way forward is to empower local Indigenous communities to take a leading role in determining what is needed for their young people to grow up strong and mentally healthy. MindMatters has worked respectfully with remote Aboriginal communities in SA since 2005 to do just this.

The approach used in South Australia has been so successful that it is now being used with three remote communities in NT. In 2010, traditional owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park allocated \$60,000 to MindMatters through their Uluru Rent Money Community Development Project, supporting Anangu leading of MindMatters over three years through Nyangatjatjara College annexes at Mutitjulu, Docker River and Imanpa annexes. This is the first time in history that rent monies have been used for education. Anangu Education Services leaders from SA are supporting this work by sharing stories, training sessions and resources of MindMatters/Keeping Safe work used in SA Anangu Schools.

Significant outcomes (achieved with limited resources and time)

- Anangu friendly processes, pedagogy and resources, supporting local leadership have been identified.
- Strong brand recognition and reputation of MindMatters with Anangu; MindMatters is seen as important work for community and schools
- MindMatters mental health resources and activities translated into language.
- Five MindMatters training sessions developed in partnership with Anangu and delivered, by them, to interested AEW's and Community members from across the SA Aboriginal District Lands Schools (APY Lands)
- Developing Senior Secondary curriculum units based on the materials
- Some AEWs have been confident and supported to take the work and lessons back to their schools.
- PYEC – have given official endorsement to continue sharing the materials developed so far.
- Formal agreement from Bob Lines, Regional Director Aboriginal District Lands Schools to incorporate this work into local Principal Network meetings
- Strategic planning meetings with Regional team (Martyn Burne – Principals Coordinator, Sandra Ken – Anangu Coordinator Support, Katrina Tjitayi – School Improvement Coordinator, Makinti Minitjukur – PYEC Director)
- Regional team involved in sharing their resources and experience with other remote communities across Australia

- Incorporating the MindMatters approach into new staff induction processes
- Making the MM and Anangu Education Services ways of working processes standard practice for agencies working with all schools on the Lands.
- Impetus for a whole school community approach to mental health using this MindMatters/Keeping Safe approach - schools /principals and Anangu coordinators register interest to be involved
- Rediscovery of language and words associated with mental health eg feelings.
- Implementation process and whole school outcomes occurring at a faster pace at Nyangatjatjara College due to the understanding and resources developed by Anangu Education Service Leaders.
- MindMatters activities being shared by Anangu across the 3 remote annexes of Nyangatjatjara College.
- Plans to establish a secondary annex in the Areyonga community as well as introducing MM to Areyonga and Lila
- Plans to establish a MindMatters student body from each of the 3 remote communities to share their work and needs directly with the College Board of Directors
- Anangu Researchers, supported by Sam Osborne, through Ninti One Limited, adapting the MM surveys in language and trialing their use with community.
- Charles Coffman, from WA Education Nyangatjatjara Lands, has expressed an interest in this work and potential to be involved.
- Enhanced feelings of pride in Anangu and across community due to acknowledgement by PA leadership that this work is significant (word of mouth is powerful, extensive and fast)

Issues

- Travel and accommodation are large costs, especially in early work with remote communities.
- Ongoing training through the workshop forums needs to be maintained so people (Indigenous and non Indigenous) can continue to learn the material, ways of presenting it, and what support is needed to make it sustainable.
- Bringing together schools involved in this work will facilitate sharing stories and celebrating Anangu leadership. Such acknowledgement is, in itself, health promoting not only for the Anangu sharing but for wider community pride.

Sustainability

1. Beginning phase – when a community is first understanding mental health and establishing local Aboriginal community interest and ownership. (The approach can be replicated for another group of beginning schools as the initial group moves into the establishing phase, requiring less support.)
2. Establishing phase – a community is taking the lead role in ongoing work with MindMatters. These groups may also be in a position to offer support to a beginning “buddy” school.
3. Embedding – community involvement is sustained internally with much less input from MindMatters

In the recent media

Article in The Advertiser Saturday 27th August 2011 *'Change comes slowly in land where time stands still'* affirms that MindMatters and PA are on the right track with this work. Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Minister Grace Portolesi comments *'It was often hard to accept the slow, steady pace of change on the Lands. You are dealing with generations of entrenched disadvantage, Governments have to embrace and need to understand the cultural issues that are absolutely an essential part of the successful service delivery. For there to be any success on the ground, anything we do has to be owned and driven by the local people. - resources and understandings about processes and methodologies that best suit Anangu to lead wellbeing'*.