

PEER SKILLS

In action!

© A UNITINGCARE COMMUNITY PROGRAM
www.peerskills.com.au



Peer Skills Testimonials

Connecting peers to help

"A young person 13 (let's call her Emma) came to the school counsellor for her own reasons but divulged to the counsellor that her close friend was always covered in bruises and had revealed that both her parents were physically abusing her. In her words they had "punched her, and held her by the throat against a wall." The counsellor discussed how important it was for her friend to receive help and explained what needed to happen next. The abuse was then discussed with the schools Guidance Counsellor and then to the Principal for reporting.

This example illustrates how young people know what's going on in their friends' lives and the important role they can play in identifying young people who need assistance. Helpful intervention can occur even earlier when we have young people trained in Peer Skills. The counsellor has encouraged this young person to attend the next Peer Skills Workshop as she is a young person that others are talking to. It's important that young people such as "Emma" feel confident to respond appropriately when their peers bring a range of issues to their attention. In addition, support staff can then provide the appropriate support and information to the peer supporter. This validates the important role they play in the lives of their peers and increases safety for all concerned."

(member of support staff)

Self-Harm and Getting Help

"This week I had one of our peer mentors and her friend tell me about another friend who has been self-harming. They were hesitant to share because their friend didn't want them to, but after Peer Skills they knew the right thing to do was to get some more help. The friend didn't like this idea at first, but a couple of days later thanked the girls because she saw that it was the best thing for her."

(member of support staff)

A young person increasing relationship skills and connecting with adults

"We are intending to run the program again this year to train up the Year 10's, probably in September. Could you please include us for access to those resources(15 booklets). I would love a hand with the facilitating if there are staff available. We had a tragic start to the Christmas holidays, one of our Peer Skillers was in a car crash and lost his mum in the accident. During the Peer Skills Workshop he decided to tell her of a time when he had lied to her when he was in Year 5. It was a minor thing but when I went to visit after the accident he said he was so pleased that he told his mum, he would never have done it but for Peer Skills and now he had no regrets. Powerful stuff. Add to that the impact of the floods, I think this is going to be a big year for Peer Skills. Thanks for everything, you are making a real difference."

(teacher at a country secondary school.)

Feeling safe at school and having someone to talk to

"Another morning out in the school I noticed a Year 9 boy who has been going through a rough patch deep in conversation with one of our Peer Mentors. The next day he was in my office, and I brought up the fact that they seemed to be having a really good talk. "Oh yeah", he said, "She's like my deep friend. I can talk to her about anything." I was pretty chuffed with that.

So thanks for coordinating this really important work :)" *(member of support staff)*



Helping
skills for life



www.peerskills.com.au

CASE STUDY

Nanango State School

Review by Kevin Robinson (Communication Participation Officer) Nanango State School

In 2012 it was suggested by the local Behaviour Support Teacher that the school participate in the Peer Skills program. After reading and considering the feasibility of such a program in a primary school setting, it was agreed that the plusses well outweighed the minuses; so four Teaching staff booked in to complete the two day facilitator training.

With the prospect of the 2013 year looming as the litmus test for Peer Skills, we got busy. We chose to have the students self-nominate for the role and followed an interview process that gave students the opportunity to be genuine and creative; for many it was the first time they had experienced an interview setting. They blew our minds with their sincerity and willingness to reveal their values and perceived strengths. This would be stretched further during the two day workshop.

The students of 2013 did not hold back in the workshop. They immersed themselves in the moment; conquering our fears not theirs. We laughed, we smiled, and we had quiet moments and loud moments. Feelings were shared; the atmosphere was positive, connected with learning and was electric. This was going to be a year filled with exciting reflections.

We discussed as a group what it would look like on the factory floor. The group would, support each other, would grow together in skill set and maintain approachability and commitment. We would meet every fortnight, cake would be supplied and the discussion would be based around the upload of support events and creative ways to express our brand, Peer Skills. Did I mention the cake?

Well, what a year. Students never let up in their integrity to support their peers. We had special moments of activities, such as a week of 'Pay it Forward'. Many of their peers received the types of supports that they needed. On numerous occasions student support resulted in agency support for whole families. The ground swell for the Peer Skill movement was creating more than a ripple; it was making a significant difference. The year 2013 had surpassed all expectations.

Data that can be summarized from the first year is as follows:

- Eight Year 7 students were trained as 'Peer Helpers'
- Approximately 173 events of support were recorded anecdotally
- 36 cases of low/medium risk reported. Support given by qualified adults, including the Class Teacher and or Guidance Officer
- Five cases of medium/high risk reported. Referred to Principal. Support given by qualified adult, including referral to Guidance Officer and or external agency.
- One high risk case reported. Referred to Principal and appropriate authorities.

2014 would prove to be a very different year for many reasons. This would be a year marking the last year of Grade 7 for State Primary Schools in Queensland.

This resulted in our school losing Year 6's and Year 7's. So it was decided that we would select students from both cohorts for the Peer Skills program. Would this work? Are Year 6's too young and could we as facilitators manage this project across four classes? Yes, yes and yes. We are pumped for the possibilities this year will bring. Rest assured, we have the students, the facilitators and we have the passion. 2014; just bring it on.

At the workshop we utilized a tool that had a significant impact on the students. We had put together a brief video of the previous year's Peer Helpers. They spoke about a number of aspects which they felt important from the project. Some spoke about the workshops, some spoke about their personal growth and some about the impact it had on other students. As the new Peer Helpers watched this production, it became obvious that they were inspired.

As 2013 was the pilot launch of the program, we held back on introducing too many bells and whistles. This year we have decided to ramp it up.

Students have a nominated class. Once a week the student participates in that class room, doing whatever activity can be used as a vehicle for building relationships. Students are involved in a variety of social programs that support social and emotional development in students who struggle with these features of their learning. Students are involved in 'Relay for Life'. They are in the process of promoting and actively engaging others in understanding the rationale of this project. This project also exposes the Peer Skills program to the broader community. Students are looking forward to organising and promoting 'Pay it Forward' week in Term 3. So you can see, this year will be an electrifyingly busy one. The students are prepped, the facilitators are excited and now it's just onwards and upwards.





www.peerskills.com.au

CASE STUDY

Mentor Program at Glenmore SHS, North Rockhampton 2014 **Review by Beverley Hewitt, School Based Youth Health Nurse**

Facilitators for Glenmore SHS, North Rockhampton, were trained in March 2012, and began conducting workshops in June 2012. The Peer Skills Mentor Program training was first delivered at GSHS during June 2012, with 16 Year 10 students (8 boys and 8 girls).

A second Peer Skills Mentor Program training was delivered during September of 2012, with 14 Year 9 students (3 boys and 11 girls).

After the 2011 floods, recovery funds assisted Peer Skills to significantly increase structures of support to the Rockhampton area. A need had been identified prior to the flood events.

The goal of establishing a Peer Mentor Support structure within our school was for the students to support peers within their own friendship groups and to act as peer mentors to the new Year 8's arriving in the school for 2013 and 2014, as well as mentoring the new Year 7's commencing in 2013 and again in 2014 at our "Pilot School for Year 7 in High Schools".

In 2013 a third Peer Skill Mentor Program training was delivered during August to 16 Year 9 students (8 boys and 8 girls), who were responsible at the end of 2013 during transition programs, and progressing throughout 2014, for the mentoring of the new Year 7 students in our school.

Meanwhile, the PSM's who mentored the new Year 7's in 2013 have continued to mentor these students as Year 8's in 2014.

Each group of PSM's worked with their focus level during the orientation activities at the end of the year and then at the commencement of school in the new school year, extending into term one. 2014 marks our second year of having Year 7 students in our school, and the Peer Mentors continue to play an integral part in providing support for these new junior students with "settling into" High School, as well as linking these new students to the daily activities of High School.

Year 11 PSM's visit Year 8 Roll Classes and Year 10 PSM's visit Year 7 Roll Classes each week on a rotating roster to provide familiarisation with the junior students whilst assisting the Roll Class teacher with reading notices, as well as injecting some fun appropriately into the beginning of the school day with a "fun fact" or suitable joke or riddle, and building awareness of school participation in sporting or community events. PSM's also assist during lunch-time activities to encourage students, who frequently spend time alone to join in and socialise.

During September 2013 there was a half-day "Refresher Workshop" for the first two groups who were trained in 2012. With post-workshop evaluation, we established an identified need for this "Refresher Workshop" to become a regular event each year for all trained Peer Skill Mentors.

The ongoing goal is for students to be utilising and reinforcing their mentoring skills, both with their designated focus levels (i.e. the Year 7 and Year 8 students each year) as well as with peers within the school community, as part of the whole-school-community emphasis on building a resilient school community.

During 2014 we have Peer Skill Mentors in Year 12, Year 11, and Year 10. Once training of the Year 9's of 2014 occurs, then there will be four year levels containing PSM's.

We have experienced the loss of four Peer Mentors from our school, and we celebrate the success of current Peer Mentors in their other achievements within and beyond our school community. From our very first group, three of our 2014 School Leaders emerged. There are Peer Mentor students who hold positions as Student Council members, Sport House Captains, and Leadership roles.



Michael Lowrey (2014 Vice-Captain), Alicia Broome (2014 School Captain), and Alex Western (2014 School Captain). These Year 12 students were in our very first Peer Skill Mentoring Program training in 2012. We are immensely proud of them! As top-of-the-school leaders and mentors and role-models, these young people are “living” the principles developed during their training and delivered during their roles as Peer Mentors.