



Recipient

Multiple Education Ministries

Grant Amount

\$670,000

Funding Period

2021 - 2024

Grant Overview

Phase one was focused on the research the mental health issues for teenage girls post COVID. Based on this research, development of a proactive program which is age appropriate to deal with increasing mental health issues. The information gathered in phase one led a second phase based on the recognition there is a significant need for every school to have an evidence based whole-school response to student wellbeing, rather than a specific program as initially proposed.



CASE STUDY: SCHOOL'S MENTAL HEALTH

Context and Need

The Mercy Partner schools recognise the importance of providing a holistic Catholic education to young women that nurtures learning in a way that is as multifaceted and dynamic as the students themselves. Emerging research indicates that the effects of COVID-19 are far-reaching for children and young peoples' social-emotional wellbeing, physical health, and academic progress. The development of a whole-school wellbeing framework is essential to meet the changing needs of this generation of students. In addition to reducing the escalation of unmet wellbeing needs, this project will improve the overall planning and allocation of resources and provide a robust framework for review and future enhancement.

The project has the potential to impact students at the six Mercy Partners' schools from Years 5-12 numbering approximately 5700 girls. In addition, the project will benefit approximately 500-600 teaching and support staff who need training in contemporary practices to support student wellbeing.

Activities and Implementation

The project has enabled the leadership teams across the Mercy Partner schools to be presented with the most up-to-date research in best practice in student mental health and wellbeing programs. A significant and positive outcome of the project to date has been the shared agreement of the Mercy Partner schools to develop a whole-school student wellbeing framework. Phase one was focused on the development of a program for all schools based on student wellbeing therefore most of the activity was around engagement with key stakeholders and subject matter experts.

Principals met each term, the project coordinator met in person with deputy principals to identify areas of strength, assess priority areas of development for the project to focus on, and generate actions. Pastoral Care Teams also met each term and expressed an intense need and interest in sharing ideas and resources, networking, and working together to develop good practices in the area of student wellbeing.

Phase II built on the work Phase I and expanded the focus to the whole of school community. At the end of Phase II schools had developed and implemented a tailored wellbeing program based on common, evidence based, principles developed throughout the project.

Learnings

- A significant strength of this project has been the shared long-term vision and investment that all Mercy Partner schools have towards creating sustainable change in the way schools respond to mental health and wellbeing issues.
- An important consideration for this project has been navigating how the project maps onto and complements each school's respective strategic plan and school structure.
- Schools that have invited the wider college leadership team to consultations have formed richer pictures of their school contexts through the combination of pastoral and academic perspectives.
- Ongoing collaboration and open communication will continue to be a key factor towards success.
- Due to the nature of the school day and unexpected issues arising, meeting attendance and the follow through of agreed-upon actions has occasionally been a barrier.

Outcomes and Impact

- St Rita's, St Ursula's, and St Patrick's Colleges have developed Student Wellbeing Frameworks for a 2024 rollout.
- SEL resources like surveys, audit tools, action templates, Student Return to School Plans, Safety Plans, and Individual Learning Plans, have been developed and shared with schools.
- Schools are running mental health initiatives in collaboration with mental health services. St. Rita's 2023 Mental Health Week involved 500+ students in positive mental health activities with Headspace's help. St. Patrick's Mental Health Week engaged 300+ students.
- 200+ staff received training in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) with highly positive feedback. Teachers self-reported increased understanding of the link between students' social-emotional experiences and learning/classroom behaviour.
- Schools reported earlier detection of student wellbeing issues and improved timeliness of school response.
- P&F committees strongly endorse SEL-based parent events, which are well-attended. At a recent event co-hosted by The Fathering Project, 100+ fathers participated in activities emphasising social skills, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, and self-regulation.