KidsMatter is a national primary school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue: the national depression initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, and the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council and supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.

Dr Brian Graetz

Senior Program Manager:

beyondblue: the national depression initiative
What is KidsMatter?

- The first national mental health initiative to be specifically developed for primary schools
- Developed in response to national concern about the mental health of children (particularly those at risk or experiencing problems)
- A collaboration between the health and education sectors
Prevalence of Mental Health Problems

Percent of Children (4 to 17 years) with Mental Health Problems in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Problem</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Non-Metropolitan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Withdrawn</td>
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<td>Social Problems</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
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<td>Total Problem</td>
<td>15.0</td>
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</table>

Child and Adolescent Component of National Survey of Mental Health & Wellbeing (Sawyer et al., 2000)
Why put a mental health initiative into primary schools?

- Mental health difficulties become evident in primary school years
- Early treatment leads to better outcomes
- Parents, families and teachers are the key influences in children’s development
Aims of KidsMatter

1. Improve student mental health and wellbeing

2. Reduce mental health difficulties among students (e.g., anxiety, depression and behavioural problems)

3. Increase support and assistance for students who are at risk or experiencing mental health difficulties
Some Clarification

**KidsMatter is not..**

- a prescribed program or sets of materials (one size does not fit all)

- An initiative where schools implement programs or strategies without guidance

**KidsMatter provides a framework for schools to address student mental health issues**

- Schools are guided through a seven-step process to address 4 key areas

- Schools identify strategies/resources/programs that best fit the needs of their community
The four components of KidsMatter

**Component 1:**
A positive school community

**Component 2:**
Social and emotional learning for students

**Component 3:**
Parenting education and support

**Component 4:**
Early intervention for students who are at risk of or experiencing mental health difficulties
Component 1: A positive school community

Key Objective: Develop a ‘sense of connectedness’ to school amongst students, staff & parents.

- Create a welcoming & friendly school environment
- Promote collaborative involvement (ie. shared views & decision making)

Important for schools to:
- Reach out to disengaged or vulnerable parents
Why is feeling connected to schools important?

- A sense of connection provides the platform for schools to address student mental health issues.

- Students who feel attached to their school are protected from a range of mental health difficulties.

- Students who are connected to their school are also more likely to achieve academic and learning goals.
Component 2: Social and emotional learning for students

Key Objective: Provide curriculum to develop students’ social & emotional skills

Five key domains:
- Self-awareness - recognising & managing emotions
- Social Awareness - feeling concern for others
- Responsible decision-making
- Relationship skills - establishing positive relationships
- Self-management - handling challenging situations effectively

Implementation of social & emotional curriculum

- weekly sessions
- curriculum to be developmentally appropriate
- has research evidence of effectiveness (or identified theoretical framework)
- taught formally (structured sessions that follow a program manual)
- coordinated & supported throughout the school
Component 3: Parenting education and support

Key Objective: Provide parents with information & facilitate access to programs and resources that will help them understand & manage their children’s needs, concerns & behaviours

Important that schools:

- foster positive parent-teacher relationships (staff to be supported through professional development)
- provide high quality information on child development & effective parenting practices
- provides opportunities for families to meet & also to make linkages with community support organisations
Component 4: Early intervention for children at risk or experiencing mental health problems

Key Objective: Schools provide or facilitate access to early intervention for students at risk or experiencing problems

- Staff PD on child mental health problems that includes:
  - how to identify students at risk or experiencing problems
  - how to respond to child & parents.
  - Knowledge of referral pathways

- School protocols for identifying & addressing the needs of students at risk or experiencing mental health difficulties (school staff need to have clear guidelines as to their roles & responsibilities)
Implementing KidsMatter in schools

- Each school establishes a KidsMatter Action Team
  - the school principal or deputy, a representative from welfare/wellbeing team (if the school has one) a classroom teacher, a parent and any other relevant school personnel

- All school staff are actively engaged in all stages of planning and implementation

- A 7-step problem-solving process provides the implementation framework for addressing each of the four KidsMatter components through developing an Action Plan

- KidsMatter Project Officers in each State support the schools
Support for KidsMatter schools

- KidsMatter Implementation Manual

- KidsMatter Programs Guide
  - Summarised information on school-based mental health programs
  - Will help schools make decisions about suitability of programs for their school

- KidsMatter website

- KidsMatter e-newsletter
KidsMatter Programs Guide

- Programs described under:
  - Aims
  - Target group
  - Program content and components
  - Evidence of effectiveness
  - Professional development requirements
  - Program costs
  - About the author(s)
National dissemination

- **Stage 1** (late 2006 to end 2008)
  - 100 + schools participate in initial evaluation

- **Stage 2** (late 2008)
  - Revised materials/resources made available to all primary schools in Australia
## KidsMatter Schools

### Distribution of schools

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<thead>
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<th>State</th>
<th>Metro</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Remote</th>
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<th>Non-Government</th>
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<td><strong>35</strong></td>
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Rural & Remote Schools

- Unique challenges to addressing student mental health needs (particularly when intervention required)
- Evaluation to look critically at success of KidsMatter in rural & remote communities
- What resources/supports are required? (project officer, e-newsletter and website; KidsMatter networks, COAG initiatives)
- Additional rural & remote schools likely to be included in initial KidsMatter trial