



# KIDSXPRESS

## School Partnership Program and Adopt-a-School Initiative

### **KIDSXPRESS**

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**Creating** a lifetime of change



# The Issue

Mental ill-health of infants and children is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time with life-long impacts for individuals, families and communities. It results in an enormous economic burden for Australia's health, education and social systems. Early intervention for child mental health concerns has been shown to be highly effective in reducing risks and costs, however access to quality psychological services for children and their families is poor across Australia.



## Statistics



The total cost of mental ill-health in Australia is estimated at \$50bn - \$60bn p.a.<sup>i</sup>



3 in 4 adult mental health conditions emerge by age 24 and half by age 14.<sup>iii</sup>



Children with mental health needs are 2.2 times more costly in terms of receipt of public services over their lifetime than those without a mental illness.<sup>ii</sup>



1 in 7 Aust. children are exposed to toxic levels of stress. Triggers of childhood stress such as domestic violence, divorce, bullying & developmental conditions contribute to 54% of Australian children exhibiting psychological distress.<sup>iv</sup>

## The impact of student mental ill-health

For some students, school is not just a place of learning and growth but also a refuge from abuse or a difficult home environment. Data suggests that an average class of 30 students has at least six children who've been exposed to at least three or more traumatic stressors in their lives, such as abuse, neglect, grief or loss.<sup>v</sup>

For some children, school is the only place in their lives where they know they are safe and can form trusted, enduring relationships. It is, therefore, a cruel irony that many students who are affected by trauma or mental ill-health also have trouble engaging at school. They may attend school with the best of intentions, hoping to form friendships, feel connected to their teachers, and succeed in their learning, yet they can find themselves defiant and disengaged - unable to learn and confused about why they can't relate and bond with others.

Few outside the sector know the extent of how symptoms resulting from trauma can directly impact a student's ability to learn. Behaviours such as jumpiness, intrusive thoughts, interrupted sleep, nightmares, anger, moodiness, and social withdrawal are all examples of related symptoms that can interfere with concentration and memory. Toxic stress during a child's early years can reduce their ability to focus, organise and process information. It also interferes with effective problem solving and/or planning. Psychologically, impacted children are vulnerable to anxiety and depression; behaviourally, they are prone to the extremes of withdrawal or challenging behaviours. None of these outcomes bodes well for school success. In fact, if left unsupported, by Year 9, students affected by trauma or mental illness may be up to 5 years behind students who do not have mental illness.<sup>vi</sup>

## Our work

KidsXpress was established in 2005 to address the lack of services available to support children living with the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Our Australian-first Expressive Therapy program combines the creative modalities of art, music, play and drama therapy to promote emotional growth and healing, while our trauma-focused education services help build the capacity of teachers and other child-welfare professionals to better recognise and respond to trauma-impacted children.

Since opening our doors 15 years ago, more than 3,000 children aged 4-12yrs have been supported through therapy delivery and forty-plus schools have partnered with us for our education services. This, combined with our extensive research and expertise in childhood trauma reparation and recovery has earned us the reputation as a leader in the field of childhood trauma and mental health. This is also evident through our accreditation as an Evidence Based Program from the federal government's Institute of Family Studies in 2015, recognising the measurement of outcomes and impact that are derived from attendance in our program. Our two core program arms are:

### Expressive Therapy

Delivered either at our Macquarie Park headquarters or onsite at our partner schools in the following settings:

- **Group Therapy:** Comprised of 4 to 6 children and facilitated by two therapists in 90-min sessions over 10 weeks.
- **Individual Therapy:** Children are supported in a 1:1 setting in 60 minute sessions. Program duration is assessed on a case by case basis and ranges from 10-20 weeks.
- **Dyad Therapy:** Combined caregiver/child therapeutic support delivered in 60-min sessions over a period of up to 20 weeks.

### School Partnership Program

Partnering schools enter into an intensive multi-year commitment with KidsXpress staff offering the following on-site, full-day programs:

Support for students:

- Individual Expressive Therapy
- Group Expressive Therapy

Support for teachers:

- One-on-one teacher support
- Classroom observation
- Parent/Carer Consultations
- Whole-staff professional learning
- School Wellbeing Support Team Assistance

“You didn't help just my children. We were ALL supported by KidsXpress. I felt like someone was holding my hand throughout the crisis. I had no family here in NSW when it all happened and KidsXpress became my family. By holding my hand, this allowed me to hold my children's hand... my children still use the creative coping tools they learnt through KidsXpress today”.

Mother of two former clients who'd been homeless following family violence

“So often in the past we've identified the needs of our students but there are limited resources in terms of what our school counsellor can do. So having the therapists at school where the children can access their services in a routine and predictable way as part of their school day, I think is a game changer.”

Louise Challis, Principal, Hampden Park PS



## Adopt a School Initiative

Much is expected of teachers to provide socio-emotional support to their students on top of an already crowded curriculum, however teachers are not mental health professionals, nor have they been shown how to recognise or respond to students impacted by trauma, toxic stress or mental ill-health. When a school partners with us via our School Partnership Program, they know that they don't have to bear the burden of student mental health alone.



### School Partnership Program Outcomes

The tailored support provided to schools in this program is evidence based and the first of its kind in Australia. Our highly skilled therapists and education consultants work alongside partner schools to create a transformative impact for the whole school community which results in:

- A positive and long lasting impact on the lives of children who've been affected by trauma by enhancing their psychosocial and emotional wellbeing
- A reduction in the personal and social burden of childhood trauma for educators and communities.
- A significant contribution to our education system and partner communities through the delivery of a tailored program that responds to specific community needs.
- Significant improvements in classroom behavior resulting in fewer suspensions & expulsions

KidsXpress currently partners with two schools who've been identified as having a large number of children with complex trauma and requiring additional support in addressing their needs. Whilst only in Year 2 of a Year 3 partnership, the success of the program has led to an increase in enquiries and Expressions of Interest from seven other schools in Greater Sydney - in just the past two months alone.

As KidsXpress does not receive any direct government funding, we are reliant on support from donors and philanthropists to help deliver our programs. Our 'Adopt a School' initiative was created in response to increased requests from schools to partner with us. The initiative aims to invite corporate, government and philanthropical organisations to adopt a Sydney primary school for a long-term commitment that will enable us to scale and support more vulnerable children and their caregivers.

### Investment

The cost of the School Partnership Program amounts to \$224,000 per year per school. These expenses are comprised of therapist and education consultant salaries and on-costs (our staff are based on site at each school over 3 full days), therapy materials and resources, professional development, clinical supervision for therapy staff and operational expenses such as insurances, IT infrastructure and administration costs.

'Adopt a School' partners are invited to contribute any amount they wish towards the program. For benchmarking purposes, a contribution of \$20,000 provides 72 hours of therapy over 18 weeks to four children who've been identified as requiring therapeutic intervention. \$40,000 would provide 144 hours of therapy to eight children and so on. In addition to the therapy sessions, this support would also provide classroom observation sessions, 1:1 meetings with the child's teacher plus multiple consultations with the child's parents or carers to discuss their progress and additional ways to support them beyond therapy.

All funding partners receive regular updates on the impact of their investment in addition to case studies of the children they're supporting. Major donors also have the opportunity to become actively involved in the school community they're supporting through site visits, event attendance, working bees, fundraising opportunities and more. (Note that guidelines and permission relating to visits from external visitors fluctuate during the current COVID-19 climate).

### Current Partner Schools

We are presently seeking funding support for Year 3 (2022 School Year) of our partnership with the two following schools:

#### BRADDOCK PUBLIC SCHOOL, CRANEBROOK PENRITH



- No. of students: 328 (Comprised of 180 boys & 148 girls)
- No. Teachers and other Staff: 25
- 29% of the student population identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

Most common referral reasons:

- Domestic Violence (50%)
- Other\* (25.4%)
- Abuse & Neglect (12.7%)
- Grief & Loss (7.9%)
- Anxiety & Depression (4%)

\*Other category is comprised of: parental substance abuse, family law court, bullying, bereavement, chronic illness, foster care, unemployment & parental separation

#### HAMPDEN PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL, LAKEMBA



- No. of students: 886 (Comprised of 457 boys & 429 girls)
- No. Teachers and other Staff: 59
- 99% of the student population is from a language background other than English
- 10% of the student population come from a refugee background

Most common referral reasons:

- Grief & Loss (63%)
- Domestic Violence (27%)
- Abuse & Neglect (6%)
- Other\* (4%)

\*Other category is comprised of parental mental ill-health, bullying and gender identity issues

### Future Schools

We have received formal Expressions of Interest (EOI) from three schools who are keen to partner with us from 2022 onwards. They are: Plumpton PS, Merrylands West PS & Crown PS. In the past three weeks alone, four additional schools in Sydney's Western & Inner Sydney region have also expressed interest in our School Partnership Program.



Watch this video to learn more about the Adopt a School Initiative.  
Active internet connection is required.



Watch this video to watch a testimonial from a partner principal.  
Active internet connection is required.

- Productivity Commission 2019, Mental Health, Draft Report, Canberra
- Stronger Communities Investment Unit (2018) Forecasting future Outcomes
- Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR & Walters EE (2005). Archives of General Psychiatry, 62, p 593.
- Department of Health, Canberra, 2015, D. Lawrence et al
- Olesen et al, Australian Children's exposure to parental & family adversities: Family Matters, 2010
- Goodsell et al 2017, Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Educational Outcomes



KidsXpress is a registered charity with DGR Status