Project ABILITY

Pilot Process Evaluation Report

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Abbreviations Used in this Report

DET	Department of Education and Training
FGC	Family Group Conference
QPS	Queensland Police Service
UQ	University of Queensland
YFSS	Youth and Family Support Service

Executive Summary

From October 2010 to May 2011, a pilot for Project ABILITY occurred across four schools (two primary and two secondary) in ▇▇▇ Policing District. This report – consisting of three parts – presents a process evaluation of the pilot, the results of which are intended to refine a larger Project ABILITY experimental field trial. Moreover, this report will assist DET in making an informed decision on the suitability and significance of progressing Project ABILITY from pilot into trial phase.

Part I: Project ABILITY Overview

Project ABILITY is a crime prevention initiative aiming to deliver a high quality, innovative, progressive and responsive intervention strategy to address truancy in a number of schools located in the ▇▇▇ Policing District (particularly ▇▇▇ Policing Division) which contains some of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Queensland. The project is led by the QPS in partnership with DET, Department of Communities (YFSS) and UQ and strongly aligns with the QPS Vision, Mission and Strategic Plans.

The Project ABILITY model involves collaboration amongst the key project partners and other governmental and non-governmental organisations, collectively known as the ABILITY Team. This multiagency ABILITY Team engage with students *and* their families to holistically address factors symptomatic and causally related to truancy. The evaluation of Project ABILITY via a randomised controlled trial will allow definitive conclusions to be made regarding the impact of the ABILITY model on truancy, antisocial behaviour and other individual, family, policing, school and community-level outcomes.

Part II: Project ABILITY Pilot Findings

This part of the report provides process-related and descriptive findings from the Project ABILITY pilot.

1. **Sample description (*n* = 9) and attrition:**
    - Pilot sample is slightly weighted towards females, yet relatively evenly distribution across cultural backgrounds
    - All pilot cases have had direct (e.g., street checks, cautions, charges) or indirect contact (e.g., emotional abuse or offences against them by carers) with police (total contacts for sample = 36)
    - The average number of unexplained absences across previous three school terms was 64.75 days (close to 50% of school days absent and unexplained)
    - Low attrition rate, indicating a feasible recruitment process and high interest in Project ABILITY

2. **Summary of issues underlying participating students' truancy:**
    - Multifaceted in nature, across individual, family, school and socioeconomic domains
    - Family-related issues were most frequently identified as underlying students' truancy (e.g., lack of home/family routine supportive of school attendance or educational engagement, substantial family disruption, responsible adults permitting absenteeism to persist)
    - Substance use/abuse, delinquent peers and violence in and around the community were also identified as issues underlying students' truancy

3. **Summary of strategies developed at FGCs to address truancy (included in Action Plans):**
    - Strategies range across individual, family, school and socioeconomic domains
    - At each FGC, a school representative clearly communicated the school's regulatory response to truancy (generally in line with DET policy and procedures and requirements of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 Qld*)
    - Strategies frequently devised at FGCs included referral to support agencies, development of a home/family routine supportive of school attendance, and designation of a school support person

4. **Overview of identified process issues and rectification strategies:**
    - General process issues and issues specific to phases in the ABILITY model were identified

- ▪ Process issues ranged from developing a viable and objective identification and sampling approach reflective of QPS and DET priorities; ensuring feasible processes are in place to ensure the larger trial sample is recruited and Engagement Group cases are progressed through the FGC component within funding/project timeframes; and ensuring those involved in Project ABILITY understand their roles/responsibilities (e.g., school staff and participating police officers)
- ▪ Sound rectification strategies are proposed for each identified process concern identified

Part III: **Positive Pilot Outcomes and Recommendations**

A number of positive outcomes arising from the ABILITY pilot are highlighted. These positive outcomes range from early signs of successful Action Plan implementation to positive feedback about the ABILITY model from families, school staff and practitioners (e.g., the partnership approach being an effective way to address truancy, its underlying issues and consequences).

As a result of the ABILITY pilot, various process rectification strategies have been proposed to ensure the ABILITY model is both feasible and sustainable for the purposes of implementing and evaluating a larger-scale Project ABILITY trial. The key recommendation drawn from this report is that the QPS, Department of Communities, DET and UQ ABILITY Teams transition Project ABILITY into a randomised field trial across five schools in ▮▮▮▮ Policing District (predominantly ▮▮▮▮ Policing Division). Only with a larger-scale trial will it be possible to examine the exact impact of the ABILITY model on truancy, antisocial behaviour and other individual, family, policing, school, and community-level domains in ▮▮▮▮ Policing District.

PART I: About Project ABILITY

1.1   Report Purpose

From October 2010 to May 2011, a pilot for Project ABILITY occurred across four schools (two primary and two secondary) in ██ Policing Division (██ Policing District). This report presents a process evaluation of the *pilot*, the results of which are intended to inform a larger Project ABILITY experimental field *trial*. The report is presented in three parts. The first part provides background to Project ABILITY including purpose, objectives and alignment with DET's core goal to lay strong educational foundations. The second part provides findings from the Project ABILITY pilot and the final part offers recommendations regarding the suitability of Project ABILITY for implementation and evaluation under randomised field trial conditions. This report will assist DET in making an informed decision on the suitability and significance of progressing Project ABILITY from a pilot into a trial.

1.2   Project ABILITY Background

The ██ Policing Division (██ Policing District) contains suburbs (e.g., ██████████████) that are considered some of the most disadvantaged urban communities in Queensland (ABS, SEIFA)[1]. Several social indicators demonstrate the disadvantaged nature of ██ Policing Division communities, including: low educational attainment and socioeconomic status, high rates of unemployment and adult/youth offending, high rates of child protection incidents, prevalence of substance abuse, and an overrepresentation of state housing.

From a **community safety** perspective, Queensland Police Service data indicates that of the six policing divisions forming ██ Policing District, ██ Policing Division:

- Has a disproportionally higher number of calls for service;
- Has a disproportionally higher number of burglary, property and drug related offences;
- Has a high number of young people involved in the criminal justice system; and
- Has a disproportionally higher number of reported domestic violence incidents, representing 42% of all domestic violence incidences in ██ District.

From an **educational** perspective, of the 11 schools within the ██ Policing Division:

- Nine fall below the average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for Australian schools[2];
- Six have 60 – 79% of their students in the bottom ICSEA quartile;
- Three have attendance rates below the Queensland average and the remainder are above the state average by only 1 – 3%;
- Four were rated as falling substantially below the Australian NAPLAN average across a number of literacy and numeracy domains tested; and
- Five are Low Socioeconomic National Partnership Schools.

Therefore, both families residing in these communities *and* the young people attending schools within the ██ Policing District (particularly ██ Division) are exposed to multiple risk factors which can significantly

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[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA).

[2] The ICSEA metric is published on the MySchool website and represents level of education advantage based on the following factors:
- Percentage of indigenous students
- Percentage of students speaking a Language Background Other than English
- Level of Remoteness/Accessibility
- Socio-Educational Advantage (based on parent occupation and education level)

affect their psychosocial wellbeing and development.

The Queensland Police Service is committed to providing a "*safe and secure place to live, visit and do business*" (QPS Vision Statement); delivering *"high quality, innovative, progressive and responsive policing services"* (QPS Mission Statement); and developing collaborative partnerships with government, non-government, private sector agencies, and the community to prevent crime, reduce antisocial behaviour and youth violence (QPS 2011 – 2015 Strategic Plan). To achieve these goals, police in the ████ Policing District are building community partnerships and establishing an integrated approach to resolving community problems by firstly ensuring community safety by preventing and/or reducing criminal and antisocial behaviour and, secondly, by proactively developing future generations in order to improve their wellbeing and life outcomes. In 2009, ████ Policing District formed a multiagency working group which has contributed to the development of several initiatives aimed at making positive changes in the District. One such initiative is Project ABILITY.

1.3   Project ABILITY Rationale

Project ABILITY is a police-led crime prevention initiative involving collaboration between dedicated government and non-government agencies to deliver a high quality, innovative, responsive, and holistic intervention strategy to address both truancy itself and the issues symptomatic and causally related to truancy.

Truancy is a major concern for schools in the ████ Policing District (particularly ████ Division) and has been recently highlighted in the media (Chilcott, 2011). For example, for one primary school located in the ████ Policing District, 257 of 299 students had at least one unexplained absence during 2009 (absences per student ranged from 1 – 102 days absent) and the total number of unexplained absences was 2,552[1]. For one secondary school in the ████ Policing Division, 870 of 1,123 students had at least one unexplained absence during 2009 (absences per student ranged from 1 – 97) and the total number of unexplained absences was 9,069.

Although all levels of truancy are of concern, students at the high end of the truancy spectrum will be included in the Project ABILITY trial (see Section 2.3 for further detail on the definition of truancy and identification of eligible cases). Limiting the pool of participants in this way is based on the assumption that these students and their families are at higher psychosocial risk for detrimental outcomes (e.g., antisocial behaviour, substance use/abuse etc) and more likely to require multiagency assistance.

Indeed, truancy is very much a multifaceted issue that for the purposes of Project ABILITY is conceptualised as both symptomatic of *and* causally related to a broad array of psychosocial risk factors and detrimental life outcomes. Appendix A provides a graphical representation of this conceptualisation. The figure, based on a large body of empirical research, illustrates that truancy coexists or is associated with several risk factors at the individual, family, school and economic levels of analysis. However, truancy can also perpetuate risk factors and set in motion direct and indirect trajectories towards a number of detrimental life outcomes[2].

Many of the psychosocial risks and detrimental life outcomes depicted in Appendix A impact on police resources (e.g., antisocial behaviour, criminality, domestic violence) and are analogous to the abovementioned social indicators present in the disadvantaged communities within the ████ Policing Division. Therefore, keeping young people engaged in education and attending school is a vital first step on

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[1] Complete 2010 data not available to the authors of this report. However, the overall attendance rates of schools in the ████ Policing Division have remained stable (verified by examination of MySchool website), which indicates that school attendance is not improving. Furthermore, the data from the ABILITY pilot project indicates that persistent truancy is a recurrent issue (see Part II of this report).

[2] Indirectly by virtue of its effects on educational attainment and perpetuation of psychosocial risk factors.

the road to reducing the multiple psychosocial risks both associated with truancy *and* characteristic of communities in ███ Policing District (particularly ███ Division). Moreover, the multifaceted nature of truancy requires that attempts to reduce its impact must consider the array of psychosocial risk factors associated with the emergence and persistence of truancy.

Based on the abovementioned rationale, the ***primary objective*** of Project ABILITY is to implement and evaluate a highly coordinated multiagency intervention that holistically targets truancy. This will be achieved through systematically addressing the range of issues underlying or associated with truancy. In the long-term, it is anticipated that this strategy will reduce truancy, antisocial behaviour, psychosocial risks and other detrimental life outcomes prolific in ███ Policing District (particularly ███ Division).

1.4   ABILITY Model and Evaluation Design

In light of the multifaceted nature of truancy and its impact on individuals, families, police, schools and communities, it is clear that an intervention to address truancy must be similarly multifaceted in nature. The Project ABILITY model that has been developed involves extensive collaboration and coordination amongst a number of organisations (see Section 1.4) to systematically address truancy in the ███ Policing District (particularly ███ Division). Collectively known as the ABILITY Team, these organisations will engage with students *and* their families to address, case-by-case, the predominant underlying factors identified as contributing to truancy.

In addition to input and collaboration with key project partners (see Section 1.5 below), the ABILITY model has also been informed by the innovative and evidence-based Third Party Policing approach (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2006). The Third Party Policing (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2005) approach arose out of extensive international field research around effective policing approaches and involves police partnering with third parties such as, government/non-governmental agencies, parents, schools and business owners and encouraging them to share the responsibility of crime control or prevention through the use of regulations and civil laws. Third Party Policing in the context of crime prevention entails police partnering with third parties to alter criminogenic factors that underlie the development or perpetuation of antisocial behaviour. For example, the Project ABILITY model aims to alleviate the risk factors associated with truancy, many of which have also been linked with antisocial behaviour, delinquency and/or criminality.

Third Party Policing has been found to be successful in controlling drug problems, violent crime, youth delinquency and many other areas of concern for police (see Mazerolle & Ransley, 2005). Moreover, evidence suggests that when police engage with citizens, organisations and the wider community in a collaborative, purposeful and procedurally just manner, perceptions of police legitimacy are significantly more likely (Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Berrien & Winship, 2002; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Mazerolle, Bennett, Eggins, Antrobus, Davis, & White, 2011; Sherman, 1998; Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Perceptions of police legitimacy are of paramount importance for police because of the supplementary benefits legitimacy promotes. For example, international and Australian research suggests police legitimacy fosters satisfaction with and confidence in the police (individually and organisationally); willingness of citizens to report crime; and willingness of the community to assist with the prevention and control of crime (e.g., see Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Mazerolle et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2008; Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Fagan, 2007). Therefore, Project ABILITY will be critical for both the advancement of the Third Party Policing crime prevention approach and enhancement of knowledge regarding innovative methods that police can implement to promote their legitimacy and address broad social issues impacting on their resources.

In order to determine if the ABILITY model can effectively impact truancy and other policing outcomes (e.g., antisocial behaviour, perceptions of police etc), the model will be evaluated via a randomised control trial design, which is considered the 'gold standard' in evaluation research. Students and their families will be randomly assigned (upon informed consent) to receive either the intensive ABILITY process (*Engagement Group*) or a resource package containing information on services in their area that they can self-initiate (*Resource Group*).

The key advantage of the evaluation design is that randomly assigning participants to treatment groups probabilistically creates two equivalent groups that differ systematically only in regards to the intervention they receive. Therefore, comparison of the Engagement and Resource Groups will allow the UQ Research Team to isolate and specify the effects of the ABILITY model on a range of outcomes.

For a more detailed description of the Project ABILITY trial protocol and the evaluation methodology, please refer to the *'Project ABILITY Process Document'* which is provided as a supplementary resource with this report.

1.5   Organisational Partners

The ABILITY Team is composed of four key project partners and any additional organisations (governmental and non-governmental) engaged by the key project partners to assist with project implementation. The four key project partners are:

1. Queensland Police Service (Project Leader)
2. Department of Communities (Youth and Family Support Service, YFSS)
3. The University of Queensland (Institute for Social Science Research, UQ ISSR)
4. Department of Education and Training[1]
      ▪ Secondary School 1
      ▪ Secondary School 2
      ▪ Primary School 1
      ▪ Primary School 2
      ▪ Other DET personnel (e.g., Senior Guidance Officers, members of the Strategic Policy and Research Division)

Project ABILITY has been developed via extensive consultation and collaboration amongst these four key project partners who have been – and will continue to be – integral to the execution and evaluation of Project ABILITY. All key partners have secured and invested considerable funds, in-kind support and/or other resources into the development of the ABILITY model (see Section 1.3), the ABILITY pilot and the anticipated larger-scale trial.

A number of other organisations (governmental and non-governmental) have been engaged during the development of Project ABILITY and the ABILITY pilot. As a by-product of the ABILITY model (see *'Project ABILITY Process Document'*), additional organisations will continue to be engaged, consulted and included in the execution of the Project ABILITY trial. These additional industry partners include:

      ▪ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Youth At Risk Network (YARN)
           - Youth Justice (Department of Communities)
           - Child Safety (Department of Communities)
           - YFSS (Department of Communities)
           - ▮▮▮ Health Service and ▮▮ Aboriginal Health Service (Queensland Health)
           - Department of Education and Training
           - ▮▮▮ District Child Protection Investigation Unit
      ▪ ▮▮ Youth Service
      ▪ Referral for Active Intervention (RAI) Service

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[1] Please note, a fifth school (Secondary School 3) will be participating in the Project ABILITY trial (see Section 2.4.4).

PART II: About the Project ABILITY Pilot

2.1   Purpose of the ABILITY Pilot

The purpose of the ABILITY pilot was to examine the feasibility of the ABILITY model and refine operational processes prior to execution and evaluation of the larger-scale Project ABILITY trial. The aim was to recruit a small sample across the four pilot schools (n = 12, three from each school) and progress each case through the Engagement Group process. Particular focus was placed on the components requiring substantial coordination of resources across different sectors (i.e., identification of cases, recruitment, preparation and facilitation of FGCs).

Due to the small sample size of the pilot and its particular focus on selected components of the ABILITY model, valid conclusions can only be drawn about processes within the ABILITY model rather than the overall impact of the ABILITY model on specific outcomes (e.g., truancy). Accordingly, the pilot evaluation centres on two areas. First, *descriptive* data for the components of the ABILITY model that were the focus of the pilot: recruitment and Family Group Conferences (FGCs). And second, identified process concerns and rectification strategies to facilitate execution of the larger-scale Project ABILITY trial.

2.2   Pilot Sample Description

Upon approval of the pilot by DET in early October 2010, the QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams began the process of recruiting pilot cases by holding meetings with the four ABILITY pilot schools to identify eligible cases (please see Appendix B for a description of the pilot recruitment process). The first group of eligible cases was identified on the 19th of October and the last on the 17th December 2010.

Table 1 below displays descriptive statistics for the ABILITY pilot sample (see Appendix C for an equivalent table detailing all identified cases). The pilot sample is slightly weighted towards females; however cultural identification categories are somewhat evenly distributed. The age of primary school participants ranges from 10 – 12 years and the secondary school participants from 14 – 15 years (predominantly Grade 10).

Of particular interest is the mean number of unexplained absences and level of police involvement for pilot cases. In relation to unexplained absences, the mean number of unexplained absences across all four schools was 64.75 days, with a raw frequency ranging between 30 – 90 days. This indicates that the students in the ABILITY pilot (on average) did not attend school for 44.05% of the first three school terms of 2010[1].

In relation to police involvement, Table 2 below displays the QPrime data for each student participating in the pilot[2]. Of note is that all 9 pilot cases have had some level of contact with the police. Six of the 9 pilot cases (66.7%) have come into direct contact with police in the form of street checks, cautions or official charges for offences. The three remaining students have had indirect contact with police via emotional abuse and offences against children recorded for their responsible adults. Therefore, students with high rates of truancy in ███ Policing District have directly and indirectly come to the attention of police and thereby impact on police resources.

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[1] There were 147 school days in the first three terms of 2010 (verified by examining the 2010 DET official school calendar).

[2] Data for students' immediate family members are not reported here. However, the evaluation of the Project ABILITY trial will involve examination and statistical analyses of QPrime data for both students and their immediate family members participating in the trial.

Table 1   ABILITY Pilot Sample Description (*n* = 9)

Descriptive Statistic		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TOTAL
		School 1	School 2	School 1	School 2	
Unexplained Absences (*first 3 terms of 2010*)	Mean (days)	65.67	64	61.33	68	**64.75**
	Range (days)	52 – 77	64	30 – 90	65 – 71	
Grade (*2010 school year*)	Grade 5	1	1	-	-	**2**
	Grade 6	1	0	-	-	**1**
	Grade 7	1	0	-	-	**1**
	Grade 9	-	-	0	1	**1**
	Grade 10	-	-	3	1	**4**
Age	Mean (years)	11	11	15	14.5	**12.88**
	Range (years)	10 – 12	11	15	14 – 15	
Gender (*frequency*)	Male	2	0	1	0	**3**
	Female	1	1	2	2	**6**
Cultural Identification (*frequency*)	Caucasian Australian	2	0	0	0	**2**
	Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander	1	1	0	2	**2**
	Maori	0	0	2	0	**2**
	Tongan	0	0	1	0	**1**

Table 2   QPrime Data for ABILITY Pilot Sample (*n* = 9)

Case	Age	Gender	Street Checks	Cautions	Criminal Charges	Emotional Abuse Against Child	Offences Against Child	TOTAL CONTACTS WITH POLICE
1	11	F	0	0	0	4	4	**8**
2	15	F	5	1[a]	2[b]	0	0	**8**
3	10	F	0	0	0	4	1	**5**
4	12	M	0	0	0	4	1	**5**
5	15	M	4	0	1[c]	0	0	**5**
6	15	F	2	0	0	0	0	**2**
7	13	M	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
8	15	F	0	1[d]	0	0	0	**1**
9	15	F	1	0	0	0	0	**1**
		TOTAL	13	2	3	12	6	**36**

[a] Unauthorised dealing with shop good (shop lifting)
[b] Unlawful use of motor vehicle (x2)
[c] Accessory after the fact to crime
[d] Unlawful taking away of goods

2.3   Identification of Eligible Cases

In the subsections below, the two key issues that arose during this phase of the pilot are discussed: the definition of truancy and development of a sound identification and sampling procedure for the larger-scale trial.

2.3.1   Definition of Truancy

At the outset of the pilot it was clear that the definition of truancy differed between primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools identified that their definition of truancy included unexplained absences from classes, in addition to whole and fractional days absent without legitimate explanation. However, schools

indicated that documentation of class absences was not always consistent or uniform throughout the school. This presented a dilemma for developing a consistent definition of truancy across all ABILITY schools which ultimately determines students' eligibility for Project ABILITY.

→ **Rectification Strategy:** Truancy has been defined as ≥15% of school days absent and unexplained across the previous three school terms, as recorded in the schools' Student Management System (SMS)[1].

2.3.2   Process for Identifying Eligible Cases

Identification of eligible cases for Project ABILITY has been a complex issue with multiple considerations. First, the Project ABILITY evaluation requires an unbiased and systematic sampling approach so that the overall sample is representative of the entire population of truants and the potential for confounds is reduced (i.e., school, order or practice effects). Second, congruence between priorities of key partners – QPS and DET – must be reflected in the identification process (i.e., inclusion of truanting students *and* truanting students who have had contact with police). Third, the identification process should ideally minimise resource strain of both QPS personnel involved in Project ABILITY and school staff who are participating in Project ABILITY in addition to their normal duties[2]. Fourth, individuals' identifiable information must remain secure.

→ **Rectification Strategy:** A systematic and unbiased identification and sampling approach has been proposed by the QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams (see Appendix D) which will fulfil the four considerations outlined above. The identification and sampling approach involves merging truancy and police contact data, ranking identified students and implementing a stratified random sampling procedure. Prior to submission of this report, the UQ ABILITY Team received 'in principle agreement' from the director of DET Strategic Policy and Research Division for this identification approach. Upon final approval from both DET and QPS, the QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams will liaise with participating schools to gain their support for this identification and sampling approach.

2.4   Recruitment and Attrition

The following section first examines the rate of attrition during the ABILITY pilot. Following this is an examination of two issues that arose during this phase of the pilot: difficulties initiating and maintaining contact with families and ensuring an adequate sample can be recruited and progress within project timelines.

2.4.1   Recruitment and Attrition

Table 3 provides a summary of case attrition during the ABILITY pilot. A total of 25 cases were identified from the student lists compiled by the schools and contact was attempted by the school for 21 of these cases.

Of the cases contacted by school staff, 17 responsible adults provided provisional consent for their contact details to be given to the ABILITY Team (QPS only) so that the ABILITY Team could contact them and provide more information about Project ABILITY. The high number of provisional consents (81%) obtained by the schools highlights both the skill of school staff in engaging with responsible adults and also responsible adults' interest in learning about possible strategies for addressing attendance issues.

From the pool of 17 provisional consents:

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[1] Fractional unexplained absences (i.e., late arrivals and early departures) will be counted as 0.5 of a school day. If the trial begins in Term 3 of 2011, this would equate to 22 full day unexplained absences.

[2] It was identified during the pilot that not all schools had the resources or necessary technical skills to navigate SMS to gather data in the format required (i.e., ranked, certain date ranges for absences, certain ages and grades excluded etc).

- Four cases were found to be ineligible before a face-to-face recruitment meeting was scheduled;
- One case was scheduled for a first face-to-face recruitment meeting, yet did not present and could not be contacted to reschedule; and
- 12 cases progressed through initial face-to-face recruitment meetings.

Of the 12 eligible cases for which the QPS Recruitment Team conducted face-to-face recruitment meetings, a total of nine students and their families agreed to participate in the ABILITY pilot by providing written informed consent. Of note is that *only three* cases declined the invitation to participate in the ABILITY pilot after a face-to-face recruitment meeting. Achieving such a low attrition rate in applied research settings is quite rare and is a credit to the effective engagement skills of the QPS Recruitment Team.

Overall, the attrition data illustrates that cases did not proceed from the point of school contact onwards due to eligibility issues or inability to make contact with responsible adults. Cases were *not* lost due to a lack of interest in the project.

Therefore, the attrition data indicates that:

1. The current recruitment process is satisfactory;
2. Both school and QPS staff possess the skills to effectively engage participants; and
3. There is high interest in the project.

These factors combined will enable the ABILITY Team to engage and recruit a larger pool of participants during the Project ABILITY trial.

2.4.2   Difficulties Initiating and Maintaining Contact with Families

Difficulties initiating and maintaining contact with families has not only been identified by school staff seeking provisional consent, but also noted by YFSS facilitators preparing the FGCs and the AEO during recruitment and follow-up with families (particularly inability to contact responsible adults). A number of communication barriers were identified, including: incorrect contact details, responsible adults not contactable during work hours, high family transience, avoiding contact with school staff, floods and school holidays.

→ **Rectification Strategy:** Although difficult to address some of the barriers to communication, a number of strategies were developed during the pilot aimed at alleviating resource strain around contact with families. For example, seeking assistance from alternative DET personnel who had built a rapport with the family (e.g., indigenous guidance counsellor previously employed at the school) and setting specific limits around the number of contacts made before a case is no longer considered eligible (for more detail, see *'Project ABILITY Process Document'*).

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Table 3   ABILITY Pilot Attrition

Point in Recruitment Process	PRIMARY			SECONDARY			GRAND TOTAL
	Sch 1	Sch 2	Total	Sch 1	Sch 2	Total	
Eligible Cases Identified	4	11	15	3	7	10	25
Cases Contacted by School	3	8	11	3	7	10	21
Provisional Consent Obtained	3	7	10	3	4	7	17
Face-to-Face Recruitment Meeting (QPS)	3	4	7	3	2	5	12
Informed Consent Obtained by QPS	3	1	4	3	2	5	9
Withdrawals Post Informed Consent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number of Recruited Cases		**4**			**5**		**9**

- 3 cases = not contacted by school as total number of provisional consents requested had already been obtained.
- 1 case = no longer enrolled at school in 2011

- 3 cases = responsible adult could not be reached by school
- 1 case = student enrolled in a 'get-set-for-work' program with BoysTown

- 2 cases = legitimate health issues underlying absences[1]
- 1 case = family relocated and student enrolled in TAFE
- 1 case = older sibling already recruited through another school
- 1 case = responsible adults did not present at scheduled recruitment meeting could not be contacted by QPS to reschedule did could not be contacted to confirm

- 3 cases = one or both necessary individuals (i.e., young person and responsible adult did not provide informed consent).

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[1] Although it would be ideal for school staff to be aware of students' circumstances and/or be able to clarify full case eligibility so that ineligible cases could be ruled out before progressing to QPS, this would be unrealistic. For example, school staff may not have been aware that one of their students would soon be relocating to another area. Moreover, requiring school staff to ask responsible adults a series of questions to determine their eligibility would be onerous in light of the additional resources committed by schools participating in Project ABILITY.

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2.4.3   Ensuring the Sample is Recruited and Progressed Within Project Timeframes

The ABILITY pilot has demonstrated that unexpected and uncontrollable events can arise that impinge on project timelines (e.g., school holidays, difficulty contacting participants, floods, staff changes, difficulty scheduling QPS officers to recruit). In relation to the trial, YFSS has funding for 12-months to support execution of the FGC component in the ABILITY model. It is anticipated that the entire 12-months of funding will be required to ensure all Engagement Group cases progress through a professionally prepared and facilitated FGC. Therefore, substantial consideration has been given to whether the required sample size (n = 100) is both viable and achievable within a 12-month period.

The pilot has provided an opportunity to gauge the case capacity of schools, QPS and YFSS. As a result, a realistic case flow has been developed which should enable YFSS to progress all Engagement Group cases through the FGC component of the ABILITY model. Moreover, the addition of a fifth school (see below) will ensure there are sufficient cases to recruit.

→ **Rectification Strategies:**

a. **YFSS Case Load.** The YFSS ABILITY Team has committed to a caseload of 7 – 10 cases (full capacity will depend on case complexity) with a 6 – 8 week FGC turnaround. Provided this is realised in practice, 50 Engagement Group cases should be progressed by YFSS over a 12 month period for which YFSS has funding. In terms of recruiting the overall sample of 100 cases, YFSS's relatively high case load means that schools and QPS can concurrently recruit more than one case at a time because – probabilistically speaking – only half of all cases will be assigned to the Engagement Group.

b. **Pool of QPS Officers.** The QPS ABILITY Team has enlisted a pool of officers to assist the AEO with recruitment, which will minimise recruitment time days. During follow-up meetings with schools, it has been recommended that ABILITY schools do the same to minimise resource strain during the Project ABILITY trial.

c. **Identification and Sampling Process.** The identification and sampling process developed for the Project ABILITY trial (see Appendix D) evenly distributes the provisional consent process and school case involvement across the five ABILITY schools. Consequently, delays resulting from individual school resource capacity should be minimised because each school will only have a small number of active cases at any one time.

d. **Inclusion of Secondary School 3.** During the pilot phase, the possibility of including Secondary School 3 in the Project ABILITY trial was raised and Secondary School 3's principal has shown interest in participating in the trial. As the school resides in ▆▆▆ Policing District and their attendance rate is quite low (85%), the ABILITY Team feels that inclusion of Secondary School 3 would be suitable. Importantly, inclusion of Secondary School 3 will be beneficial by providing an additional pool of students to assist with attaining the Project ABILITY sample.

Prior to submission of this report, the ABILITY Team received 'in principle agreement' from the director of DET Strategic Policy and Research Division to include Secondary School 3 in the Project ABILITY trial without progressing the school through a pilot phase[1]. Upon trial approval, the Project ABILITY Team will work closely with Secondary School 3 principal (and any relevant school staff) to ensure that the school is fully informed and prepared for their integration into Project ABILITY without disadvantage before the trial launch.

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[1] The nature of the Project ABILITY evaluation design requires that the trial is launched simultaneously across all schools. If Secondary School 3 were to undergo a pilot phase in a similar manner to the other ABILITY schools, the Project ABILITY trail would be delayed. As noted in Section 2.2.4 of this report, delaying the trial would be detrimental to the overall project. In addition, it is unlikely that a pilot study with Secondary School 3 would uncover any additional process issues not already identified and addressed in this report.

2.5   Family Group Conferences, Action Plans and Follow-Up

The first subsection below summarises the issues identified as contributing to truancy during the FGC component of the ABILITY model. This section is followed by an examination of two issues that arose during this phase of the pilot: development of a streamlined FGC process and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of FGC attendees. The final two sections describe the strategies included in the pilot families' Action Plans and descriptive outcomes drawn from initial follow-up with students, families and practitioners included in Action Plans.

2.5.1   Family Group Conferences and Issues Underlying Truancy

Of the nine pilot students and their families who have been referred to Youth and Family Support Service (YFSS), eight have participated in a Family Group Conference (FGC) and one student and her family are currently in the final stages of preparation for their FGC. Table 4 provides a summary of underlying issues contributing to pilot participants' truancy as identified during the preparation of the FGC and the number of cases for which the issue was identified. Consistent with the conceptualisation of truancy in Section 1.2.2 of this report, truancy appears to be associated with an array of psychosocial risk factors at the individual, family, school, and economic levels of analysis.

Table 4   **Summary of Issues Contributing to Truancy in the ABILITY Pilot**

Level of Analysis	Underlying Issues	Number of Pilot Cases
Individual	▪ Difficulty understanding curriculum or completing assignments/homework	5
	▪ Mental health concerns[1]	3
	▪ Student too tired to attend school or stay engaged during the school day	3
	▪ Substance use/misuse (e.g., smoking, Marijuana)	2
	▪ Delinquent peer influence (friends truanting)	1
Family	▪ Substantial family disruption[2]	5
	▪ Responsible adult(s) indicating they were not aware of absences (or their extent) and so unable to monitor school attendance	4
	▪ Responsible adult(s) allowing continued absences from school	4
	▪ Lack of established routine to assist student in attending school which is monitored by responsible adults[3]	3
	▪ High family responsibility impacting on ability to attend school[4]	2
School	▪ Student feeling targeted by school staff	3
	▪ Difficulty understanding concepts, particularly when teachers have an accent and speak English as a second language	2
	▪ School administration staff being rude to students signing in late, so student either does not sign in when arriving late or does not go to school	2
	▪ Bullying, harassment and/or violence towards student	2
	▪ Violence in the community extending into school grounds	2
Economic	▪ Lack of affordable and/or reliable transport to and from school	4
	▪ Financial difficulties regarding school uniforms, school fees and educational resources (e.g., textbooks etc)	4
	▪ Lack of affordable accommodation in proximity to school	3
	▪ Lack of resources to complete assignments outside of school hours (e.g., computer, printer, internet facilities)	1

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[1] Examples include: grieving due to multiple family suicides; fear and/or anxiety; managing anger; and depression.

[2] Examples include: attempted suicide of parent; breakdown of parent's relationship; mental health of responsible adult(s); substance abuse issues; and domestic violence concerns

[3] Examples include: appropriate bedtimes; consistent morning routine; diet; and responsible adult(s) absent before/after school.

[4] Examples include: caring for younger siblings and assisting parent with household tasks.

2.5.2   Developing a Streamlined Family Group Conference Process

The FGC component is a significant strength of the ABILITY model because it allows for an innovative approach to collaboratively addressing issues underlying truancy with students and their families. The preparation and facilitation of FGCs requires a high degree of skill, organisation and sufficient preparation with all individuals invited. Four issues regarding the FGC component have been highlighted during the ABILITY pilot:

- Difficulty arranging time with those invited to FGCs for the purposes of preparation.
- Varied levels of understanding about roles and responsibilities during and after the FGC.
- The length of conferences and the ability of school staff and/or practitioners to commit in addition to their normal duties.
- School staff indicating that lack of knowledge about the student makes participating in the FGC challenging.

→ **Rectification Strategies:** The requirement to meet with the YFSS facilitator before an FGC has been clearly outlined in each of the respective information packages and will be clearly explained to all those involved. YFSS have also found it beneficial to send out a collective email to practitioners (including school staff) invited to FGCs which highlights the importance of gaining their commitment to the process.

In relation to the second and fourth point above, the QPS, UQ and YFSS ABILITY Teams have developed a comprehensive checklist for FGC preparation to ensure all individuals invited to FGCs are receiving complete and consistent information about their participation in the FGCs (see Appendix 23 of the *'Project ABILITY Process Document'*) and the student/family. Additionally, schools will be encouraged to nominate staff members who have a pre-existing relationship with the student and/or family to attend FGCs during the pre-trial training session (see Section 2.3.4).

Finally, QPS, YFSS and UQ ABILITY Teams have implemented strategies to ensure, wherever possible, that FGCs do not extend two hours in length. For example, ensuring only the very critical direct issues impacting the participating student's attendance at school are addressed. It is also anticipated that as the trial proceeds, the FGC process will become more streamlined as YFSS facilitators continue to develop their FGC skills.

2.5.3   Ensuring Safety and Wellbeing of FGC Attendees

The safety and wellbeing of participants is considered paramount by the entire ABILITY Team. During the pilot, one FGC for a particularly complex family called for specification of explicit minimum requirements that must be observed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all conference attendees. These minimum requirements were developed in direct consultation with the specific school and practitioners who had attended this specific FGC.

→ **Rectification Strategies:** First, the police officer attending the FGC must be present at all times and ensure the safety of attendees during the conference and in transit to their cars. Second, *any* individual who has not been prepared by the YFSS facilitator and provided informed consent to participate will not be permitted to attend the conference[1].

Third, all individuals invited to an FGC will be advised of behavioural expectations during conference preparation. Specifically, all FGC attendees will be encouraged to treat all those present at the FGC with dignity and respect and will be informed that aggressive behaviour or arriving at the FGC under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol will not be tolerated. Fourth, the ABILITY Team will briefly follow-up with FGC attendees to debrief and/or check wellbeing after the conference.

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[1] Should an individual express an interest in participating in an FGC on the date of the conference, the conference can either (1) be postponed so that the individual can be appropriately prepared to attend; or (2) continue without their presence.

2.5.4   Strategies Included in Action Plans

Table 5 presents the types of strategies included in the Action Plans developed by families (in collaboration with practitioners) during pilot FGCs. The table also displays the number of pilot cases for which each type of strategy applies. By virtue of the ABILITY model, the most common strategy across Action Plans was communication and documentation of the regulatory processes schools must undertake should truancy persist (as per *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* Qld and DET policy and procedures). However, a variety of other strategies aimed at supporting the student and family to address the multilayered issues underlying the truancy were also developed.

Table 5   Summary of Strategies in Pilot Action Plans to Address Underlying Issues

Strategy Included in Action Plan	Number of Pilot Cases
Clear identification of school and/or departmental processes that must be followed regarding persistent unexplained absences	8
Development of a specific home routine for student that is conducive to attending school	6
Referral to support agencies or specific interventions (e.g., anger management, counselling)	5
Designation of specific school staff member(s) student and/or family can approach to discuss within-school issues	5
Referral to support programs already existing within the school (e.g., career guidance, chaplain, 'cool room', homework club)	5
Clear identification of processes responsible adult(s) and school staff can use to communicate with each other regarding absences (e.g., text messaging, notifying school for legitimate absences)	4
Additional support from school staff regarding school work (e.g., one-on-one assistance)	4
Designation of specific school staff member(s) to regularly check-in with student to enquire about their progress and/or wellbeing within school	3
Provision or offer of financial support for school resources (e.g., uniforms, computer etc)	3
Provision or offer of support (financial or otherwise) to assist with housing	3
Clear identification of processes students and/or family can follow when violence occurs (e.g., contacting police, engaging with Police Liaison Officers in their area)	2
Provision or offer of tutoring external to school	2
Appropriate school staff member (e.g., principal) to engage with specific administration staff to encourage more positive interactions with students	2
Provision or offer of financial assistance for transport	2
Clear identification of processes student and/or responsible adult(s) can initiate with school should bullying occur	1
Examination by school staff of subjects student currently enrolled in to determine with different subjects may be more suitable for the student	1

2.5.5   Follow-up of Pilot Cases by QPS

The ABILITY Engagement Officer (AEO) is currently monitoring pilot cases by following-up with students, family members, school staff and any other practitioners who agreed to be included in an Action Plan. During the monitoring phases, the AEO regularly engages with those included in the Action Plan to ascertain the level of progress that has been made in relation to the specific strategies documented in the Action Plan.

A number of themes have become apparent during follow-up:

- Students, families, school staff and agency practitioners remain motivated to address the underlying issues contributing to truanting behaviour;
- Action Plans are an effective tool for maintaining participants' commitment towards strategies developed at the FGC;
- Students, families, school staff and agency practitioners have all made some level of progress towards implementing the strategies they agreed to at FGCs; and
- Entrenched and complex issues identified at FGCs continue to be present in many of the participating families, however, are beginning to be addressed;
- Families feel that the FGC was a positive experience, particularly because the family was not blamed for the truancy and because they were able to garner support of others to address the issues identified.

2.6   Pilot Truncation, Understanding Roles and Responsibilities, and School Privacy

This section first discusses the truncation of the ABILITY pilot from twelve to nine cases. Second, a commonly raised process issue – understanding roles and responsibilities – is addressed. Third, school privacy and publicising of Project ABILITY is briefly discussed.

2.6.1   Pilot Truncation

To fulfil the originally desired pilot sample (n = 12, three from each school) recruitment of three more cases would be required. Unfortunately, the pool of cases with provisional consent has been exhausted. After careful consideration and collaborative discussion amongst QPS, UQ and YFSS ABILITY Teams, a decision has been made to truncate the ABILITY pilot[1].

A number of factors underlie the decision to truncate the ABILITY pilot. First, the purpose the pilot was to operationalise and refine the ABILITY model so as to ensure a sustainable implementation and evaluation process had been developed for the larger-scale ABILITY trial – in particular, the components requiring substantial agency and resource coordination (i.e., identification of cases, recruitment, FGCs). It was decided that an adequate number of cases had been successfully progressed through these portions of the ABILITY model and, collectively, these cases have informed refinements of the model for the trial. Therefore, to identify additional pools of students or seek further provisional consents to fulfil the anticipated pilot quota would require unnecessary replication and time delays. Moreover, it could potentially begin to exhaust school resources that are vital for execution of the ABILITY trial.

2.6.2   Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities

During follow-up with schools and agency practitioners, a common issue raised was uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities at various phases in the ABILITY process.

➔ **Rectification Strategy:** An information package has been developed for schools, police officers and agency practitioners (for more detail, see *'Project ABILITY Process Document'*), which provides a clear description of the roles and responsibilities during involvement with Project ABILITY. Moreover, the QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams are arranging a brief 'training' session to be held with schools to explain the trial process, roles and responsibilities and answer any questions school staff may have.

2.6.3   Protecting the Privacy of ABILITY Schools

On a few occasions during the ABILITY pilot, the possibility of publicising Project ABILITY was raised (e.g.,

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[1] In practice, this means that no further cases will be identified to obtain the final case for Secondary School 2 or Primary School 2 will not be asked to seek provisional consent for their final two cases on their eligible case list (identified late 2010).

principals requesting a blurb on the project in their school newsletters). Although positive that those involved are keen to promote Project ABILITY, some concern was raised by DET Strategic Policy and Research Division about maintaining the confidentiality of participating schools or students. Particularly during the early stages of Project ABILITY.

→ **Rectification Strategy**: The ABILITY Team is committed to maintaining the privacy of participating schools, students and families. Project ABILITY will not be publicised without first consulting DET Strategic Policy and Research Division. Additionally, a set of pseudonyms has been developed by the QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams which will de-identify participating ABILITY schools in reports or publications outside those provided directly to DET and/or other ethics committees[1]. This strategy is in addition to the strict confidentiality and privacy guidelines regarding individual participants which form part of the ethical clearances for the project (see application to DET Strategic Policy and Research Division seeking approval for conducting the Project ABILITY trial).

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[1] However, reports and publications may make reference to ███ Policing District, as the very nature of the communities within the district provides the rationale for Project ABILITY.

PART III: Positive Pilot Outcomes and Recommendations

The purpose of the ABILITY pilot was to determine the feasibility and sustainability of the ABILITY model within four schools in the ▮▮▮ Policing District. During the pilot, the ABILITY Team progressed a small sample of cases through phases of the ABILITY model requiring high levels of interagency coordination to enable them to identify process concerns and refine operational procedures in preparation for a larger-scale experimental field trial.

This report has provided descriptive outcomes for pilot cases and outlined how the ABILITY model has been refined as a result of the pilot. A larger experimental trial is now required to determine whether the ABILITY model can significantly impact truancy, antisocial behaviour, psychosocial risks and other individual, family, school and community outcomes in the ▮▮▮ Policing District. In addition to highlighting the positive outcomes of the ABILITY pilot, this section outlines recommendations in light of the anticipated Project ABILITY trial.

3.1   Positive Pilot Outcomes

3.1.1   General Positive Outcomes

A number of positive outcomes arising out of the ABILITY pilot have been identified in this report, including:

- Low attrition rate
- QPS ABILITY Team recruiting students and families which school staff had indicated would be unlikely to participate or engage with the ABILITY Team
- YFSS ABILITY Team securing funding to facilitate the FGC component of the ABILITY model
- International interest in the ABILITY model from renowned criminological scholars
- Progression of eight (soon to be nine) students and families through FGCs and development of comprehensive Action Plans to holistically address participating students' truancy
- Early signs of successful Action Plan implementation
- Development and refinement of a comprehensive, yet sustainable, interagency ABILITY model

3.1.2   Feedback from Schools and Practitioners

In addition, follow-up meetings with participating schools to gain feedback from principals and other school staff have highlighted a number of other positive pilot outcomes, including:

- Project ABILITY has motivated a needed change in viewing truancy as a multilayered issue rather than purely a school issue
- The involvement of QPS is important for highlighting the risks of truancy with students, families and community agencies
- Project ABILITY has created opportunities for forging relationships with students and families
- Project ABILITY has brought attention to truancy for staff across the entire school who are now beginning to monitor student absences more closely
- Project ABILITY has strengthened interagency partnerships
- The collaborative approach implemented by all members of the ABILITY Team has created confidence in Project ABILITY

In a similar vein, practitioners involved in the pilot FGCs provided positive feedback about the conference component of the ABILITY model. Throughout the pilot, a short electronic questionnaire was emailed to school and agency practitioners who had participated in each FGC to gain their feedback. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with questionnaire items on a scale from one to five (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

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Table 6 provides a snapshot of this questionnaire. As can be seen, school staff and agency practitioners, on average, agreed that the FGC process was an effective forum for developing partnerships with other agencies in order to assist families address the issues underlying students' truancy.

Table 6   **Perceptions of FGC Component of the ABILITY Model**

Post-FGC Questionnaire Item	Mean
A partnership with other organisations present at the FGC[1]....	
Is important for addressing the issues underlying this student's truancy	4.48
Is an effective way to assist this family address issues underlying the student's truancy	4.19
Is necessary for addressing issues underlying this student's truant behaviour	4.19
Is an effective way for my organisation to assist this family in addressing the student's truancy	3.95
Will be effective in reducing this student's truant behaviour	3.76
Will be effective for delivering resources to this student and family	4.10
The conference was useful for forging a partnership with the other organisation(s)[2]	3.81
The Action Plan is the best way to assist this family address the student's truancy[2]	3.59
Collaborating with the other organisation(s) present will ensure this family complies with their Action Plan[2]	3.82

3.2   Recommendations

3.2.1   Primary Recommendation

The primary recommendation drawn from this report is that the QPS, Department of Communities, DET and UQ ABILITY Teams transition Project ABILITY into a randomised field trial across five schools in ▉▉▉ Policing District (predominately ▉▉▉ Policing Division). Only with a larger-scale trial will it be possible to examine the exact impact of the ABILITY model on truancy, antisocial behaviour and other individual, family, school and community-level domains in ▉▉▉ Policing District (particularly ▉▉▉ Division).

3.2.2   Process Related Recommendations

In light of the positive feedback regarding the value of a multiagency partnership approach for addressing truancy, it is strongly recommended that the key project partners – QPS, DET, YFSS and UQ – continue to collaborate with each other and other governmental and non-governmental agencies throughout the Project ABILITY trial. Ultimately, an interagency approach is crucial for generating a significant impact on the multifaceted nature of truancy in the ▉▉▉ Policing District (Particularly ▉▉▉ Policing Division).

The ABILITY pilot also led to the identification of several process concerns, for which this report has proposed rectification strategies. These rectification strategies will ensure the ABILITY model is both feasible and sustainable during the implementation and evaluation of a larger-scale Project ABILITY trial. Therefore, it is recommended that the following strategies are integrated into the ABILITY model as the ABILITY Team moves from trial to pilot phase:

- Truancy being defined as $\geq 15\%$ of school days absent and unexplained across the previous three school terms
- The objective and unbiased identification and sampling approach involving the merging of truancy and QPS data, ranking and stratified random sampling
- Ongoing consultation with schools to identify additional DET employees who may be more suitable for initiating contact with families, particularly where communication barriers are identified

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[1] *N* = 21
[2] *N* = 17

- Upholding a maximum number of attempted contacts to minimise resource strain and allow for recruitment of further cases to be initiated
- Upholding YFSS case load, utilising a pool of police officers and inclusion of Secondary School 3 to ensure the recruitment of 100 cases and progression of all Engagement Group cases through a professionally facilitated FGC within project timeframes
- Clearly communicating roles and responsibilities to those involved in Project ABILITY (e.g., school staff and participating police officers)to minimise ambiguity and streamline the progression of cases
- Focusing on the core issues directly impacting truancy to streamline FGCs and progression of Engagement Group cases
- Mandatory preparation of all FGC attendees, attendance of a sworn police officer and minimum behavioural requirements to ensure the safety and welling of all FGC attendees
- Use of pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participating ABILITY schools

Finally, a sound and robust evaluation of the ABILITY model requires that a consistent process is followed for the life of the Project ABILITY trial. Therefore, it is recommended that QPS, DET, YFSS and UQ maintain their commitment to diligently implementing the protocol described within the '*Project ABILITY Process Document*'.

Appendix A

Figure A   The Multifaceted Nature and Impact of Truancy[1]

ECONOMIC FACTORS
- Low socioeconomic status (impacting ability to purchase required school materials, uniforms and pay school fees)[11]
- Lack of affordable transportation or childcare[12]
- Student employed[13]
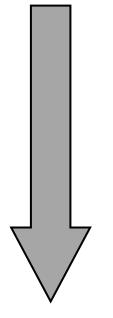- Single-parent with multiple jobs[14]

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS
- Mental health issues[1]
- Alcohol and substance use[2]
- Learning difficulties[3]
- Lack of understanding of attendance laws[4]
- Lack of social skills[5]
- Low self esteem[6]
- Anxiety and fear[7]
- Poor physical health[8]
- Low motivation and/or self control[9]
- Antisocial behaviour[10]

TRUANCY

FAMILY FACTORS
- Lack of parental supervision[15]
- Domestic violence and/or family dysfunction[16]
- Substance use/misuse[17]
- Lack of familial support for or prioritisation of education[18]
- Single-parent homes[19]
- High residential mobility[20]
- Lack of social support[21]
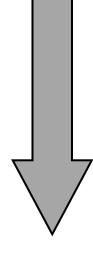- Older school-age siblings needing to take on a carer role for parents and/or younger siblings[22]

SCHOOL FACTORS
- Bullying / violence[23]
- Negative peer[24] influences
- Consequences for truancy not meaningful deterrents[25]
- Inconsistent application of truancy regulations / consequences[26]
- Student-school staff relationships[27]
- Incongruence between individual learning styles and school curriculum / teaching methods[28]

LACK OF EDUCATION CORRELATES & SHORT-TERM TRUANCY OUTCOMES
- Poor academic achievement and/or literacy and numeracy[29]
- School drop out[30]
- Delinquent/criminal activity[31] - higher daytime incidence[32]
- Social isolation/alienation[33]
- Teen pregnancy[34]
- Negative self-image and low self-esteem[35]
- Lack of school social bond[36]
- Substance use/abuse[37]

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
- Low socioeconomic status[38]
- Lower earnings[39]
- Substance use/abuse[40]
- Unemployment[41]
- Less educated workforce[39]
- Social service dependency[39]
- Higher likelihood of marital problems[39]
- Poor health[39]
- Higher likelihood of mental health issues[42]
- Criminality[42]
  - More likely to become serious and violent juvenile offenders
  - Incarceration more likely
  - Violent offences more likely
  - Recidivism more likely

[1] Empirical literature informing this figure is contained in endnotes at the end of this report.

Appendix B

At the outset of the pilot, each school was asked to identify students aged between 10 – 16 years (excluding grade 12) with the highest number of unexplained absences amongst the school population. In addition, it was requested that students be ranked from highest to lowest according to the number of unexplained absences over the previous 3 school terms. In the absence of having access to schools' data, this approach was considered the most feasible and simple process that could be implemented by schools, whilst still ensuring an unbiased identification process[1].

The QPS and UQ ABILITY Teams then met with representatives from each school to review the eligibility of the identified cases. For the purposes of the pilot, cases were excluded if (a) there was a legitimate reason for absences (e.g., chronic medical problem); or (b) they were engaged with another intervention targeting truancy or educational engagement. A pool of eligible cases was identified at each meeting and de-identified information for each case was entered into a School Case Log (see Appendix 5 of '*Project ABILITY Process Document*').

After assigning each case a specific case number, the case log was then sent to the nominated school representative and direction given to seek provisional consent (see p. 4 of 'Project *ABILITY Process Document*') for three cases. Upon obtaining each provisional consent, the school representative forwarded the relevant case log to the QPS appointed ABILITY Engagement Officer who then initiated the face-to-face recruitment process (see pp. 5 – 7 of '*Project ABILITY Process Document*').

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[1] Nevertheless, it was identified during the ABILITY pilot that not all schools had the resources or necessary technical skills to navigate SMS to gather data in the format required (i.e., ranked, certain date ranges for absences, certain ages and grades excluded etc).

Appendix C

Table D   **Descriptive Statistics for All Identified ABILITY Pilot Cases**

		PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TOTAL
Descriptive Statistic		**CP**	**IN**	**FL**	**GL**	
Unexplained Absences	Mean (days)	61.5	63.0	61.33	84.1	**68.48**
(*first 3 terms of 2010*)	Range (days)	49 – 77	40 – 104	30 – 90	60 – 115	
Grade (*2010 school year*)	Grade 5	1	8	-	-	**9**
	Grade 6	2	3	-	-	**5**
	Grade 7	1	0	-	-	**1**
	Grade 8	-	-	0	0	**0**
	Grade 9	-	-	0	4	**4**
	Grade 10	-	-	3	2	**5**
	Grade 11	-	-	0	1	**1**
Age	Mean (years)	11	10.5	15	14.71	**12.32**
	Range (years)	10 – 12	10 – 11	15	14 – 16	
Gender (*frequency*)	Male	3	6	1	4	**14**
	Female	1	5	2	3	**11**
Cultural Identification (*frequency*)	Caucasian Australian	3	0	0	2	**5**
	Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander	1	7	0	3	**11**
	Maori	0	1	2	0	**3**
	Tongan	0	1	1	0	**2**
	Samoan	0	0	0	1	**1**
	Vietnamese	0	1	0	0	**1**
	Unknown	0	1	0	1	**2**

Appendix D

The identification and sampling approach outlined below is also explored in more detail in the *Project ABILITY Process Document* (pp. 1 – 3). The approach has a number of advantages:

- It demonstrates congruence between QPS and DET priorities by ensuring that young people displaying truancy *and* other antisocial behaviour are identified and approached for inclusion in Project ABILITY.
- It will alleviate the level of resources required by QPS and school staff during the identification and sampling phase.
- It ensures an unbiased and objective sampling approach that minimises confounds for the evaluation of Project ABILITY (e.g., order or school effects).
- It will ensure even distribution of cases across schools at any one time, thereby minimising the possibility of one school progressing multiple cases at once and exhausting their resources.
- Schools can be prepared in advance regarding the number of forthcoming cases so that they can mobilise their resources accordingly.
- It will generate in equal mix of low, medium and high risk cases for YFSS's case load, thereby minimising burnout or delays which may result if only those at the 'high' end of truancy are recruited first.

– Phase I –

1. UQ Project Manager signs a confidentiality agreement regarding the restrictions and use of identifiable data during the identification and sampling phase of the Project ABILITY trial.
2. QPS ABILITY Team provide UQ Research Team with a list of all young people (age 10 – 16 years) who have come to the attention of police in ▮▮▮▮ Policing District.
3. List of young people will detail the following information:
   a. Full name
   b. Date of birth
   c. Gender
   d. All contacts with police (includes street checks, arrests, cautions etc)

NOTE: Identifiable information on this list is used only for the purposes of merging QPS and DET data. QPS and DET data is merged in an effort to ensure that young people who have come to the attention of QPS are included in the identification, sampling and recruitment phases of the Project ABILITY trial. This list will be destroyed upon compilation and ranking of eligible case lists.

– Phase II –

1. UQ Project Manager sorts students on number of unexplained absences for last three school terms (restricting sample to students ages 10 – 16 years and excluding Year 12 students).
2. Cases excluded with <15% unexplained absences.
3. Each case with ≥15% unexplained absences assigned an ABILITY case number.
4. Eligible students placed into a table with the following headings:

   a. Name
   b. Case number
   c. Number of unexplained absences (last 3 school terms)
   d. QPS contact (Yes/No)[1]
   e. Type of unexplained absences (whole days, late arrivals, early departures)
   f. Grade
   g. DOB
   h. Gender
   i. Cultural identification
   j. Presenting issues

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[1] **If Yes**, tally of police contacts noted.

5. Identified list is left with school principal.
6. De-identified list taken away by UQ Project Manager.
7. Process repeated across all 5 Project ABILITY schools (within school grounds).

– Phase III –

QPS (AEO) and UQ meet with each school to discuss each case on the list compiled in Phase II. Only cases meeting eligibility criteria are retained.

– Phase IV –

1. UQ Project Manager places remaining cases (all schools) from Phase 2 into Low, Medium or High Risk categories:

   a. **Low Risk** are cases with 15 – 19.99% unexplained absences
   b. **Medium Risk** are cases with 20 – 24.99% unexplained absences
   c. **High Risk** are cases with ≥25% unexplained cases <u>OR</u> ≥15% unexplained absences + QPS contact

2. Any case with QPS contact is placed into the High Risk category.
3. This process is followed for each school.

– Phase V –

1. Order of recruitment consent follows a rotating system (consecutive order):

School[1]	Risk Category	Description
School 1	Low	Case is randomly drawn from School 1's 'Low Risk' group
School 2	Medium	Case is randomly drawn from School 2's 'Med Risk' group
School 3	High	Case is randomly drawn from School 3's 'High Risk' group
School 4	Low	Case is randomly drawn from School 4's 'Low Risk' group
School 5	Medium	Case is randomly drawn from School 5's 'Med Risk' group
…	…	…

2. At the **start of the trial:**
   a. Approximately 12 – 15 cases are drawn using the system outlined above.
   b. School Case Logs for these cases are sent to relevant schools by AEO and direction given to seek provisional consent <u>simultaneously</u>.

3. For the **remainder of the trial**, the number of cases drawn will be **(a)** proportionate to the number of places left in YFSS's case load; and **(b)** take into account that not all cases will provide informed consent or be randomly assigned to the Engagement Group. For example, if YFSS had two places left in their case load, 3-5 cases would be drawn <u>using the rotating order above</u> (see light grey section in diagram below).

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[1] Each school will be randomly assigned a number from 1 – 5 to determine which school represents School 1, School 2, School 3 and so on.

SCHOOL	RISK LEVEL
School 1	Low
School 2	Medium
School 3	High
School 4	Low
School 5	Medium
School 1	High
School 2	Low
School 3	Medium
School 4	High
School 5	Low
School 1	Medium
School 2	High
School 3	Low
School 4	Medium
School 5	High
School 1	Low
School 2	Medium
School 3	High
School 4	Low
School 5	Medium
School 1	High
School 2	Low
School 3	Medium
School 4	High
School 5	Low
…	…

1ST POOL DRAWN →

2ND POOL DRAWN →

3rd POOL DRAWN STARTS HERE

4. If a school does not obtain provisional consent for the case they are assigned, another equivalent case will be provided to and direction given to seek provisional consent. For example, if School 2 was given a Low Risk case and provisional consent was not obtained, they would be given another case at that level. Three opportunities are given before that particular 'recruitment occasion' is considered exhausted.

5. A 'recruitment occasion' is considered exhausted when:
   a. Provisional consent is sought
   b. The school has exhausted 3 attempted provisional consents at that level
   c. The case provided does not meet the eligibility criteria

6. UQ will retain a running log/record of the rotating system throughout the trial.

– Phase VI –

1. Process is repeated at the beginning of each school term to ensure the case pool remains current.
2. Cases already exhausted excluded from the process.

NOTE: Although the UQ Project Manager will now have *access* to identifiable data, **no identifiable data will be retained or stored by the UQ Research Team unless informed consent to participate in Project ABILITY has been obtained.** Access to identifiable data is solely for the purposes of compiling and ranking lists of eligible cases for the Project ABILITY trial and will not be removed from school grounds.

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