Collaborative Evaluation & Research Group

Supporting Innovative Research and Evaluation

ADOLESCENTS BUILDING CONNECTIONS (ABC)

PROJECT EVALUATION

2022

FEDERATION UNIVERSITY

COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION & RESEARCH GROUP

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

ADOLESCENTS BUILDING CONNECTIONS (ABC)

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2021 / 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group (CERG) Federation University Gippsland is an innovative initiative that aims to build evaluation capacity and expertise within Gippsland. As a local provider the CERG understands the value of listening to the community and has the ability to deliver timely and sustainable evaluations that are tailored to the needs of a wide variety of organisations.

Associate Professor Joanne Porter is the Director of the CERG. Joanne has led a number of successful research projects and evaluations in conjunction with local industry partners. She has guided the development of the CERG since its formation in 2018.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Adolescent Building Connection (ABC) program delivered by Quantum Support Services in regional Victoria is an intervention-based response to family violence. It provides access to a targeted and responsive program that encourages positive behaviour choices while supporting young people to form healthy relationships in their lives.

The program works with young people aged 12 – 17 years who display traits of aggression, violence or bullying behaviours, prior to escalation into the justice system. The program works with adolescents individually and focusses on the positive changes they can make within their own lives. It combines interactive activities specifically designed to meet the needs of adolescents with an open, non-judgemental and safe discussion space to encourage peer correction, improve coping mechanisms and encourage wider thing outside what they may have experienced as normal.

1.2 KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The ABC program aimed to explore the experiences of the participants during the program and to ascertain if participation was having a positive impact on the lives of those engaged in the program. A total of 219 students from term 4, 2021 to term 2, 2022 participated in the 10-week program from 10 schools across Gippsland.

Participants were asked to represent how they are feeling each week using a set of emoji of which happy scored the highest followed by frustrated, sad, exhausted and angry. The emojis were used as a way for facilitators to gage the emotions of the students each week. Interestingly females rated higher across the weeks for the majority of the emotions especially sad, scared, alone and nervous. The males in comparison rated higher for being happy and excited and were consistently low for confused and alone across the program.

There was a significant decline for males in the middle third of the program with results decreasing from 80% feeling comfortable with the discussion to 40%, however these results increased again in the final weeks. Similarly, males halved their satisfaction levels when asked if they feel judged, if the information was useful and if they enjoyed the activities. The decline was directly related to the more challenging topics covered in the middle third of the program such as power and control, positive relationships and gender equity.

 Facilitator reports demonstrated the complexity of issues and behaviours displayed by participants in the ABC program. Participants spoke to facilitators about challenges at home such as experiencing family violence, being responsible for siblings, parents being absent overnight, familial alcohol and drug use, unstable housing and foster care arrangements, family members being incarcerated, and the death of family or friends.

Many participants also displayed strong emotional responses to events and poor emotion regulation, such as an inability to communicate or acknowledge their behaviour. A facilitator reported that one participant "*disassociates when we talk about healthy/unhealthy relationships* (looks down, doesn't respond)." while another student was previously seen to *"hide under a desk or hide under a 'jacket'…."* but that this behaviour was not observed in week 8 *"so we are seeing some improvement."*

Facilitators reported some significant changes in participant behaviour and very positive effects of the program;

"[The participant] *is a very determined young person. When we discussed thing's they are looking forward to in the next 5 years, she has very clear ideas of where she is headed. Her contribution to discussions are well considered and thoughtful. She has become much more open and trusting as the sessions have progressed*."

It was essential that facilitators had the skills and experience to use protective interruption and support with personal one on one follow through. They needed to direct very sensitive discussion topics and give participants "*Regular reminders to ensure group sharing stays in a space of uplifting and sharing to move forward positively rather than a space of grievance*."

Many facilitator reports indicated that participants responded positively to the program.

"[The Student] *has really 'come into his own' during ABC. He frequently engages with the content and shares personal examples. He encouraged others to participate respectfully. He commented today that he would love to do the ABC program again*!"

Understanding and identifying unhealthy behaviours is a key component of the program. Identifying their behaviour in the past may not have been acceptable was for some a catalyst for change, for seeking answers and help grow was an interesting finding of the evaluation.

"*We've actually had quite a few young people that have identified during the group that they are actually perpetrating in their relationships with either their girlfriends, their boyfriends and then actually seeking help from there to actually be better themselves.*"

By the end of the program, the activities and discussions had given participants the space, skills and opportunity to reflect on their feelings and emotions and learn how to manage them.

"*It's incredible to see them towards the end of the term actually really being able to have real, honest, open conversations about their emotions and how they handle things, how they resolve conflict and identifying things that they possibly don't do as well as they could and things that are healthy behaviours and unhealthy behaviours.*"

1.3 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are divided into three areas, future, program and evaluation recommendations. The top three recommendations have been presented here and include:

1. The program is worthy to continue with consideration to expand into other locations and other age groups
2. Work towards ensuing there is consistency of staff allocated to facilitate the ABC program with consideration to offering long-term contracts for expertise and program fidelity.
3. Explore ways to capture the student's experiences throughout the program while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity

2. ABC PROGRAM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Adolescent Building Connection (ABC) program delivered by Quantum Support Services in regional Victoria is an intervention-based response to family violence. It provides access to a targeted and responsive program that encourages positive behaviour choices while supporting young people to form healthy relationships in their lives.

The program works with young people aged 12 – 17 years who display traits of aggression, violence or bullying behaviours, prior to escalation into the justice system. The program works with adolescents individually and focusses on the positive changes they can make within their own lives. It combines interactive activities specifically designed to meet the needs of adolescents with an open, non-judgemental and safe discussion space to encourage peer correction, improve coping mechanisms and encourage wider thing outside what they may have experienced as normal.

The ABC program has been evaluated consistently since the pilot project was run in 2016-2017. The Pilot Program evaluation, '*Quantum Support Services Respectful Relationships Adolescent Behaviour Change'* was followed by an evaluation of year two of the program – 2017 – 2018 and *Adolescent Building Connections Program 2019-2020.* This evaluation covers the ABC program delivered in 2021 – 2022. This is the first year accessing the local area secondary schools to provide the program.

2.2 POLICY CONTEXT

In 2016 the Victorian Government announced a ten year plan to rebuild Victoria's family violence system and committed to implement all recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence (2015). From 2020-2023 ten priority themes and projects became the focus for reform activity. Primary Prevention was one priority theme, with the aim to prevent violence from happening in the first place. Primary prevention acts across the whole population to change attitudes and behaviours, looking at underlying causes of violence. The ABC program is evidence based and assist adolescents to understand the impact of their behaviours on those around them and to encourage positive behaviour choices and positive growth for young people to form and maintain healthy relationships in their lives.

2.3 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The ABC program provided framed, interactive and reflective educational sessions focussed on achieving positive change in young people who display traits of aggression, violence or bullying behaviours. Activities were designed to meet the needs of adolescents with an open, non-judgemental and safe discussion space that encouraged peer correction, improved coping mechanisms and encouraged wider thinking outside what the young person may have experienced as normal.

The program included ten two-hour sessions, with eight participants per program (up to a maximum of 10 if there was demand). There was also provision for case management where no other case management options were available. The program was delivered by two qualified facilitators, where possible one male and one female, with groups for young men and young women delivered separately to best meet their needs.

2.4 KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders for this evaluation include:

- The adolescents engaged
- The parents of the adolescent
- The teachers working with the adolescent
- The facilitators
- Past participants
- Advisory Committee

2.5 PROGRAM DELIVERY 2021 – 2022

Participants were referred to the program by School Welfare Offers, Youth Justice and Youth Funded Programs or services, L17 referrals[1].

Term 4 2021

The total number of program participants in 2021 was 112, with Traralgon Secondary College having the highest overall number (32%, n=36), followed by Leongatha (28%, n=31).
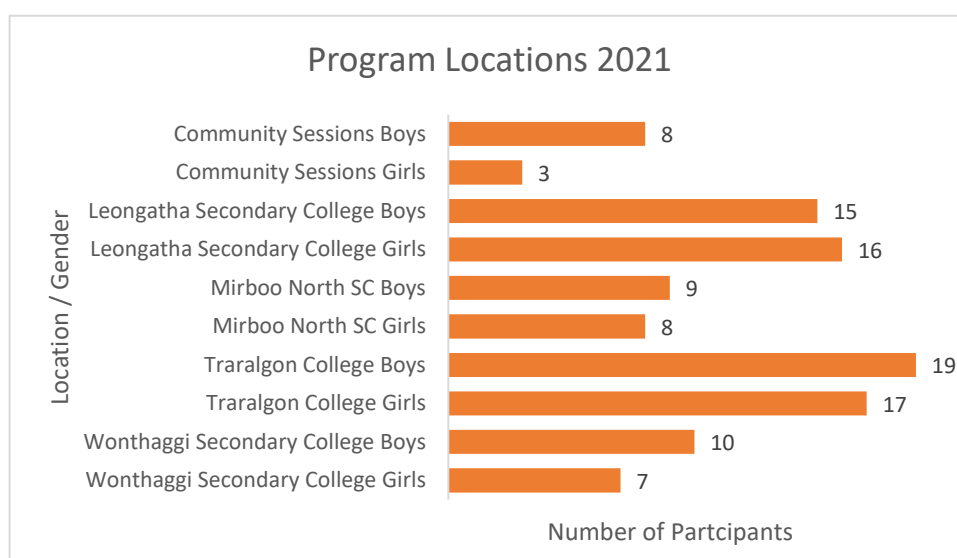
Figure1: 2021 Program Locations and Number of Participants 2021

Terms 1 and 2 2022

The ABC program was conducted over two terms in 2022, term 1 consisted of 36 participants (34%) in 3 cohorts and term 2 consisted of 71 participants (66%) in 7 cohorts.

A total of 107 participants completed the evaluation tools throughout the program sessions. The number of participants who participated from each school is shown in Figure 1. As shown, Mirboo North Secondary College male cohort were the most consistent completing the evaluation assessments (21%, n=23).

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[1] L17 specialist family violence workers respond to L17 referrals made by Victoria Police officers who have attended a family violence incident.

Program Locations 2022

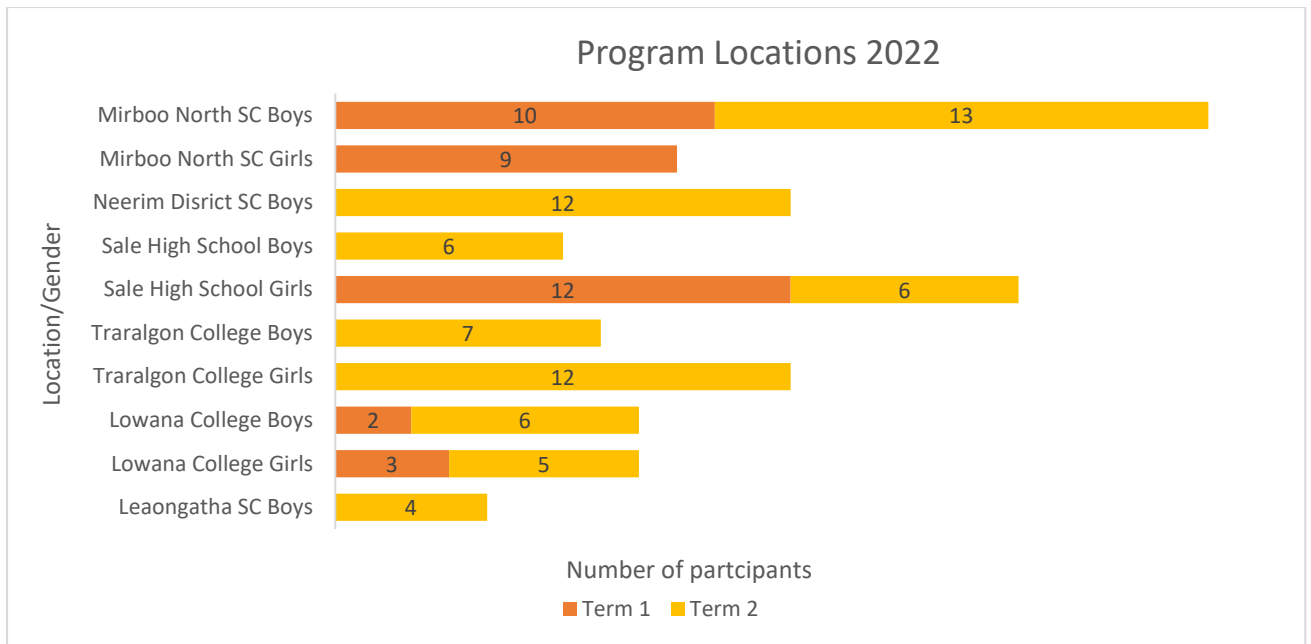| Location/Gender	Term 1	Term 2
Mirboo North SC Boys	10	13
Mirboo North SC Girls	9	
Neerim Disrict SC Boys		12
Sale High School Boys		6
Sale High School Girls	12	6
Traralgon College Boys		7
Traralgon College Girls		12
Lowana College Boys	2	6
Lowana College Girls	3	5
Leaongatha SC Boys		4

Number of partcipants

■ Term 1 ■ Term 2

Figure 2: Program Locations and Number Of Participants 2022

3. THE EVALUATION

3.1 AIM OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation seeks to develop an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders engaged with the ABC program to identify enablers and barriers to current and future delivery of the program.

Key Research Question

Overall, the research question for this evaluation centres on if the ABC program developed for adolescents who are experiencing negative behaviours is perceived to be having a positive impact upon the lives of those stakeholders engaged in the program.

It is anticipated that the dissemination of the findings of the evaluation will support adolescents, families and teachers and therapists to understand the experience of others and to identify those the enablers and barriers to success.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION / TOOLS USED

There were a number of data collection points as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Data Collected

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS / DATA

4.1: TERM 4: 2021

Data was received for a total of 112 participants enrolled in the ABC program in Term 4, 2021. Data was received de-identified and coded using participant codes and included self-assessment worksheets and facilitator reports completed each week of participation in the program. A participant feedback sheet was also collected at pre-determined collection points throughout the semester.

Limitations of the Data

It was not always possible to determine what week of the program the data correlated to as data was inconsistently dated. Furthermore, the program was interrupted by COVID-19 and thus not was not delivered at all weeks during the semester.

Sessions attended: It was not always clear how many sessions each student attended, due to non-completion of student surveys and/or facilitator report sheets. However, a minimum of 378 session records were received.

Sessions cancelled due to COVID: at least 293 student reports recorded the session as cancelled due to COVID-19.

4.1.2 STUDENT SELF ASSESSMENT

This self-assessment was designed specifically for the ABC program, therefore there is no validated measurement available to analyse it. The self-assessment measured a combination of positive and negative affect, personal circumstances, emotional intelligence, and overall wellbeing. Positively framed questions were reverse scored and a total survey score for each student response was determined. One question relating to the consumption of alcohol and/or other drugs was excluded as it does not relate to the other measurement factors. The total score ranged from 16-80, with 16 being the lowest score possible and indicating very positive affect and wellbeing, and 80 being the highest score possible and indicating very negative affect and wellbeing. Consequently, higher scores are indicative of higher personal distress. The highest distress score recorded was one participant who scored 65 in week six. The lowest distress score recorded was 21, indicating a very low level of distress. To measure change over time, the total self-assessment score was averaged across participants for weeks one, six, and ten. Over the three time periods, overall distress declined (see Figure 4 below).
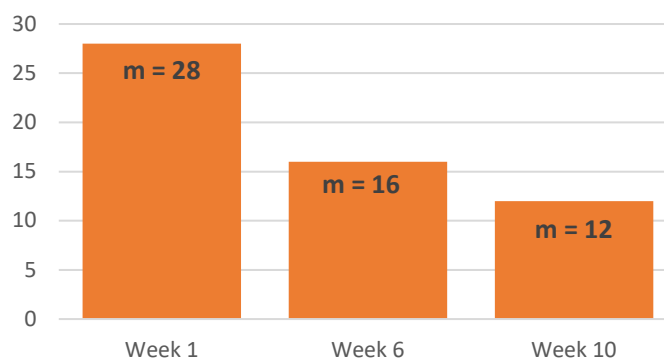

Figure 4: Mean participant assessment score - indicative of distress - from start to finish of the ABC program

This data is indicative only as it was not always possible to determine what week the assessment was completed, and not all participated in more than one or two sessions. Thus, some assumptions were made during the data analysis process to determine what week the participant self-assessment was completed.

Emotions that you have been feeling today, indicated by emotive cartoon faces

Participants were asked what emotions they have been feeling 'lately' at each session by circling emotive cartoon faces (emojis). Change over time was not able to be measured using the emotive faces because the week was not often enough recorded to give an accurate representation of the data. Therefore, a total presentation of emotion is reported.

Summation of each time the emotive faces were selected indicates the way that participants were feeling throughout the program. The face indicating 'excited' was presented twice, hence number of responses to each 'excited' face were combined and divided by two. Only two positive emotion options were offered. These are presented in orange in Figure 5 below.
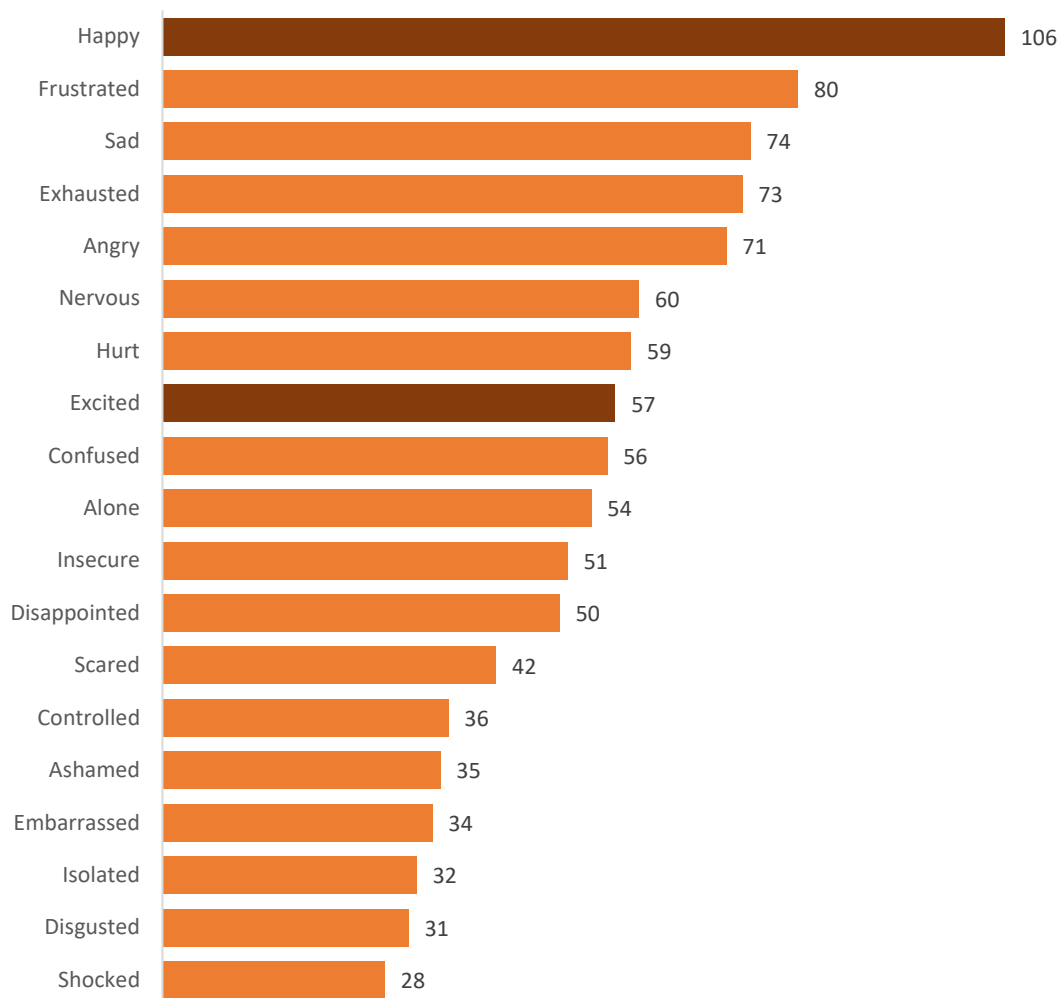

Figure 5: Total number of times each emoji was selected

Other responses included "I'm normally always happy", "calm", and "chilled". Two participants emphasised '*scared*' and '*excited*', respectively, and one student commented that there was "*a bit of negative energy from emoji's. More happy ones*".

Quantitative data analysis

Facilitators were asked to report on each participant's engagement with the class during each session. Responses were measured on a Likert Scale from 0 to 4 and included questions such as "client's participation in discussion", "respect of other participants", and "willingness to engage in activities", among others. The survey was designed to measure participants engagement with the session and overall behaviour. Scores for each survey were summed to determine a total score for each session.

The total score ranged from 6-30, with 6 being the lowest score possible and indicating negative engagement and behaviour, and 30 being the highest score possible and indicating positive engagement and behaviour.

The highest score recorded was 30, while the lowest score recorded was 6. The average score for participants engagement and behaviour is presented below. As indicated, there is a slight increase in average level of engagement and behaviour over the course of the program, however this effect is small and inconsistent.
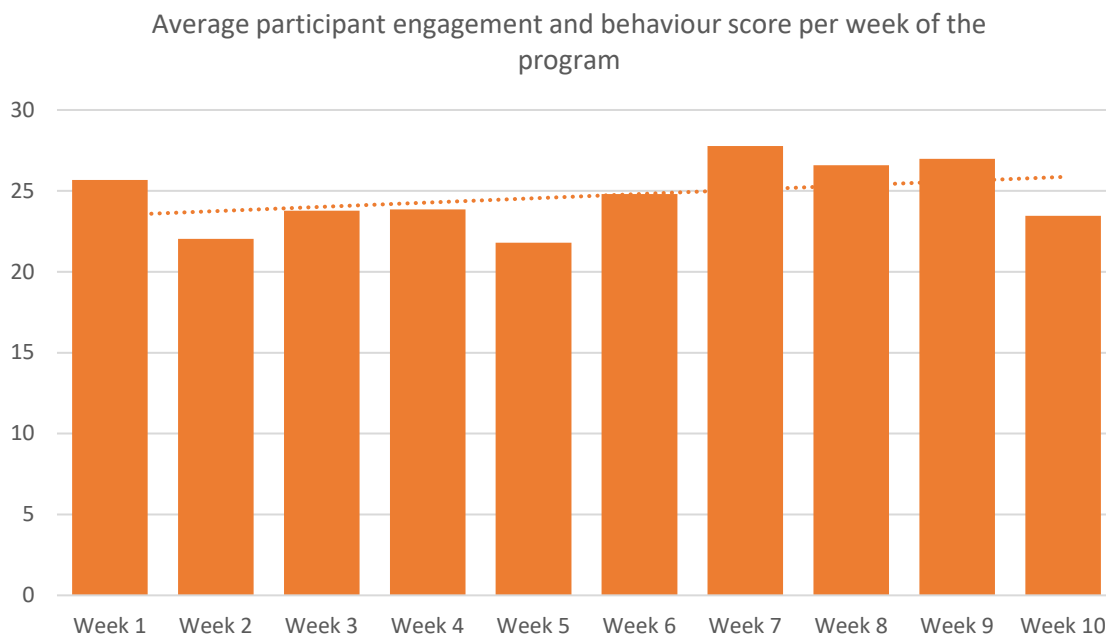

Figure 6: Average Participant Engagement and Behaviour Score

This data should be considered carefully. Individual analysis of the report sheets showed that the behaviour of some participants clearly declined over time, however, the facilitator provided a qualitative explanation as to circumstances at home that were influencing the participants behaviour in class. Therefore, change in engagement and behaviour is not necessarily indicative of the effectiveness of the program.

Qualitative data analysis

Each session, facilitators were asked to record if the participant had made any disclosures to the group or facilitator, any issues or areas of concern, and additional comments. A summary analysis of facilitator reports revealed a number of themes that occurred repeatedly and give an important

insight into the role of the facilitator and the impact that the program can have on participating participants.

Complex behaviours

Facilitator reports demonstrate the complexity of issues and behaviours displayed by participants in the ABC program. Participants spoke to facilitators about challenges at home such as experiencing family violence, being responsible for siblings, parents being absent overnight, familial alcohol and drug use, unstable housing and foster care arrangements, family members being incarcerated, and the death of family or friends. Some participants were living out of home due to Child Protection protective orders or were involved in Intervention Orders.

Facilitators reported that participants also experienced challenges in school including being bullied, being in physical altercations, not getting along with other participants, and not liking school.

> "[removed] *discussed difficult dynamics from early childhood. Mothers drug use and neglect… difficulty in communication…. wanting to isolate himself from others as he gets older because he feels people lie and are not open to his views*. "

Many participants also displayed strong emotional responses to events and poor emotion regulation, such as an inability to communicate or acknowledge their behaviour. A facilitator reported that one student "*disassociates when we talk about healthy/unhealthy relationships (looks down, doesn't respond*)." while another student was previously seen to "*hide under a desk or hide under a 'jacket'….*" But that this behaviour was not observed in week 8 "*so we are seeing some improvement.*"

Level of emotion regulation was also anecdotally related to other conditions and risk-taking behaviour:

> "*Participant wants to cease using marijuana, Participant wants to make changes in his behaviour so he has a better chance at getting a job…. Participant has diagnosed FAS* [Foetal Alcohol Syndrome] *and displays strong desire for change but has poor impulse control and this influences on his high risk taking behaviours. Participant is eager for support and a desire to enter mainstream school.*"

However, throughout the reports, many participants reportedly expressed a desire to improve or change their behaviour, and some participants showed significant insight into their situation:

> "[removed] *discussed extensive criminal history and affiliations. Was / is hoping to be a role model to younger group members… and goal is to make better choices over next 6 months…. High risk taking behaviours, but wishes to make sustainable positive change…* [removed] *will also be case managed by facilitators*."

Facilitators tailor program to each participant

The program provides an avenue for constructive discussion and learning opportunities. Over the course of the program, facilitators became aware of the needs of each participant so that they could enable learning and growth while maintaining trust and rapport.

It was important that facilitators develop a relationship with participants before offering constructive advice so not to appear authoritarian. For example, one facilitator reported that after two sessions a participant "*Spoke derogatively about two non-participants today, however, was reflective about this behaviour when challenged.*" This shows how facilitators can use the sessions to enable behaviour change in a non-confrontational or punitive manner.

The program utilised a range of activities to encourage engagement, for example, it was report that: "[removed] *seemed happy and relaxed during session. She contributed positively to discussions and the 'feelings ball' and 'balloon pop' activities*.". Similarly, "[removed] *was the only boy in group this week. We kept the content delivery fairly low key and used the Jenga set to discuss elements of healthy/unhealthy relationships*."

The sessions required consistent innovation by facilitators to match the participants and their needs on the day, for example. one participant who presented with complex relationships at home, including an Intervention Order in place, "*was the only participant* [in session]*, so we took him fishing. We kept the conversation fairly general but tried to weave some of the session content into general discussion*."

Sometimes, facilitators acknowledge that direct engagement is not an appropriate aim for the participant at the time, but that involvement in the program can still be beneficial to changes in behaviour:

> "*Throughout the sessions,* [removed] *has spent a lot of time on his computer playing games. I think he uses this as a strategy to keep himself settled. Also, some of the discussions with the older boys involve experiences that he can't relate to yet. We have allowed him to continue this as he is still listening to the discussion and not distracting the others. If he is asked a direct question or to perform a task, he does willingly but otherwise did not engage in discussion and activities today*."

Participation is not the only indicator of program success

In some of the initial session reports (i.e. week one or first week of participation) facilitators made a comment as to whether or not the participant had agreed to return the next week. Repeat participation is an indicator of program success, as repeat engagement increases the opportunity to illicit change in participants. However, the 2021 ABC program was severely affected by COVID – 19 and in many cases, participants were only able to participate in one or two sessions due to cancellations.

Further, not all participants chose to engage in the program activities, but this cannot be used to reliably indicate program success. For example, one participant did not engage with the activities in week one: "[removed] *was very quiet this week. She listened but didn't want to contribute to discussion*." but was more comfortable to participate in week two "…*was much more communicative than previous group and used examples from her own experiences to contribute to group*.".

Sometimes, it took multiple sessions for participants to become confident enough in the group to engage with the activities: "[removed] *seems to become more relaxed as each session goes on*." Other measures were also used to indicate the success of the program. Facilitators reported some significant changes in participant behaviour and very positive effects of the program

> "[removed] *is a very determined young person. When we discussed things they are looking forward to in the next 5 years, she has very clear ideas of where she is headed. Her contribution to discussions are well considered and thoughtful. She has become much more open and trusting as the sessions have progressed*."

For some participants, multiple sessions were required to see a change in affect or behaviour. For others, the change was achieved within one or two sessions:

> "*Participant arrived with school staff escorting him and not wanting to be there. Participant did not acknowledge anyone else in the group. Participant appeared extremely poorly emotional presentation and stood at door in corner and refused offers to come further into the room or engage. Participant slowly relaxed as group carried on and later become fully*

immersed in content and activities. Participant came to completely relax with facilitators although does appear to not have peer friendships with anyone in the group."

However, participants' behavioural presentations and levels of engagement sometimes fluctuated inconsistently throughout the program. One participant was repeating the program and showed a combination of negative behaviours but some improvement in emotion regulation compared to the previous term:

"*Participant is easily influenced by others negative behaviours, and struggles to not respond with physical threats to try and get them to change behaviour…. Participant is a return from last term group (by choice). Participant continues to have trouble with concentration when others are also having difficulty- but was easily rediverted and was able to demonstrate a change in how quickly he could be redirected.*"

Multiple participants who displayed challenging behaviour during prior sessions expressed disappointment to facilitators that the program was nearly complete. This is an important result as it indicates participant satisfaction with the program.

Participants act as peers to empower one another

Within the ABC sessions, participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences in a supported environment. While facilitators directed the conversation and discussion topics for each session, it was sometimes the conversation between peers that had the greatest influence on participants. Sharing was an important way to build confidence among participants, for example, after a participant talked about their experiences, "[removed] *seemed to feel empowered to talk about her situation.*"

Peers were also an important source of feedback and compassion:

"*We also talked about strategies for bullying as this is an ongoing issue for him. The other boys also gave him some advice about how to handle bullies and how to choose whether something needs to be reported or not.*"

The influence of other participants was not always positive, and facilitators regularly noted that participants could be a distraction to one another and that some were unable to resist becoming distracted: "*A real effort here not to be influenced by other disruptive students, tried hard to get other participants to focus.*"

The challenging discussion topics require a skilled facilitator

Disclosures are significant events and require intervention. They are often of a significantly personal nature, including self-harm, abuse, bullying, and experiences of sexual assault, among others, which could be distressing to some participants: "*The discussion today triggered thoughts about sexual assault and his negative feelings towards his father.*" It was essential that facilitators had the skills and experience to use protective interruption and support with personal one on one follow through. They needed to direct very sensitive discussion topics and give participants "*Regular reminders to ensure group sharing stays in a space of uplifting and sharing to move forward positively rather than a space of grievance.*"

The following report demonstrates how facilitators aim to redirect participant discussions to be empowering and build confidence:

"*Challenges appear to be that participant is very isolated from peers and community engagement, and this in addition to overcrowding in the home continues to perpetuate a cycle*

of generational abusive, volatile and manipulative behaviours within the family. Struggled to identify values in self, but through discussion and conversation able to identify actions that he has done that made him feel compassionate and caring of others. "

The facilitators also required a strong competency in addressing very complex mental health and behavioural challenges.

"[removed] *disclosed that his mum using manipulation to control him. He explained that yesterday his mum said 'she would tell his parents that* [removed] *is interested in boys to break up their relationship'. He said 'if you do that, I will kill myself'. I asked* [removed] *whether he felt like acting on those feelings and he said 'no, he was just saying it'…. To the group I explained that if anyone feels like acting on those thoughts that they needed to talk to a trusted adult. We then talked about who the adults were that they felt comfortable going to.*"

While some participants were reported to be "*reluctant to 'trust' in facilitators*" or presented as defensive at their first session, the disclosures made by participants throughout the program demonstrates how the sessions facilitated a trusting and confidential environment: "[removed] *was extremely open and reflective with regard to exploring her gender identity and sexuality and continues to struggle to do so. Some extremely valuable contributions to the discussion.*"

"*Discussed anxiety and challenges in having experienced sexual abuse, discussed previous aggressive behaviour and self-harm having not addressed this abuse at the time, but now having withdrawn and isolated herself. Discussed positives of having a safe space within group.*"

Facilitators were required to competently interpret participant behaviour and understand when referral was required. The self-assessment sheets provided facilitators with valuable insight into the participants current wellbeing and experiences, especially if they were not confident to contribute in session, for example, one participant described some challenging experiences in school, but did not wish to complete the assessments. In week 4 the facilitator reported that "*x chose not to complete 'feelings' sheet this week. Regularly refusing paperwork but participates actively in discussion and activities.*" This participant was then absent in week 9. The facilitator reported that the participant had completed "*Limited evaluations so challenging to know how x is feeling and progressing in understanding content.*" This is an example of how the participant worksheets is useful to facilitators.

Positive feedback for the program

Many facilitator reports indicated that participants responded positively to the program.

"[removed] *has really 'come into his own' during ABC. He frequently engages with the content and shares personal examples. He encouraged others to participate respectfully. He commented today that he would love to do the ABC program again*!"

Others made comments that indicated the program was better than they expected. One participant did not participate in the program until week 3. The facilitator reported that "[removed] *hesitation to be in group was understandable due to other participants having already attended either 1:1 of group.* [removed] *reports he will return to group, wasn't as 'bad' as he thought.*"

Some participants were reported to only attend school when the ABC program was on "[removed] *was late to group* [ABC] *however he attended school late and reportedly only came at all to make group.*" Facilitators also reported that some participants were reported to behave very differently in ABC group versus the classroom, saying they are "*…very respectful and positive in group.*". However, some participants did not want to miss their regular school classes.

Some participants appeared to only attend one ABC session. This is a limitation in the data and it is not possible to discern why participants did not complete the program as further contact was not made with participants after the program.

4.2: TERMS 1 AND 2 2022

4.2.1 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SURVEY

This survey included a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions as well as some visual measurements to show levels of emotions or satisfaction with the program. The survey explored and evaluated the participants' experiences during the program, their learnings, their feedback and recommendations for future similar programs.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

A total of 35 participants (aged 12 to 15; average=13.5) completed the survey among which 60% (n=21) were male, 28 % (n=10) female, 3% (n=1) non-binary/third gender, and 3% (n=1) reported their gender as other. 6% (n=2) of participants also did not report their gender status.

The participants attended the program at schools in locations across Gippsland, including Sale College in Wellington Shire (23%, n=8), Leongatha Secondary College in South Gippsland Shire (40%, n=14), and Traralgon Secondary College in Latrobe City (31%, n=11). A small number of participants (6%, n=2) did not mention the area in which they attended the program. The number of surveys collected from each school by gender is shown in Figure 7 below, with Traralgon Secondary College having the highest number overall.
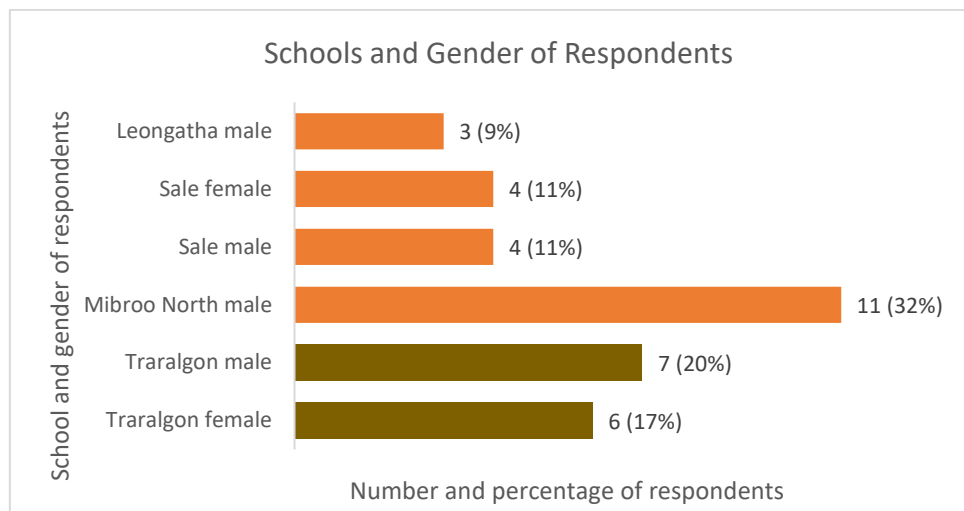

Figure 7: The number and percentages of surveys collected from each school.

Most of the participants were motivated to attend the program based on the encouragement of their teachers (34%, n=12), parents (20%, n=7) as well as their own personal interest (23%, n=8). During the program, the participants were mostly engaged with group work (80%, n=28) while some participants also attended one on one sessions, family work or all types of the delivery modes. The frequency of participants' type of participation are presented in Figure 8.
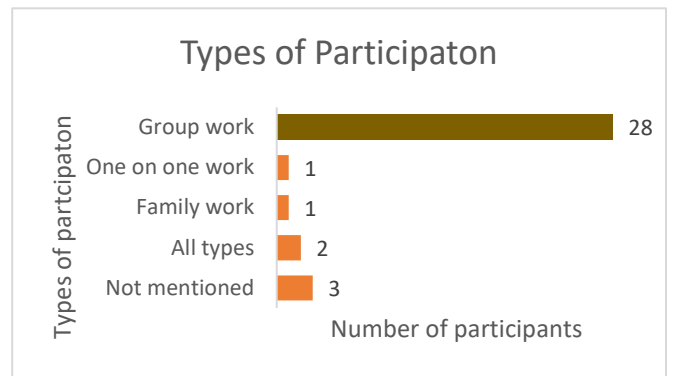

Figure 8: Frequency of type of participation

ANGER MANAGEMENT

As a part of the survey, the participants were asked to rate their anger level before and after program. They were able to show it through a visual (emoji) sliding scale (see Table 1) that was coded between 1 (no anger) to 5 (highest level of anger). As shown in Table 1, a decrease in anger scores was reported by participants. Based on inferential statistical tests, the improvement in anger level was statistically significant.

Anger Scores	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average Scores
Pre-program	32	2	5	**4**
Post-program	27	1	5	**2.5**

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for anger scores

FAVOURITE PARTS AND USEFULNESS OF THE PROGRAM

Through an open-ended question, the participants were asked about their favourite part of the program. The most common answers were "activities", "lollipop", "games", and "getting out of class". The responses of the participants are presented in a word cloud (see below) that gives a visual representation of word frequency.

Figure 9: Word cloud representing most frequent words used: favourite part of the program

The participants also were asked to rate the usefulness of the program on a scale from 1 to 10. The average score was 8 which shows that the majority of participants rated the program as a highly useful.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE

Two questions were included in the survey to evaluate the knowledge building capacity of the program. In the first question, the participants were asked to complete the sentence "Family violence is …". Some common themes emerged between participants' responses to this question. Accordingly, the responses commonly referred to hitting other family members, describing family violence as "bad for children", and referring to it as a type of abuse. Some representative comments are presented below.

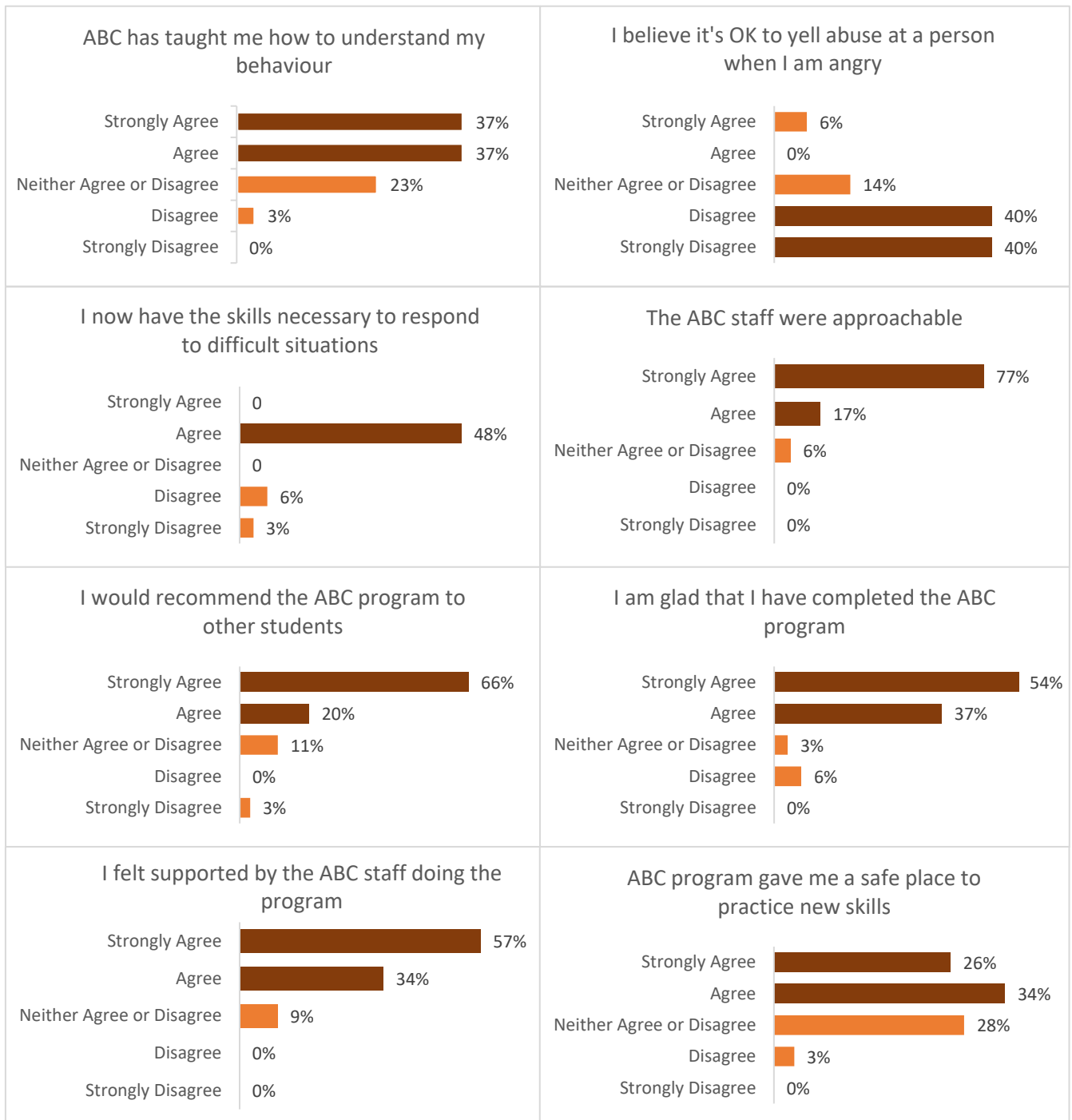| Family violence is …..	
"physical and mental abuse"	"any type of violence to a family member mental, emotional, physical"
"when Dad Hits Mum	"Physically being touched
"bad for children stressful	"Abuse/bad/bad for kids, it can also give people depression and anxiety."

Table 2: Family violence is ….

Participants were asked to show whether their knowledge about family violence had improved due to their participation in the program. To answer to this question the participants were able to rate the level of knowledge improvement on a scale from 1 (zero knowledge) to 10 (a lot of knowledge). The average score of 7 was recorded for all responses which showed that the participants mostly considered the program successful in improving their knowledge about family violence.

OVERALL PROGRAM EVALUATION FEEDBACK

The participants were asked how much they agreed with a series of 15 statements to assess their general satisfaction with the program and its efficacy. The options ranged from *"strongly disagree"* to *"strongly agree"* (See Figures 10 – 17) The majority of participants (74%, n=26) confirmed that the program had helped them to understand their behaviours. Due to the program, 80% (n=28) of the participants said that they had a good understanding of inappropriate aggressive behaviours, 68% (n=24) of participants believed they had gained the necessary skills to cope with difficult situations, and 71% (n=25) believed that the program had helped them to manage their feelings. With regard to

the approachability of ABC staff, 94% (n= 33) of the participants were satisfied, and 91%(n=32) felt supported by the staff members. In recommending the program, 86% (n=30) said that they would recommend the program to other participants. A total of 91% (n=32) confirmed that they were glad to have completed the program, and 60% (n=21) considered it as a safe place to practice new skills.

ABC has taught me how to understand my behaviour

Strongly Agree	37%
Agree	37%
Neither Agree or Disagree	23%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0%

I believe it's OK to yell abuse at a person when I am angry

Strongly Agree	6%
Agree	0%
Neither Agree or Disagree	14%
Disagree	40%
Strongly Disagree	40%

I now have the skills necessary to respond to difficult situations

Strongly Agree	0
Agree	48%
Neither Agree or Disagree	0
Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	3%

The ABC staff were approachable

Strongly Agree	77%
Agree	17%
Neither Agree or Disagree	6%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%

I would recommend the ABC program to other students

Strongly Agree	66%
Agree	20%
Neither Agree or Disagree	11%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	3%

I am glad that I have completed the ABC program

Strongly Agree	54%
Agree	37%
Neither Agree or Disagree	3%
Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	0%

I felt supported by the ABC staff doing the program

Strongly Agree	57%
Agree	34%
Neither Agree or Disagree	9%
Disagree	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%

ABC program gave me a safe place to practice new skills

Strongly Agree	26%
Agree	34%
Neither Agree or Disagree	28%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0%

Figures 10 to 17: Participant Feedback

PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

The participants were asked to provide their feedback and suggestions for different aspects of the program. The first area was about the main topics addressed during the program. These topics consisted of "emotional intelligence", "consent", "understanding family violence", "positive communication", and "emotional regulation". The participants were asked to rank the order of importance for each topic, with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important. The average score for each topic is presented in Figure 18. As shown, the highest average score was for emotional regulation, highlighting this factor as the most important topic based on the point of view of the participants.
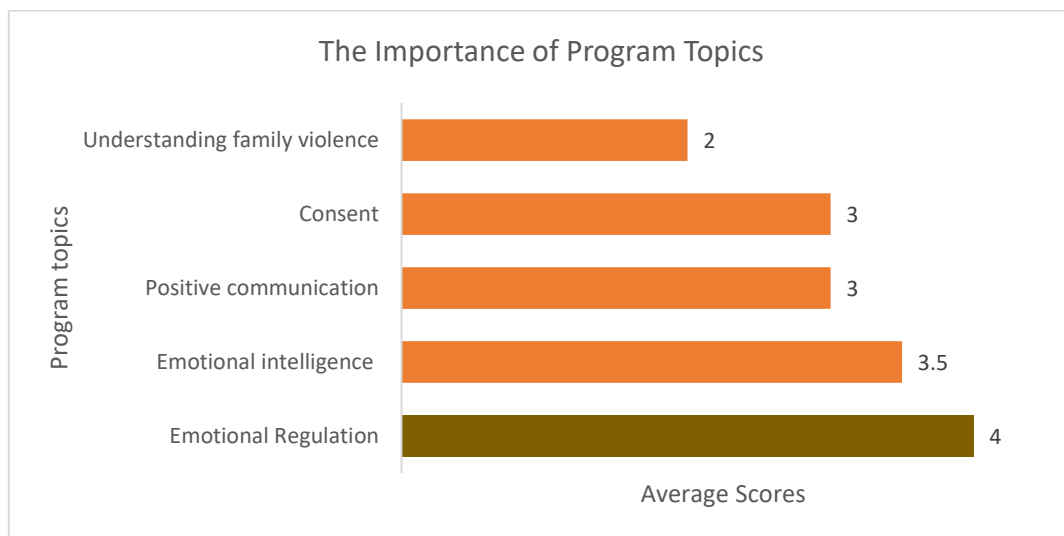
Figure 18: Average scores for the importance of different program topics

In addition, participants were asked "who would benefit from doing this program?". There were some common themes amongst the responses, the being "*anyone*", "*myself*", "*my friends*", and "*kids*". Some examples of other responses are presented below.

"*People struggling*"	"*People with mental illness, Autism*"
"*Kid struggling with school*"	"*Mentally challenged children*"
"*Family*"	"*Anyone except for old people*"

Table 3: Who would benefit from the program

The participants were asked whether they would recommend the program to other adolescents. All responses were "yes" (94%, n=33) except one participant who mentioned "yes and no" (3%, n=1) and another participant who did not answer to this question (3%, n=1).

Participants were asked to rate the importance of different features of the program through rating each one on a scale of "not important at all", "slightly important", "moderately important", "very important", or "extremely important". As shown in Figure 19, approachable staff (94%, n= 33), program activities (83%, n=29), and provided food (83%, n=29) were rated as highly important by the majority of participants. The majority of participants (74%, n=26) believed that the worksheets were not important or were slightly important.
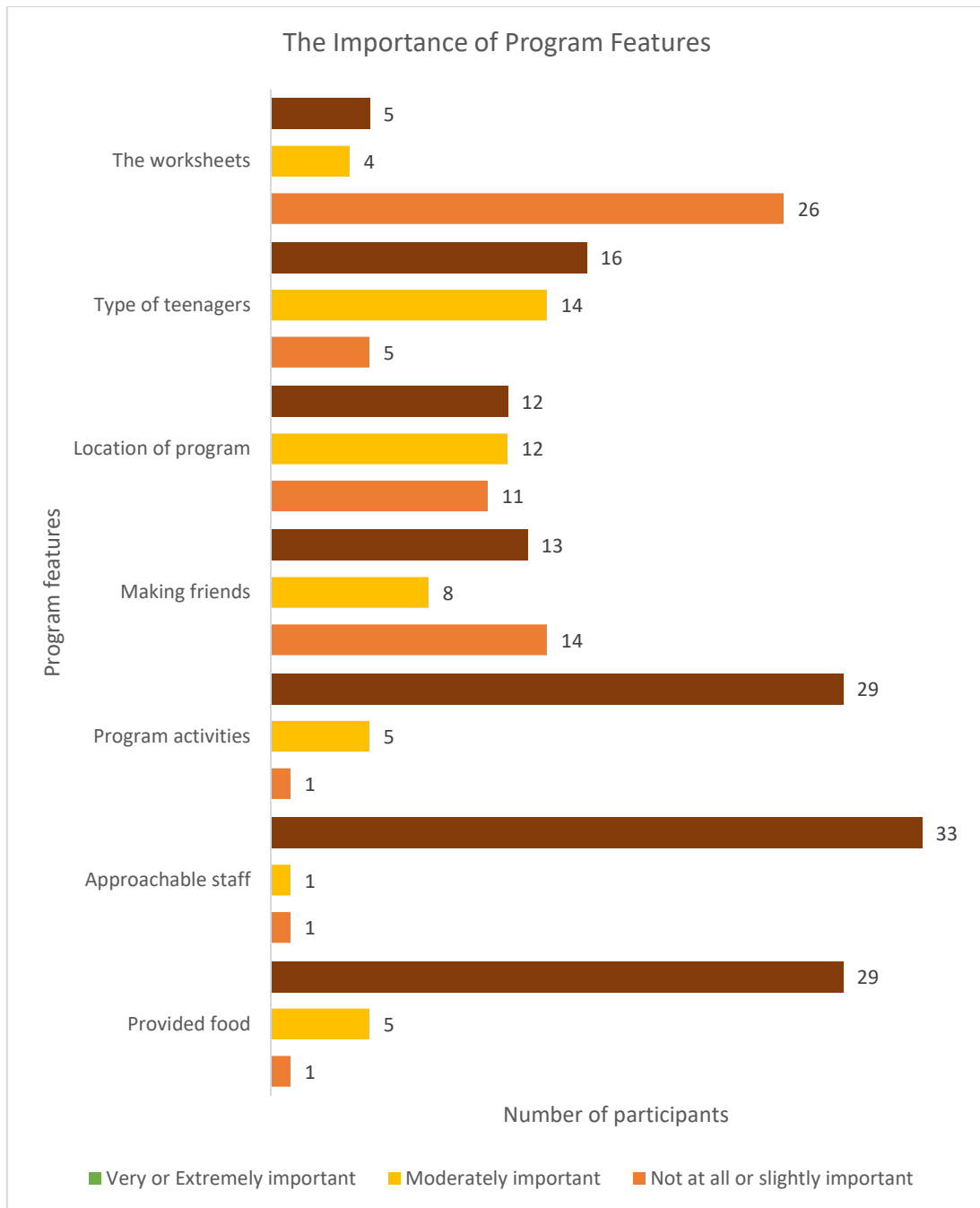
Figure19: The importance of different aspects of the program.

Finally, through an open-ended question, the participants were asked for general feedback about the program. Most of the participants did not have any additional feedback, however six participants commented as Table 4 below.

"It has helped me with anger and everything"	*"More consistent rooms"*
"Two sessions a week"	*"Nope I'm happy :)"*
"It's good how it is"	*"Don't play the Balloon game."*

Table 4: General Feedback

SUMMARY

In summary, the data showed a good diversity of participation in terms of different genders, and areas participating into the program. The results showed that the program has been successful in improving anger management, better understanding of behaviours and specifically aggressive behaviours, coping skills, and emotion regulation. The participants reported that they had perceived the program as a safe place to improve their skills, and they showed high levels of satisfaction with the support they received from the staff members, the activities, and food services. The majority of participants recommended that the program would be useful for young people, especially with its focus on emotion regulation skills.

4.2.2 EVALUATION OF PROGRAM TOOLS

_____

Two self-assessment evaluation tools were designed and used throughout the ABC program to assess the participant's progress and outcomes. Firstly, participants were asked how much they agreed with a series of statements about their experiences while taking part in the program and issues they may have experienced outside of the sessions. Secondly, a visual assessment tool (using emojis) was used to evaluate the emotional experiences of participants after completing each session. Additionally, some open-ended items were provided at the end of each assessment tool for free comments. The reported comments were mostly phrases like "no", "I don't have any comment" and were therefore not included in the qualitative analysis.

SELF ASSESSMENT – EXPERIENCES IN AND OUTSIDE OF THE PROGRAM

The self-assessment tool to explore participants' experiences during and outside of the program was completed three times, the first week, the middle in week five and the final session in week eight. (Appendix …) The tool included ten statements to which participants were asked how much they agreed with each on a five-point scale; "*disagree*", "*slightly disagree*", "*not sure*", "*slightly agree*", and "*agree*".

EXPERIENCES IN PROGRAM

STATEMENT 1.

The majority of participants (64%, n= 68) agreed or slightly agreed that they felt comfortable participating in discussions at the first session. This was similar at the final session with 57% (n=61) of participants agreeing or slightly agreeing that they still felt comfortable with participating in discussions.
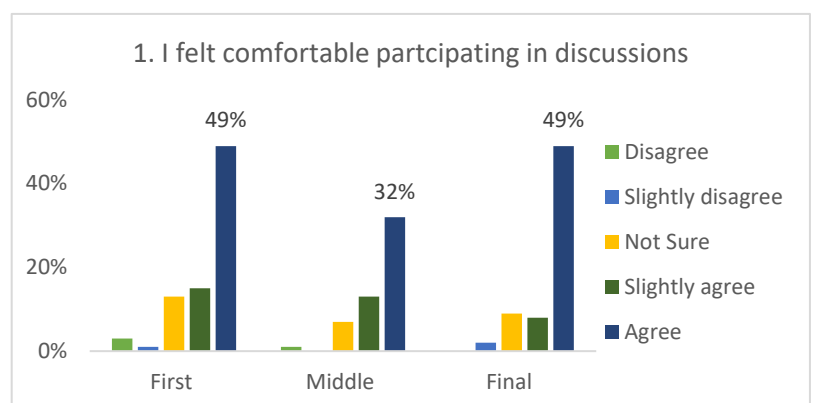
Figure 20: Feeling comfortable participating in discussions

STATEMENT 2.

A total of 59% (n=63) of participants felt accepted and not judged by other participants (agreed or slightly agreed) at the first session, and this proportion was similar at the final session (55%, n=59).
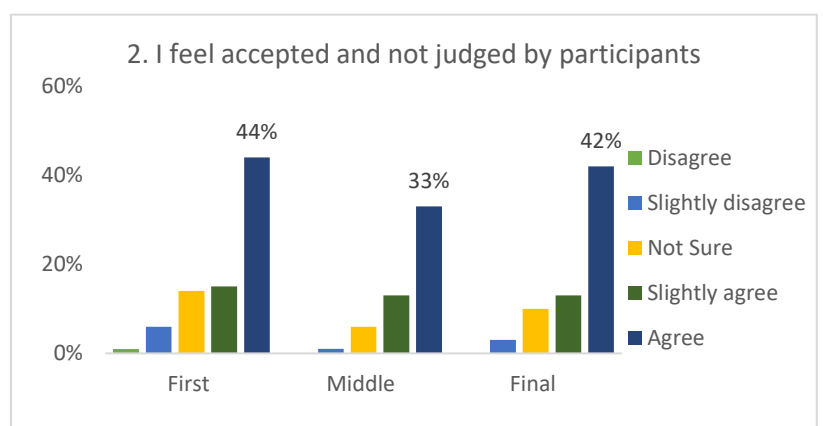
Figure 21: Feeling accepted by participants

STATEMENT 3.

Similarly, 65% (n=69) of participants felt accepted and not judged by facilitators (agreed or slightly agreed) at the end of the first session, and this was confirmed by the majority of the participants (55%, n=59) at the final session.
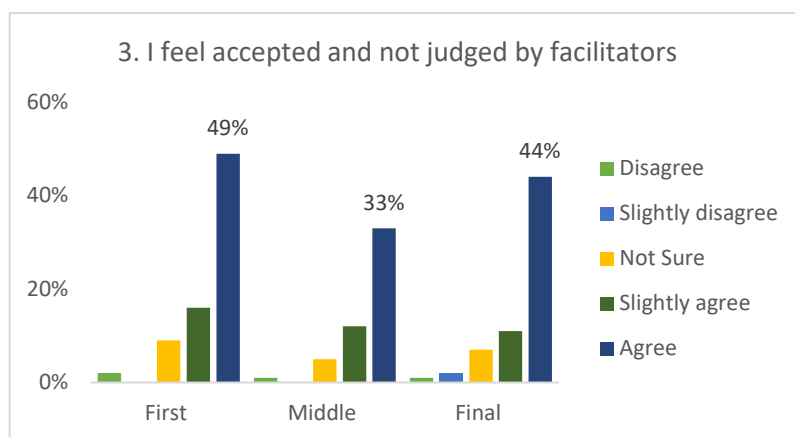
Figure 22; Feeling accepted by facilitators

STATEMENT 8.

A total of 59% (n=64) of participants agreed or slightly agreed that they had found the information helpful at the end of the first session. Similarly, at the end of the final session 54% (n=58) gave the same feedback.
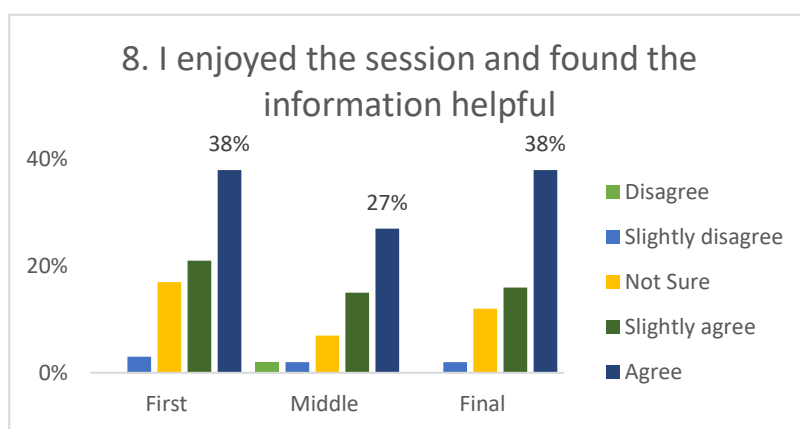
Figure 23: Enjoyment of session

STATEMENTS 9 AND 10

The participants had consistent positive feedback about facilitators' good understanding of the topic (first session: 62%, (n= 66) final session: 57%, (n=61)) and the helpfulness of the activities to understand the information provided (first session: 58%, (n= 62) final session: 51%, (n=55)).
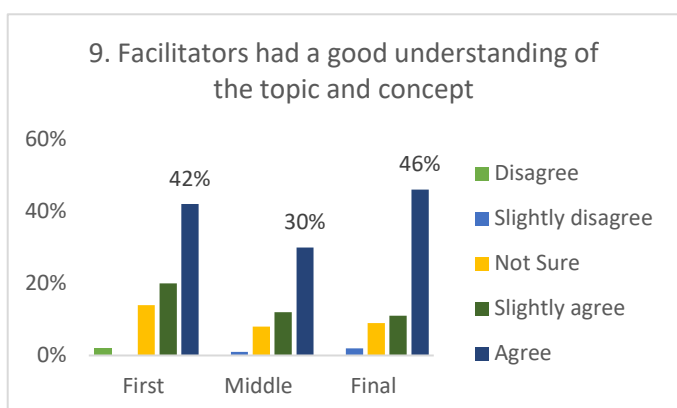
Figure 24: Understanding of topics
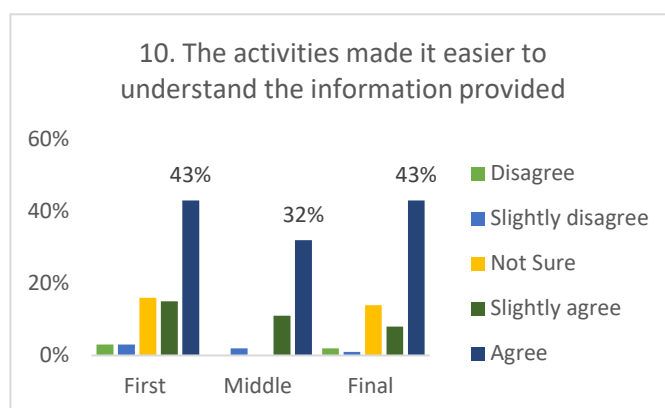
Figure 25: Activities

27

EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE OF THE PROGRAM

STATEMENT 4.

At the end of the first session, the majority of participants (61%, n=65) agreed or slightly agreed that they enjoyed participating in physical and community activities, and this was confirmed by 50% (n=54) of participants at the final session.
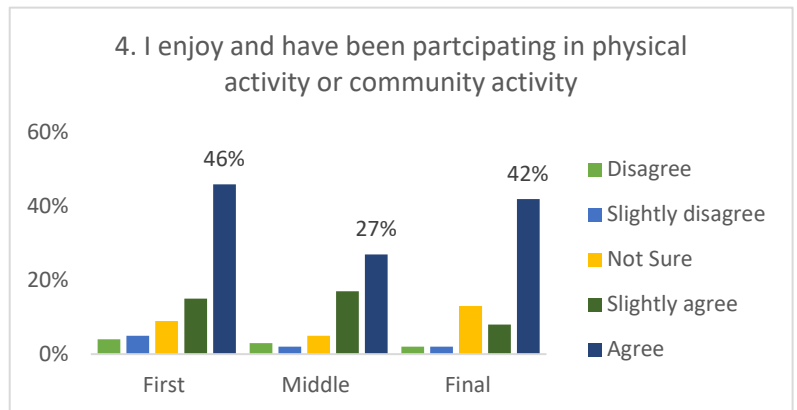
Figure 26: Participation in activities

STATEMENTS 5, 6 AND 7

Other statements about experiences outside of the sessions, (5, 6, & 7) included fighting not with a family member, my family had a fight/argument and staying away from the family home. Only for one of the experiences (statement 7) a pattern of responses was found across the assessments. At the end of the first session, the majority of participants (56%, n=60) reported that they had not stayed away from home overnight unexpectedly and without permission. Similar results were confirmed by 52% (n=55) of participants at the final session.
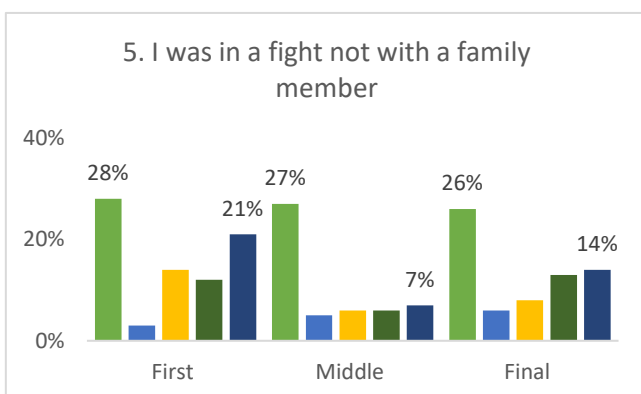
Figure 27: Fighting with a family member
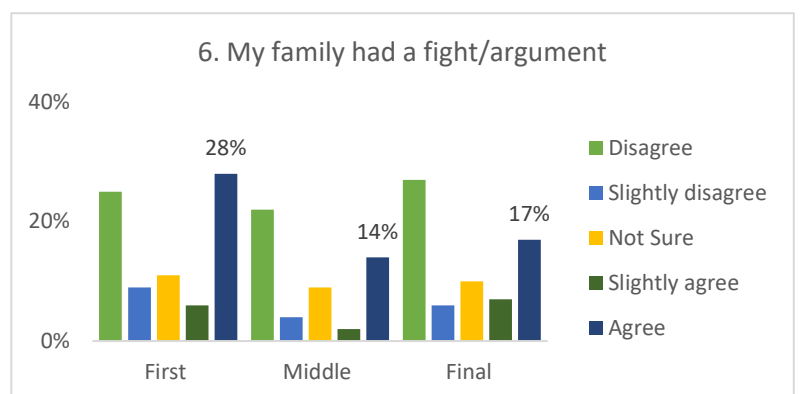
Figure 28: Family fight/argument
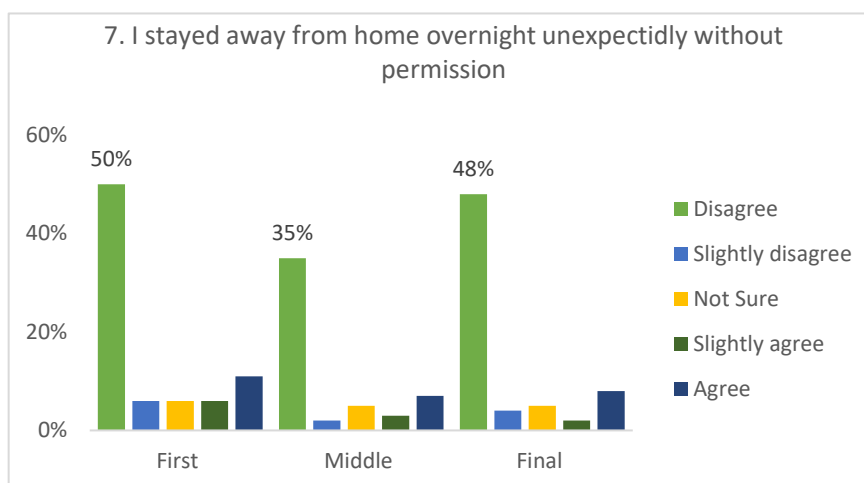
Figure 29: Staying away from home

28

Based on statistical analyses, significant gender-based differences were found amongst the participants in the results. Therefore, the outcomes were analysed for male and female participants separately.

Male and female participants consistently showed certain trends of changes across the sessions for most areas of the assessment. However, there were significant differences between male and female participants in these trends of changes. Accordingly, the female participants showed significant changes from the beginning to middle sessions in most areas of the assessment as discussed above, but the changes were not sustained until the final session. Conversely, male participants mostly showed significant changes until the final sessions. These gender-based differences are shown in Figure 30below (the results show the percentages of participants who answered agree or slightly agree with the statements).
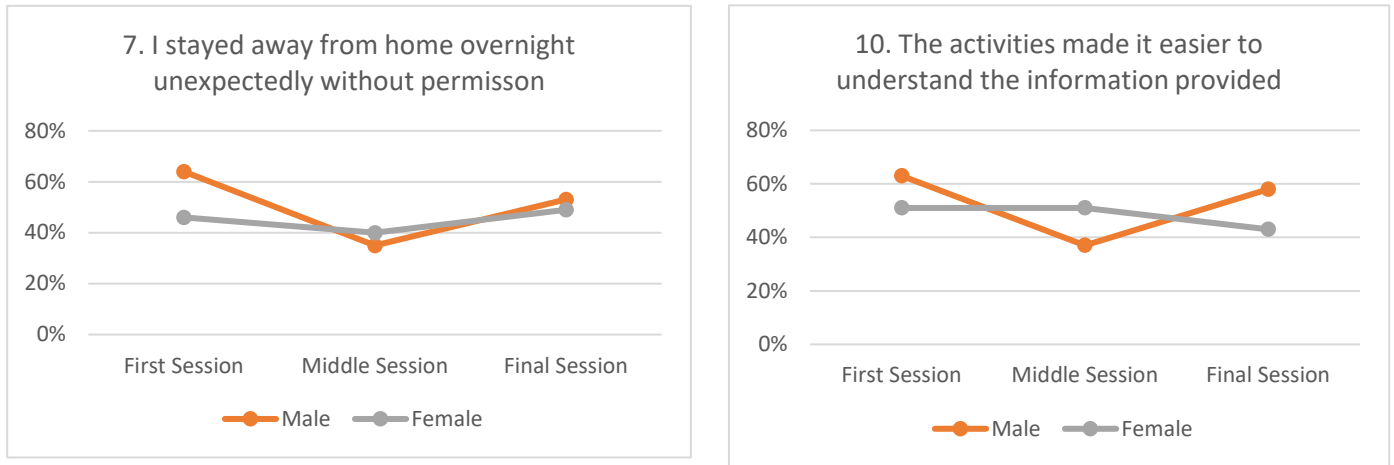
Figure 30: The trends of changes (male and female participants) for the significant outcomes

RESULTS FOR MALE PARTICIPANTS

There was no significant difference in outcomes and trends of change between the results of male participants and the general results. Therefore, the discussions presented for the general results can apply to the male participants' results as well. In summary, these results showed that male participants showed high levels of satisfaction with *"feeling comfortable participation in discussion"*, *"feeling accepted and not judged by participants and facilitators"*, *"participating in physical and community activities"*, *"finding the information helpful"*, *"facilitators' understanding of the concepts"*, and *"usefulness of the activities to understand the provided information"*. It was also confirmed that "*staying away from home without permission*" has not been a significant experience for male participants.

There was a significant decline for males in the middle third of the program with results decreasing from 80% feeling comfortable with the discussion to 40%, however these results increased back up in the final weeks. Similarly, males halved their satisfaction levels when asked if they feel judged, if the information was useful and if they enjoyed the activities. The decline was directly related to the more challenging topics covered in the middle third of the program such as power and control, positive relationships and gender equity.

RESULTS FOR FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

The results of female participants were significantly different from the results presented for male participants. The long-term efficacy of the program (based on the final assessment) on participants' satisfaction with the sessions or experiences outside the program was not evidenced for female participants. More specifically, the results showed that in no areas of the assessment female participants significantly confirmed positive outcomes in the final session. However, in the middle session, female participants confirmed short-term positive outcomes for most areas. The short-term efficacy was evidenced for "*feeling comfortable with participation in discussions*" (statement 1), "*feeling accepted and not judged by participants or facilitators",* (statements 1 and 3)*, "participating in physical and community activities"* (statement 4)*, "considering the facilitators having good understanding of the topics and concepts"* (statement 9)*, "usefulness of the activities to understand the provided information"* (statement 10)*.*

It is important to note that in all the above-mentioned areas, the majority of male participants (above 50%, n= 31 or more) confirmed positive outcomes for both beginning and final sessions, but this was not confirmed for the female participants. Another gender-based difference was that while the majority of male participants at the beginning (64%, n=38) and final sessions (53%, n=32) confirmed

that they have not stayed away from home overnight without permission, the outcome was not confirmed by the majority of female participants in any of the sessions (i.e., less than 50% or n=23 confirming the outcome across the three assessments). This can highlight the possibility that this issue might have been more frequent for female participants.

SELF ASSESSMENT - VISUAL

The emotional experiences of the participants were regularly self-assessed throughout the program using a visual self- assessment tool. The participants were presented with a number of emojis, each of which represented a type of positive or negative emotion. The participants could choose as many emotions as they wanted (both positive and negative) to show their emotions in each session.

The analysis of the self-assessment determined if the number of participants choosing a certain emotion had significantly changed from the first session to the final session. To investigate this outcome, a cut-off point of 5% difference between the results of the first session and the final session was considered, i.e., if the number of participants choosing an emotion in the final session was 5% more or less than the relevant number in the first session, this could be considered as a significant change.

Based on the above criteria, the ABC program was associated with a significant increase in the rate of feeling "happy" (11% increase) and "excited" (8% increase) as well as a significant decrease in the rate of feeling "controlled" (5% decrease). However, some increase in experiencing negative emotions were recognised as well. The program was associated with a significant increase in feeling "scared" (11% increase) and "confused" (5% increase).

Emotions	Emoji	Session 1	Session 7	% Change
Happy		38%	49%	**+11%**
Excited		27%	35%	**+8%**
Sad		21%	23%	**+2%**
Frustrated		29%	27%	**-2%**
Angry		26%	25%	**-1%**
Scared		6%	17%	**+11%**
Ashamed		6%	7%	**+1%**
Disgusted		8%	8%	**No change**
Shocked		16%	16%	**No change**
Hurt		17%	15%	**-2%**
Disappointed		16%	18%	**+2%**
Embarrassed		12%	16%	**+4%**
Alone		17%	21%	**+4%**
Insecure		16%	19%	**+3%**
Confused		17%	22%	**+5%**
Exhausted		27%	29%	**+2%**
Controlled		14%	9%	**-5%**
Isolated		9%	12%	**+3%**
Nervous		17%	21%	**+4%**

Table 5: Responses to emojis – male and female combined

However, there were significant gender-based differences in these outcomes. Therefore, the outcomes were re-analysed for each gender separately to show any potential differences between male and female participants. The comparison between male and female participants are presented in Table 6.

As shown in Table 5, for most emotions the results of male participants were consistent with the results of the whole sample as discussed above. That means that for male participants, a significant improvement in feeling "happy" (13% increase) and "excited" (8% increase), and a significant increase in negative emotions of "scared" (10% increase) and "confused" (6% increase) was confirmed to be associated with the ABC program. However, for two emotions, the results were different from the results of the whole sample. Accordingly, when considering only male participants, the results additionally supported a significant decrease in feeling "shocked" (5% decrease). Moreover, unlike what discussed for the whole sample, no significant improvement was identified for feeling "controlled" when considering only male participants. Overall, this can be concluded that significant

changes in emotions in male participants are limited to the emotions of "happy", "excited", "scared", "shocked" and "confused".

EMOTIONS	EMOJI	Session 1	Session 7	% Change	Session 1	Session 7	% Change
		MALE			FEMALE		
Happy	😊	45%	58%	**+13%**	30%	36%	**+6%**
Excited	😁	35%	43%	**+8%**	17%	23%	**+6%**
Sad	😞	18%	17%	**-1%**	23%	32%	**+9%**
Frustrated	😤	35%	32%	**-3%**	21%	21%	**No change**
Angry	😠	32%	35%	**+3%**	19%	13%	**-6%**
Scared	😨	3%	13%	**+10%**	11%	21%	**+10%**
Ashamed	😳	5%	7%	**+2%**	8%	8%	**No change**
Disgusted	🤢	7%	7%	**No change**	11%	11%	**No change**
Shocked	😮	22%	17%	**-5%**	8%	15%	**+7%**
Hurt	😔	15%	13%	**-2%**	19%	17%	**-2%**
Disappointed	😩	17%	17%	**No change**	15%	19%	**+4%**
Embarrassed	😖	12%	12%	**No change**	13%	21%	**+8%**
Alone	😢	15%	17%	**+2%**	19%	28%	**+9%**
Insecure	😟	12%	15%	**+3%**	21%	23%	**+2%**
Confused	😕	17%	23%	**+5%**	17%	21%	**+4%**
Exhausted	😫	28%	30%	**+2%**	25%	28%	**+3%**
Controlled	😖	10%	8%	**-2%**	19%	11%	**-8%**
Isolated	😳	10%	12%	**+2%**	8%	13%	**+5%**
Nervous	😬	17%	17%	**No Change**	17%	28%	**+11%**

Table 6: Responses to emojis – comparison of males and females

Similar to male participants, female participants also showed a significant increase in feeling "happy" (6% increase), "excited" (6% increase), and "scared" (10% increase). However, only female participants showed a significant decrease in feeling "angry" (6% decrease) and "controlled" (8% decrease). Moreover, unlike male participants, the female participants showed a significant increase in feeling "sad" (9% increase), "shocked" (7% increase), "embarrassed" (8% increase), "alone" (9% increase), "isolated" (5% increase), and "nervous" (11% increase).

The comparison between male and female participants across all sessions is highlighted in Figure 31 below.
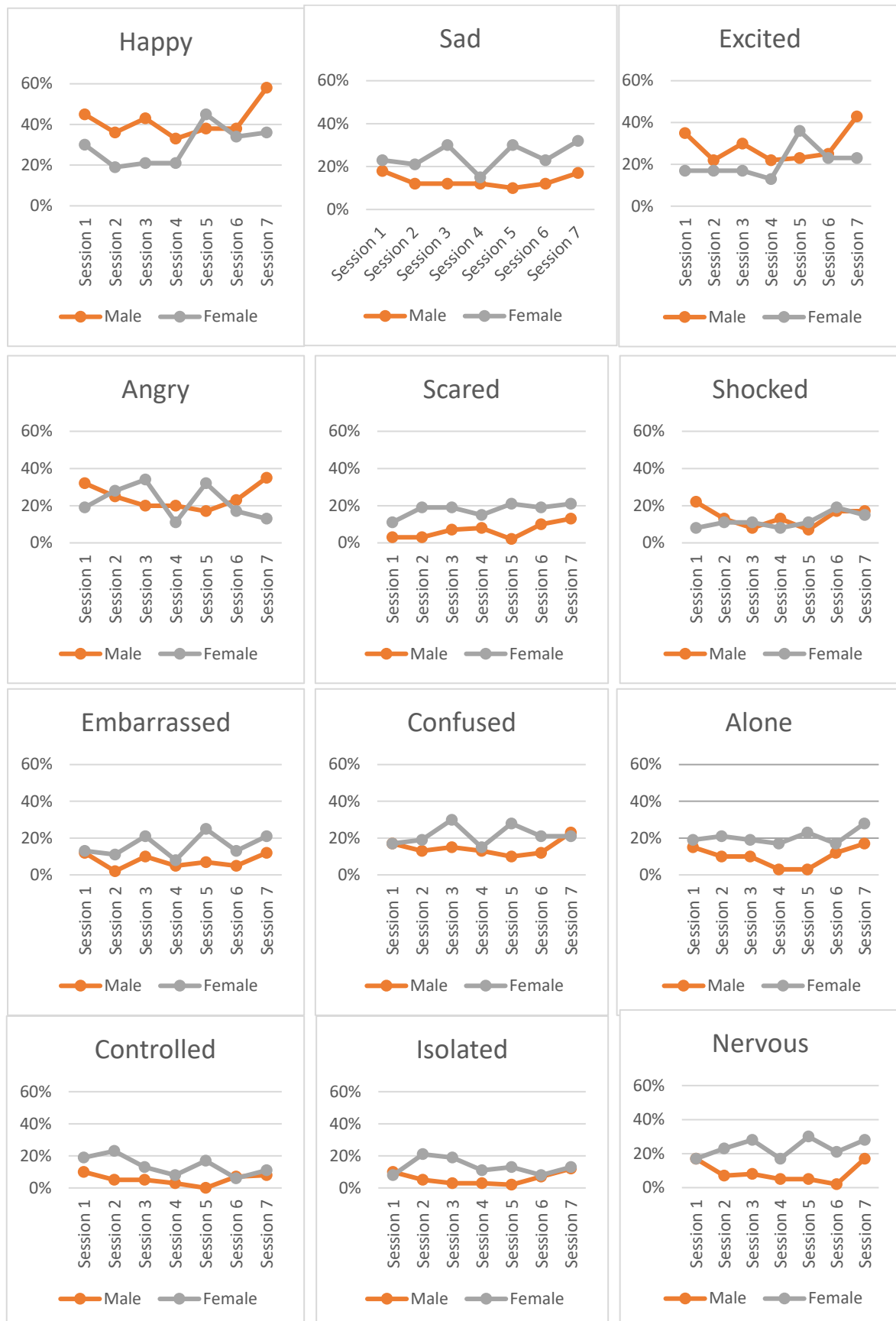
Figure 31: Comparison between male and female participants across sessions

Figure 3. The trends of emotional changes for male and female participants based on the percentages of chosen emotions.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the results of the self-assessment confirmed high levels of student satisfaction with most aspects of the ABC program. Good experiences of knowledge and skill development as well as good connection with facilitators were evidenced based on these results. However, the results were significantly moderated by participants' gender. Accordingly, male participants had a more consistent and longer-term satisfaction with the program and its positive effects compared to female participants. In addition, some issues experienced outside the sessions were significantly more common amongst female participants compared to male participants. While both genders showed significant emotional changes across the program, the intensity and variety of emotional changes were more evidenced for female participants. This implies that the program was successful in connecting the participants with their emotions and enabling them to identify their emotions, and this effect was evidenced more significantly amongst female participants compared to male participants.

4.2.3 FACILITATOR WEEKLY IMPACT STATEMENTS

Facilitators were asked to complete weekly impact statements for participants. These included an assessment of participants behaviour in response to six statements: Client's participation in discussion, Respect of other participants, Punctuality, Willingness to engage in activities, Positive behaviours and General mood/demeanour. A Likert scale was used with 0 being rated as poor, 1 – average, 2 – OK, 3 – very good and 4 – excellent. Facilitators were then asked to record if the participants made any disclosures to the group or facilitators, if there were issues or areas of concern and any other comments. Not unlike the previous data from 2021, the effect over time for all participants is small and inconsistent, however, analysis of participants impact statements alongside the data provides an insight into their individual progress through the program as shown by the case studies below.

Case study 1: Mary[2]

Mary is a female attending school in the Latrobe Valley. When starting the program facilitators noted that she idealised and discussed using physical assault in the settlement to settle disagreements. She respected other participants though her mood and positive behaviours were low. During the session in week two she disclosed that she had avoided being suspended from school which would have led to her being sent to another school. She did participate well in discussions and activities, and this continued in week three.
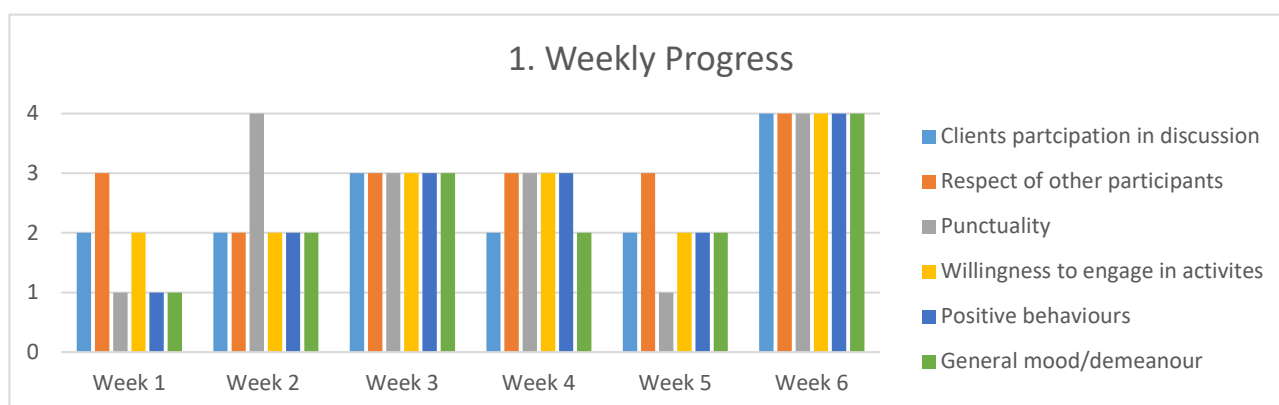
Figure 32: Weekly Progress Case Study 1

It was noted in week four that, although she participated in activities, she was missing two of her friends in the group and felt less confident because of this. Mary found week five difficult with led to her being unsure of wanting to continue in the program. She did not like talking about some of the topics and was quiet. It was explained that participation was voluntary, however, she did return for week six and rated excellent on all measures.

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[2] Names changed to protect identity

Case study 2: Gemma

Gemma attends a school in rural South Gippsland. Due to illness she was unable to attend week one and concerns were raised by the facilitators in week 2 about her strategy of 'smashing' people who bully to stop it. She participated in the activity Boom Boom Balloon, where she listened to other participants discussing how they deal with stressful situations.
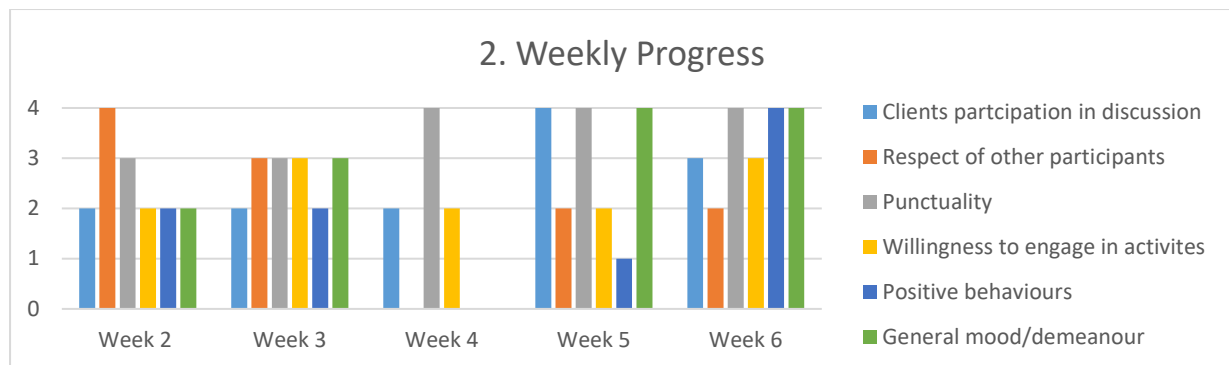
Figure 33: Weekly Progress Case Study 2

Week 3

There was a discussion in week three that Gemma took part in about not being listened to by staff in school. Gemma mentioned "*a teacher who 'perves on girls' and makes them feel uncomfortable".* The participants had reported this to the wellbeing staff. There was an issue that was recorded in week four where Gemma's became verbally abusive to another student, which prompted facilitators to include a discussion of respect for other points of view the following week. She scored 0 on respect of other participants, positive behaviours and general mood. Facilitators raised concerns about Gemma's behaviour in week five when talking about communication and positive relationships:

> "*The group facilitators share a concern for the client's ideas and beliefs about sex as an exchangeable currency, and her negative attitude towards women. The group facilitators will continue to monitor the client's behaviour and disclosures*."

Although Gemma was a little disruptive in week six, she once again engaged in activities and discussion.

Case Study 3: Dan

Dan attends a school in the Latrobe Valley. Facilitators noted in week one that Dan did not have the ability to read emotional cue's from other students, taking part in name calling of another student and being loud and disruptive. Significant concerns were raised by facilitators in week two, with Dan scoring 0 on all measures. He displayed inappropriate sexualised behaviours and facilitators intended to investigate this further, talk to the school well-being staff about referrals to other programs that were more specific to his needs.
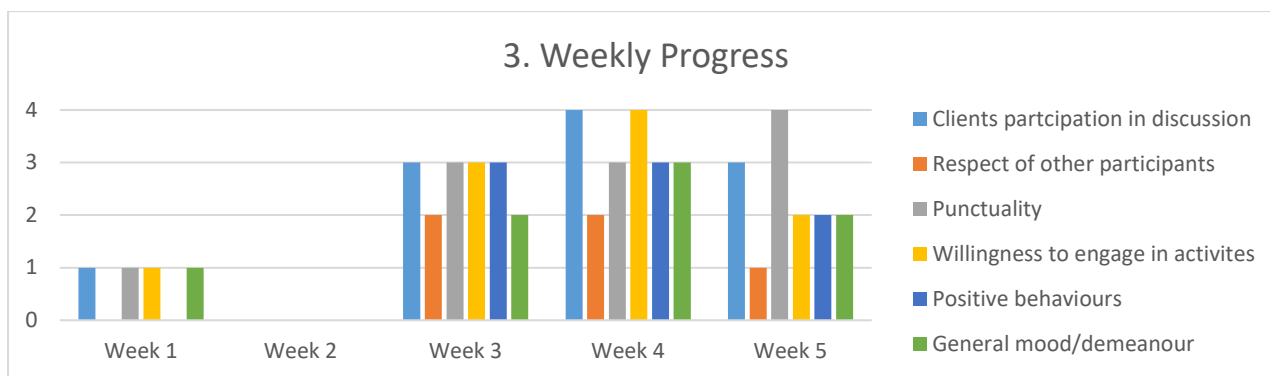
Figure 34: Weekly Progress Case Study 3

Dan was noted as being 'calmer' in week three and participated well in group discussions and activities. it was also noted he '*sometimes have trouble controlling his energy levels and does go a little off topic. With support Dan is able to come back into the discussion at hand*'. Facilitators commented in week four that the is 'a very smart young man' and that his responses to most activities and discussions were valid. He himself was trying to become less distracted by his friends and focus better. Though he participated in activities and discussions in week five, his concentration remained an issue and he scored lower on all measures. No data was recorded for week six.

Case study 4: Chris

Attending sessions at a school in the Latrobe Valley, Chris's progress through the program showed significant improvement. During week one he scored fairly low on the measures, and it was noted he was rude and disrespectful towards others in the group, his friends in particular.
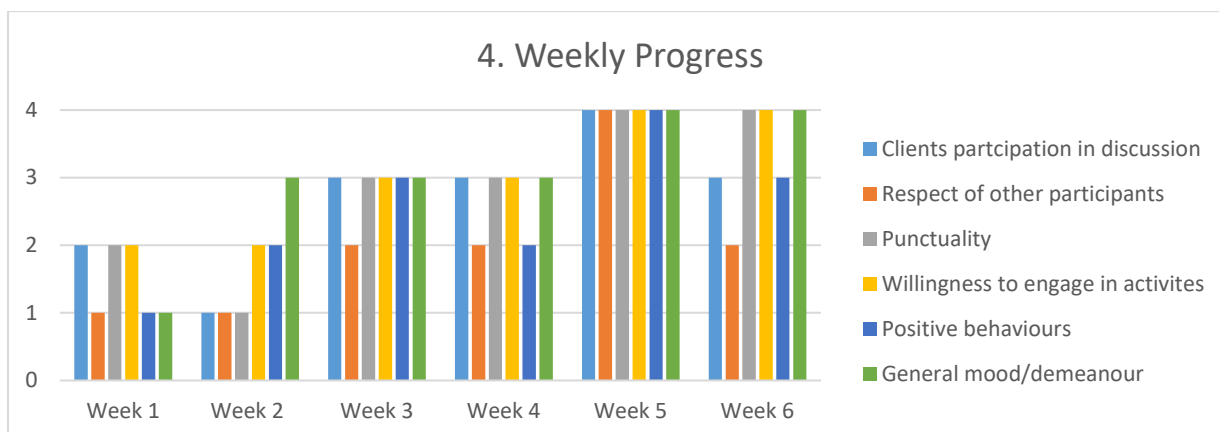
Figure 35: Weekly Progress Case Study 4

Arriving late to week two, Chris participated in discussions where he could although the found difficulty staying on task and distracted others. Facilitators did note that he is a 'happy kid'. Chris' did well in participation in group discussions and activities through weeks three and four with facilitators noting that Chris '*is a lovely young man, he just needs a little support with staying focussed*'. Again in weeks five and six he participated well, and facilitators noted that he "*mentioned he hasn't been getting angry lately and is feeling happy about this*".

Responses to the program are very individual, with many participants having complex behaviour. The ability to adapt and include relevant material as the need arises is a strength of the program, as is the ability to monitor and refer participants to either the school's welfare teams or to other programs.

A thematic analysis was undertaken of interviews of six facilitators of the ABC program. is something that benefits. The interviews took place via TEAMS virtual meeting software in 2022. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clark[4] six step process for thematic analysis. The findings of the thematic analysis is presented under three major themes and eight minor themes as shown in Figure 36.

Figure 36: Thematic Analysis Themes

Theme 1: Unpacking the program

The major theme Unpacking the Program encompassed the what the program aimed to do and who benefited from the program. The identifying and understanding of healthy and unhealthy behaviours was explored in Understanding behaviours, the activities that were central to the program were looked at in Catalyst for deeper conversation and Changing behaviours examined how the students benefited from the program.

Aim of the program

The aim of the program as explained by the participants was to assist students who were slipping through the cracks in the system or in school, who needs may be being overlooked;

> "We were catching students that were slipping through the cracks, ones that weren't quite involved fully with services yet and ones that weren't engaged in school."

Referral to the program was for young people who were at risk of or displaying traits of aggression, bullying or violent behaviours. The program was designed to "*generate conversation and awareness, and that cognitive thinking about your personal reactions to different things externally and also … how you deal with those*".

> *"… the idea is that they're thinking of themselves in the situation of what does that actually look like? Is it appropriate behaviour and how do I change that? What are the strategies I could be using to better deal with the feelings that I'm feeling of lack of control?"*

Equipping young people with life-long strategies to deal with their emotions whenever they arose was a key component of the program. They looked at internal feelings as well as those that arose due to outside influences.

> *"This program will give you or your young person tools to put in their toolbox … when it comes to dealing with what do I do with frustration? What do I do with anger? What do I do with stress? It will hopefully help them with lifelong strategies that they can draw on whenever they need to."*

Education around emotions was key to the program, however as one participant noted it was also "*around the way that their emotions affect other people are pretty central to the whole program*".

Developing and dealing with relationships with their peers, family and friends and listening to their instincts about underpinned the discussions and activities, to know;

> *"how to deal with relationships that are either unhealthy or healthy and how to go about either ceasing the relationship or asking for change in the relationship. And to notice within themselves when they're feeling … their body is telling them that something's not right and to actually act upon that."*

The message that facilitators had for parents when talking about the program was one which recognised that the young people needed to learn strategies to deal with lived experiences and deal with; "*the day-to-day lives of the challenges that they struggle with. It's to deal with the real-world challenges that we face every day.*"

Understanding behaviours

Understanding and identifying unhealthy behaviours is a key component of the program. Identifying their behaviour in the past may not have been acceptable was for some a catalyst for change, for seeking answers and help grow;

> *"We've actually had quite a few young people that have identified during the group that they are actually perpetrating in their relationships with either their girlfriends, their boyfriends and then actually seeking help from there to actually be better themselves."*

Taking a different perspective on their behaviour, in seeing that some actions, though they have not been physically abusive to others is still not acceptable, for example, one participant said;

> *"They don't understand that pushing the table over when they leave is violence and is aggression. They think that they're doing the right thing by not hitting someone or walking away, but in the process they've punched a wall or flipped the table over."*

Often, for the students outbursts of inappropriate behaviour are a culmination of a series of events, of issues that have not been resolved or understood which led to a tipping point;

> *"…we don't notice in our daily lives is we have that explosion, and everybody says, "oh, where did that come from?" whereas we don't actually realise that there were a whole bunch of compounding things that led to that explosion. It wasn't just an explosion over one thing, it was an explosion over many things and a lot of the time it's undealt with things.*

A key learning and teaching strategy is unpacking the 'window of tolerance'. For the facilitator asking the students what it is, allowing them to explore it and explain reinforces the learning which then becomes "*more of an entrenched memory*." Listening to themselves, their body to identify that window is crucial;

> "*We've got that little window of opportunity that our body's telling us, that I can still make a decision here, but if you kind of get past that then you may not be able to make the right choice because you're in that flight of fight mode.*"

Engaging with schools at times was problematic. Participants were aware of the of the stigma and sensitivity of the nature of the program and that this could be a barrier to schools participating. When hearing that the program is around family violence prevention that "can scare a lot of schools"; *It can scare a lot of other people involved because it's the whole, "oh no, we don't have those issues here at this school", because a lot of schools don't want to have that label…*

However, by the end of the program, the activities and discussions had given participants the space, skills and opportunity to reflect on their feelings and emotions and learn how to manage them.

> "*It's incredible to see them towards the end of the term actually really being able to have real, honest, open conversations about their emotions and how they handle things, how they resolve conflict and identifying things that they possibly don't do as well as they could and things that are healthy behaviours and unhealthy behaviours.*"

Catalyst for deeper conversation

Central to the program was a series of activities that were "*used as analogies and there's just absolute strength in that".* For one participant they felt that the activities were key to understanding and education as they often felt that when they were just talking, they were '*talking in riddles'* to them. An example of the activities was boom boom balloon. A balloon sits inside a frame with the students applying pressure to it with sticks, with it inevitably popping. This exercise explains; *what it feels like or what it might feel like in the body when stress is building up, or anxiety or frustration, and so we use it to highlight our early warning signs.* To stimulate discussion an 'emotions ball' is thrown across the classroom, the student then has to discuss the emotion that is facing them when they catch it. This "*takes away the on-the-spot sort of thing of having to pick an emotions, because if you ever speak to a teenager, they have three emotions, it's sad, glad and mad … they're the safe ones.*"

Activities and games to open discussion with different games targeting different topics, for example, when looking at the facts of family violence;

> "*…you just get them to stand at the end of the room and, it's like 'What's the Time Mr Wolf'. They take a step forward, if you're right they put up the paddle.*"

Changing behaviours

Understanding the students and building relationships with them before beginning to address the topics is the foundation for a successful outcome. It is only by seeing *through a lens of actually understanding the kids"* that the risk of re-traumatizing them is mitigated*.* For many of the students they are *growing up in environments where they normalize the stuff that they see."* It is when the discussions and activities shed light on some of the behaviours in a way that they understand that they begin to see that they *"shouldn't be tolerated as they are".* For young people there are always going to have conflicts, but the importance is in the way they react and deal with the '*big emotions'*.

> *"…we know adolescents are going to have conflicts constantly. They're going to fall out of friendship groups. They're going to have boyfriends and girlfriends and they're going to break up. They going to get back together. They're going to have a new one next week, type of thing … there's going to be so many conflicts that they go through throughout school. Being able to handle these big emotions and resolve those conflicts in a way and know how to do that, is going to help these kids so much socially…"*

Building emotional intelligence in you people by helping them to *"understand how to handle their emotions better"* is something that benefits everyone; *"it's not just the kids who benefit from it, it's the school, it's the teachers, it's the families, it's the parents, it's the friends. Everyone's benefitting from it."*

One participant noted that helping young people build emotional intelligence helps in their studies, they are able to concentrate better in class and make the most of their studies. Some young people are *just really a little behind in their emotional intelligence".* The program helps with this;

> *"We give a bit of education around emotions and rupture and repair style relationships, and how to interact with people, and how your actions and body language effects those relationships and interactions with other people."*

One participant noted that it is not about not feeling or preventing emotions but it is about knowing what to do when they arise. Feedback received highlighted this; *"Some of the feedback that I've received is along the lines of, "I still get angry, but I know what to do with it now"."* During the program some students disclosed that they had used inappropriate behaviour in certain situations, however, they were given the tools to assist in changing behaviour;

> *"We've also had other people that have identified that they do use family violence at home and then going to the self-regulation, the power control will actually help them … identify when that's happening, how they could curb those behaviours, and then actually take that home with them, they're utilizing those tools and strategies that we assist them with to actually prevent that from happening."*

This is not, as one participant said, a *"foolproof process and it's not you've done the program once and you're healed and an immaculate human being and functioning member of society. There's still work to be done".* However, for those that complete the program there is a noticeable change in their behaviour, they *engage with the content, they engage with us and the discussions, you definitely do find a change in the kids from the start to the end.*

Theme 2: Creating the right environment.

Theme 2 looked at what skills were needed to engage with the students in Essential skills for facilitators. Building trust in a safe space explore the elements both physically and emotionally that made the space comfortable and safe for discussion of difficult topics and Setting boundaries and expectations found that giving the students choice and allowing them to set guidelines for acceptable behaviour was important.

Essential Skills for Facilitators

Developing the right skills as facilitators of the program was crucial to its success. There was formal training and a manual that included a hands-on approach from the facilitators, however, as one facilitator noted it was the shadowing of another facilitator that was important.

> *"We have a manual that we've got set up. So you read that, and you'll be proactive and look at different scenarios and activities, and you just do the activities yourself. The main thing was I shadowed somebody else and then it was a couple of weeks* [later] *he supported me head facilitating."*

The program used trauma informed practice, a strengths-based approach that sees participants as unique individuals. Facilitators are required to work within the professional boundaries while building trusting relationships with the participants.

> *"The facilitators are employed on their understanding of trauma informed practices, but also the ability to develop relationships with kids, but it's also the confidentiality side, being able to work within the realms of the ethics of the program."*

Input from the facilitators was seen as valuable in order to keep the content relevant to the participants, and this is encouraged at all levels. Facilitators worked together to find new and innovative ways to engage with the students, keeping the activities**, "***fresh and fresh and up to date with today's kids."* This was seen as a strength of the program.

Each group has two facilitators, ideally one male and one female, as one facilitator said, "*It wouldn't work with one facilitator…I think ideally you would have a male and a female co-facilitator."* This is not always possible, however in some groups it can be of benefit: "*I think the girl's group really enjoyed having two female facilitators. Actually I think there was probably a lot more disclosures in that group".* Some discussions and subject matter can trigger some of the participants who have experienced trauma which the facilitators are acutely aware of. Having two facilitators allows for one to support a participant if needed outside of the group. Each group creates their own dynamic which calls for facilitators to be adaptive and responsive, which the program allows for.

> *"You do have to be flexible. You can't really just expect that every group is going to respond the same and that every group is going to enjoy the same sessions. You can't not be flexible. I think if you're being stagnant in this role … I just don't think it's going to work as well as it could."*

Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement to report any reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities, police or Commissioner for Children and young people (CCYP). The nature of the content of the program and the discussions they engender can lead to disclosures that need to be reported. The program is a "*catalyst for different things that the school doesn't know about. So say, for instance, we've had some disclosures in the ABC program that have ended out having to go through the process of mandatory reporting…we were the catalyst for that conversation."* Though compulsory, facilitators strive keep the trust that they build with the participants; "*the trust that we've built up we didn't want to break that. So we were honest with them."*

Each facilitator developed their own personal style and brings with them a unique experience. For some, it is the life experience that comes with them: "*So for me, my experience probably comes from my background, like my own life experience would be more than anything."* As one facilitator said:

> *"I'm not an authoritative style facilitator at all. I come in, I'm very relaxed. I'm very chilled with them. I'm young myself, so I know what these kids are going through. I relate to a lot of them so for me, my style is very relaxed and causal."*

Building trust in a safe space

Creating a physically and emotionally safe environment that allows for the establishment of relationships built on trust was essential to. Trust is an important part of relationships and building

trust with the participants and between the participants was crucial to the success of the program. Facilitators began to build that trust by talking about themselves; *"So not only did we tell them what the program was about, but we opened up a little bit about ourselves as well. I really think that helped."* For one facilitator: *"My technique is to come in as more of an ally to them and a teacher but not an authoritarian figure".* Developing a rapport with the participants and building relationships required a high level of skill as some of the participants had little or no experience of secure and healthy relationships.

> *"That relationship side is absolutely paramount because even discussing the content of the lessons just on a surface level, that requires a relationship, and for people who have struggled with developing relationships because of developing, want for better wording, a form of protection in not developing deep relationships with people, that takes a lot of skill to be able to develop those relationships."*

Listening to the participants without judgement, with empathy and being responsive to their feelings was essential so they were able to share their stories; *"Deep listening was a really important component of that, I think. Allowing them to tell their story without judgement and just yeah, really listening".* As one facilitator noted this was something that the participants enjoyed.

> *"Because it's non-judgemental, and it's … you can say what you want to say and we're not going to punish you, were not going to lecture you … I think they really, thoroughly enjoy it and respect that aspect."*

The physical environment was seen by facilitators as important in building a safe space, that was unlike a classroom or formal setting. Having a "*conference type room*" with chairs placed in a circle or space to sit on the floor was preferable to rows of tables and chairs. The number of participants in each group was also considered, with smaller numberers engendering better engagement and participation in discussions and activities;

> *"The small group environment that allows for trust and security and connection to be made, I believe, is what allows young people to become open to the activities and the discussion that follows on from them."*

In the small group settings peer support was nurtured and for participants to realise that they had others around them who had experienced similar issues to theirs was empowering.

> *"Having young people being able to open up, become vulnerable in a space that is safe for them and actually working with their peers to identify their own feelings, like self-regulation, what their relationship with their peers are like, what their relationships with their partners would be like."*

Being outside of mainstream schooling and education, away from families and being a part of something different was something the participants enjoyed.

> *"They do enjoy it … and I don't think its just because they get out of Maths or English or whatever. It's they enjoy, I guess, having people come in who aren't a part of school, aren't a part of their family, are part of something completely different and are relatable."*

Setting boundaries and expectations

Giving participants choice and allowing them to set guidelines for behaviour was important. Participation in the program was voluntary and they could choose to leave at any point;

"He was second week, he came and then he said I don't want to do this group, do I have to do it? And I said no, mate, if you don't want to do it you don't have to do it. … He just doesn't want to do it, that's fine."

Inclusivity and acceptance and respecting choice was important to building respect, with individuals being encouraged to make their own decisions.

"We split it up in males and females' groups. We have had one student who was transitioning, and they were transitioning from female to male, and we asked them which group they would prefer to be in, and they said they would prefer to be in the female group even though they were transitioning to the male. So we gave them the option."

Creating boundaries and expectations was a shared practice, with participants playing a significant role in setting them; *"We actually get them to come up with their own boundaries and their own rules, not even rules, more expectations from themselves. So therefore they've got buy in from the get to."* Once those boundaries were determined they ensured the safe physical and emotional space needed to learn was created. *"I find that that and keeping those boundaries are really crucial to actually building that rapport, to actually allow them to become safe and be able to talk about how they are feeling."*

Theme 3: Hope for the future

Enhancing the program covered the participants aspirations for the future of the program and looked at the differences the program makes to young people.

Enhancing the program

To meet its objective of providing access to a targeted and responsive program that encourages positive behaviour choices requires funding support. According to one participant, funding these programs can make an enormous difference to the participants future, possibly preventing future incarceration.

"Early intervention and early prevention work better than fixing it once it's done. So getting in and maybe funding a small program like ours might be the difference between someone going to prison for domestic violence 10 years later. If we're able to correct these pathways that young people may be going down now … or give them the education that they require prior to a large incident that might end pretty horrifically, then we've saved lots more money."

Participants agreed that ABC is a good program but there are improvements that could be made if more funding was made available.

"I feel like it could be run really, really, really well. I think it does a good job at the moment, but I think if it was given the extra funding and given the time and space to build on it and add those extra variables to it, I think it could be really, really good."

The program has flexibility and topics can be brought in dependent on discussions and conversations, for example *"gender equality, respecting women, cyber safety"*. This, the participant continued is empowering; *"… so not just focusing on the respect for women, but also empowering those young girls to be a bit more protective of themselves as well."*

The addition of electives depending on each group was noted by one participant as being beneficial:

"I wouldn't mind adding in a few other things, things around self-esteem, body image, things like that as well. I think [it] would be really beneficial to add in as elective sessions as well depending on the groups that you have."

It was noted that staff shortages were an impediment to reaching out to more schools implement the program and extend its reach; "*I think it's more so if a school hasn't jumped on board, it's been because we haven't had the actual availability and time to go out here because of our short staff.*"

Extending the program to include sessions or creating a course for parents was noted by participants as beneficial. This would allow for the parents to understand the content that was being taught to their children and how it was perceived by them. For the participants a whole of family approach would assist in the ongoing development and use of the skills learnt during the program. For some, though they have learnt strategies to self-regulate, situations may arise where it is too difficult to put them into practice.

I do definitely think to improve a family situation, you can't just work with one person because we might put tools an strategies in for that young person, but if mom or dad or one of the siblings is following them when they're trying to walk away to clear their head and self-regulate, it's not going to help if you if one of the other family members comes in behind them and still pokes the bear … trying to escalate them again.

It should also not be the responsibility of the young people to have to become a "*superhero*" as one participant said;

They shouldn't have to be the superhero who comes home from the ABC program and goes, "I know how to handle my emotions now mum, and I know how to tell when you're about to blow up as well. I know how to pick your early warning sign, so I know to give you space". The kids shouldn't have to be the ones responsible for doing that.

In the longer term, building resilience in the young people needs not only the skills but a supportive home environment which to grow and mature.

Refreshing the content of the program and ensuring that age-appropriate material is used was seen as important. Different age groups have different levels of maturity, and content is different for, for example a year 7 and a year 12 student. The content needs regular updating and checking for availability and to ensure it is suitable.

"Some of the sessions that we do have there, I'll be honest, are outdated. Like some of the content that's on there, there's some videos and stuff that we're supposed to show that don't even exist anymore, they've been taken off the YouTube or whatever because they're too old and there's some things that are just a bit outdated or perhaps not really age specific for the exact group that we're working with."

It was suggested that it would be beneficial for young people to repeat the program as "*doing it twice because it's putting it in their head more. They can't learn too much of this … there's never too much of this stuff that you can learn.*" It was noted that some students who have repeated the program have fared better as the current program Is too short;

"I would say the students that have repeated the program have significantly better results than the students that have done it the first time. My personal opinion is I think it's a little bit too short for the program to be super effective."

Looking to the future the participants were all positive and saw the benefits of the program for young people. One participant thought training more in trauma informed practice would be useful, however, overall the general comments indicated that the program should be continued and expanded both in content and reach.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

An exploration of adolescent intervention programs to positively influence behaviour:

A scoping review

This review brings together evidence on the characteristics and outcomes of structured early intervention programs designed for positive behaviour modification amongst adolescents. Our findings suggest that intervention programs for enhancing adolescent behaviour offer a productive avenue for early intervention. The programs included in the scoping review all reported positive changes in the adolescent samples. Several factors were identified as leading to program success. Our review highlighted a need for close stakeholder (parent, teacher, and adolescent) engagement though training by often external personnel who can establish the program and then maintain its momentum across its entirety. Engaging multiple stakeholders by way of an external well informed professional has been shown elsewhere to be an effective strategy in the reduction of harm amongst adolescents (Kristjansson et al., 2020).

While multiple stakeholder engagement is seen as a strength to adolescent program outcomes, a lack of stakeholder engagement can be equally debilitating to a program's success. Through the articles that make up this review, there was a clear need for stakeholder, particularly parents and teachers, to be enthusiastically engaged in the anticipated outcomes of the program. A key element of success is the alignment of the expertise of each member in the group with the objectives to create a functional team dynamic focused on the wellbeing of the adolescent that can be addressed from different perspectives (Kristjansson et al., 2020). While the studies included in this review spoke positively about parent stakeholders, available literature remains unsettled. For example, a meta-analysis by Widman et al. (2019) examining the impact of sexual health interventions designed for adolescents that include parents as a stakeholder found that the evidence of their success was mixed. A systematic review conducted by Burrus et al. (2012) found that interventions delivered to parents had a positive influence on the risk and protective behaviours that improved adolescent health. While the literature may remain unsettled, we feel that the parent is well placed to provide ongoing guidance to and surveillance of the adolescent and to moderate their behaviours, if they are provided with appropriate levels of support and training.

Conclusion

Programs designed to influence adolescent behaviour have been shown to have positive outcomes in the articles reviewed through this scoping review. While the programs have been shown to be of benefit, there are a number of principles that are consistent across programs that can be synthesized in order to facilitate more robust programs into the future. Engaging diverse stakeholders in ways that foster inclusion, empowerment through education and training and who collectively create a team that interacts with the adolescent in the community, at home and at school is tantamount to success. While there is a dearth of research literature pertaining to program outcomes such as this, future studies could benefit from the use of consistent definitions and inclusion of diverse perspectives to ensure we understand the unique perspective of each stakeholder and collectively provide the very best opportunities for adolescents and families to thrive.

MARY

The subject of this case study is a 14-year-old female, Mary* who lives with her mother. Prior to this she lived in an unstable and volatile situation with a previous partner. Mary attends a secondary college within the Latrobe City. The college referred the Mary to the ABC in-school program because of "unsettled and uncooperative behaviours" however, staff suspected that were underlying issues. Mary joined the group late in the term 2 sessions and requested to join the term 3 group due to disruptions as a result of COVID-19. The group continued into term 4.

CHALLENGES

During the early sessions, Mary was quite withdrawn and needed regular breaks during discussion of the more challenging topics. She also physically separated herself from the others in the group. Over time she contributed more to discussions and engaged further with other participants. The facilitators felt that there was a lot Mary wanted to discuss, however, needed to feel safe and trust the group before she could do this.

STRATEGIES

To help and encourage Mary in the early sessions, facilitators spent time with her individually as needed and responded to her requests for breaks. Facilitators also used a strengths-based approach to bring her attention to her positive contributions. Over time she grew in confidence and was forthcoming with her first disclosure to the group. Mary was affected by the sessions about healthy/unhealthy relationships and in the second last session of term 4 she disclosed information to the group that she said she had not told to anyone except for her mum and that this was a huge step for her. She was thanked for the historical information that she shared and the policy on confidentiality was reiterated. In the last session she was very positive and future focused. Mary asked the facilitators how to work in the field and she was given resources and the pathways, whilst providing feedback to her on how her life experiences, empathy and understanding would be great asset.

OUTCOMES

We received some feedback from Mary in the program evaluation. Her comments included:

> "*They helped me though many things that I couldn't talk about with others*".

> "*Yes, it helped me understand what was going on and why*".

Members of the wellbeing team at school commented that Mary was much happier and settled at school and that she had a much more positive outlook.

MOVING FORWARD

Mary will move into year 10 at school and plans to meet with the career's advisor about learning pathways for community services.

Name changed for confidentiality

JOHN

John lives with his mother and two sisters. He is 15 years old and attends a secondary college within the Latrobe City. The school referred John to the ABC in-school program due to the following presenting behaviours:

- Provokes bullying among peers, is both a bully and a recipient of bullying
- Disrespectful behaviours towards staff and peers
- Seeks out inappropriate and negative behaviours and outcomes
- Concerns for possible self-harm
- Possible mental health issues
- Disregard for school staff and instructions
- School suspensions

John was known to be out of class frequently, seeking negative outcomes and displaying negative behaviours. The school reported that in term one John had "a complete lack of respect for teaching staff, blatantly refusing any instructions which has resulted in an in-school suspension". No further information was provided about family or background.

STRATEGIES

Risk management strategies were discussed to both engage John and keep him safe being:

- Support with safety planning re. self-injury if disclosed or apparent
- John to have access to hall pass to take time to step outside the room as required
- John to be an active member in creating 'group rules' to support respectful behaviors for self and staff

IMPLEMENTATION

In the early sessions, John seemed reserved and disengaged from his peers and learning.

Facilitators used a strengths-based approach and soon discovered that John has a natural tendency towards group leadership and is interested in rap music. John responded well to positive reinforcement in group and continued to grow in confidence. This was evident in the way John related confidently to facilitators, peers and participated in group discussions and activities.

John attended regularly and remained well-engaged for the duration of the program. On days when the program ran at school, he attended all other classes and was well engaged with positive behaviour towards teachers and peers. His overall school attendance increased.

OUTCOMES

Measurable outcomes completed throughout the program indicated that John increasingly had improved positive emotions and the negative emotions decreased. This speaks to the increased engagement and positive outcomes also at school. John's mum provided feedback in that they had a 'great Term 2' and she had high praise for our program. She has increased praise for John about both behaviour and school engagement. She has since requested the school to refer John's sibling to participate this term.

Teaching staff also reported improvements in behaviour, especially on days when ABC ran at school, decreases in peer issues and bullying, increased class attendance and participation and therefore

positive feedback to John. Although John still has some challenges, he is working on this in his academic classes.

John is now interested in voluntary youth mentorship within the program and hopes that if the program is to be ongoing past Term 3, that he could continue to offer support and engage with the program throughout his schooling. It is hoped that this warm introduction to leadership will increase confidence and perhaps further mentoring or other opportunities for John.

7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 DISCUSSION

The evaluation of the Adolescence Behavioural Change (ABC) program aimed to explore the experiences of the students during the program and to ascertain if participation was having a positive impact on the lives of those engaged in the program. A total of 219 students in term 4 2021 to term 2 2022 participated in the 10-week program from 10 schools across Gippsland.

The evaluation included a variety of data collection sources including participant weekly self-assessments, facilitator impact reports, participant feedback survey, workbook data and interviews with facilitators. The data provided an overview of the impact to the student's behavioural changes and understanding of their reactions to difficult situations. A total of 74% of students agreed that the ABC program had taught them how to understand their behaviour and to recognise unacceptable behaviour. Emotional regulation and emotional intelligence were deemed to be the most important topics in the program.

The ABC program demonstrated significant improvements to the participant's level of engagement with program, the peer group and the content as evident in the facilitators impact statements and the program tools. There was an increase in the understanding of positive relationships, awareness of their response to stressful situations and effective communication skills. There was evidence of personal growth and development of emotional intelligence leading to confidence building and reflection while understanding the impact of family violence.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Future recommendations

1. The program is worthy to continue with consideration to expand into other locations and other age groups
   a. Development of age-appropriate versions of the ABC program resources and tools
   b. Conduct a needs analysis to assess the services gaps for students aged 9-12 years of age

2. Include a longitudinal component which captures the long-term impact and benefits of the ABC program for students, families, community, and education providers in future program evaluations.

3. Explore the use of digital technology using interactive platforms to capture program data.

4. Develop practitioner resources and conduct training for family violence and family service staff around the techniques and ABC lessons to ensure consistency of approach across service delivery.
   a. Develop an understanding of the program benefits through a series of industry information sessions and workshops.
5. Evaluation is built into the program design and planning phase and continues to support the data collection and analysis through the implementation and delivery phases.

Program recommendations

6. Work towards ensuing there is consistency of staff allocated to facilitate the ABC program with consideration to offering long-term contracts for expertise and program fidelity.

7. Introduce the delivery of a structured program induction and training package which includes ongoing live supervision sessions and the opportunity to shadow facilitators to learn program delivery techniques.

8. Develop a clear understanding of the use and functionality of each program and evaluation tool
    a. Develop clear document and version control processes

Evaluation recommendations

9. Explore ways to capture the student's experiences throughout the program while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity
    a. Consider using video / audio technology to record the students comments each week or pre and post program completion. Include the development of a software platform to store the video / audio recordings.

10. Continue to evaluate students' experiences using the pre/ post program surveys
    a. Explore digital technology options that can support the collection of post program impact data including survey data.

8. LIMITATIONS

There were limitations related to this evaluation that must be considered. These include:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the normal delivery of the program resulting in a number of weeks being cancelled due to state restrictions. In addition, there was an impact on the ability to meet in person with the project team from Quantum Support Services which restricted the ability to work on data analysis in partnership.
2. Attempt was made to work with Quantum Support Services on finding ways in which past ABC program participants could be contacted and invited to participate in an interview. After an extensive effort we were not able to collect data from program participants except from the workbooks. It is suggested that participants be provided with the ability to record their program experiences in the form of audio or video blogs in future evaluations.
3. Facilitator turnover resulted in visible differences of how the program and evaluation tools were used and the instructions to students on how to interpret the tools was provided.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation is considered to present a credible assessment of the project.

9. METHODOLOGY

9.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The approach of the CERG to this evaluation was informed by a Participatory Evaluation and Co-Design Framework.

PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

A participatory evaluation framework puts people from the community and those delivering the programs, projects and services at the centre of the evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a distinctive approach based on the following principals:

- That evaluation should be a co-designed, collaborative partnership through 360° stakeholder input including project participants and project funders;
- That integral to evaluation is an evaluation capacity-building focus within and across projects;
- That evaluation is a cyclical and iterative process embedded in projects from project design to program assessment;
- That evaluation adopts a learning, improvement and strengths-based approach;
- That evaluation supports innovation, accepting that projects will learn and evolve'
- That evaluation contributes to the creation of a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking;
- That there is no one or preferred data collection method rather the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods will be tailored to the information needs of each project.

CO-DESIGN

Co-design is a process and approach that is about working with people to create 'interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives and will reflect their own values and goals'[3]. Co-design can be done in many ways but is about collaborative engagement that is bottom-up, creative, and enables a wide range of people to participate and importantly to steer decisions and outcomes. Co-design is not a consultation process but a partnership approach where 'end-users' actively define and shape strategies and outcomes. The role of the 'expert' is to facilitate this process.

9.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach providing information about process, outcomes, impact and capacity building. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed as described below.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Participant surveys were distributed to students post program participation. In addition, the student program worksheets were analysed noting the changes to behaviour and attitude from week 1 to week 10 of the program.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Semi-structured interviews were held via digital software. Participants indicated their interest in participating in individual interviews on the survey

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[3] VCOSS (2015). Walk alongside: *Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*. V. C. o. S. Service. Melbourne.

Semi-structured interview questions were designed to guide the researcher to capture all desired information while providing flexibility for the participant to elaborate on their experience (see Appendix 5).

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis technique was used for the qualitative data with findings presented under theme headings together with participant quotes. The thematic analysis utilised Braun and Clarke's six step process which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Figure 37)[4].

Phase 1
- Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down identical ideas

Phase 2
- Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashon across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code

Phase 3
- Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all relevant data to each potential theme

Phase 4
- Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis

Phase 5
- Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme

Phase 6
- The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Figure 37: Six Step Thematic Analysis

As qualitative analysis is an inductive process, some interpretation of the data was required to create the thematic map. It was actively acknowledged that the researcher's interpretations would inform the results of this study, hence, any prior conceptions of the topic were reflexively bracketed to the best of the researcher's abilities[5].

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[4] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887.

[5] Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

10. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND PRACTICE

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Federation University aims to promote and support responsible research practices by providing resources and guidance to our researchers. We aim to maintain a strong research culture which incorporates:

- Honesty and integrity;

- Respect for human research participants, animals and the environment;

- Respect for the resources used to conduct research;

- Appropriate acknowledgement of contributors to research; and

- Responsible communication of research findings.

Human Research and Ethics applications, *Evaluation of the Adolescent Building Connections (ABC) Program* was approved by Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix …) prior to data collection and analysis (A21-047). Consent to participate in the study and for participant's de-identified transcripts to be used for research and evaluative purposes was obtained via signed informed consent forms before commencing the interviews. Participant anonymity was maintained by removing any identifiable information from the evaluation.

11. ABBREVIATIONS

ABC   Adolescent Building Connections

CERG   Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group

LHIZ   Latrobe Innovation Zone

12. LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

TABLES

13. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Human Research and Ethics

Principal Researcher:	Dr Joanne Porter	
Co-Researcher/s:	Dr Blake Peck Dr Carolyn Bailey Miss Michelle James	Val Prokopiv Peter Hopwood
School/Section:	**School of Health**	
Project Number:	**A21-047**	
Project Title:	**Evaluation of the Adolescent Building Connections (ABC) Program.**	
For the period:	02/06/2021 **to** 30/06/2022	

Quote the Project No: A21-047 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Approval has been granted to undertake this project in accordance with the proposal submitted for the period listed above.

<u>Please note</u>: It is the responsibility of the Principal Researcher to ensure the Ethics Office is contacted immediately regarding any proposed change or any serious or unexpected adverse effect on participants during the life of this project.

<u>In Addition</u>: Maintaining Ethics Approval is contingent upon adherence to all Standard Conditions of Approval as listed on the final page of this notification.

COMPLIANCE REPORTING DATES TO HREC:

<u>Annual project report:</u>
2 June 2022

<u>Final project report:</u>
30 July 2022

The combined annual/final report template is available at:
 HREC Forms

Fiona Koop
Coordinator, Research Ethics
2 June 2021