

# THE MAT PROGRAM

*A therapeutic martial arts program  
Year two report of the three year pilot  
for the Department of Education and  
Early Childhood Development*

December 2011

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Did you know that at any given moment, at least 10% of children and teenagers are having serious problems with worries, fears, sadness, behaviour or concentration.

This rises to 25% at any given moment, including those being severely bullied or going through a rough patch

(Source: youthinmind)

*The MAT Life Skills program gives children and young people direct strategies to successfully meet these challenges now and throughout their life experiences.*

This means that nearly all teachers have a number of students in each classroom who are facing such problems, which distracts them from engaging in their learning and results in disruptive behaviours which impacts on other class members. Knowing what to do to help their students is not always straightforward.

(Source: youthinmind)

*The MAT Program delivers professional development sessions to teachers which enables them to effectively identify behavioural triggers, defuse potentially violent situations and to provide alternatives which build student confidence and resilience.*

Did you know that conduct problems are some of the most frequently diagnosed mental health issues in childhood and adolescence, with higher rates for boys and in urban areas

(Source: Headroom Australia)

*The MAT Support Officers give face to face daily assistance to children and youth in their school environment so that they can successfully self manage their behaviour, their personal safety and that of their teachers and classmates.*

This report outlines the goals of the Pilot MAT Program and the significant achievements in the first two years, since commencement on 1st February 2010.

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# Executive summary

## Amid reading and writing, there's the violence

HALF of Victoria's school teachers have battled violence or aggression in their classrooms — and primary kids are among the worst offenders, according to a poll. Almost seven in 10 teachers surveyed by the Herald Sun report being the victims of some form of threatening behaviour.

### AGGRESSIVE TREND

Evonne Barry

And a third of primary school teachers say they have been pushed or shoved by students. "Violent and disruptive student behaviour is a sig-

nificant issue causing stress for many teachers," one teacher said.

"Intimidation and violence by parents towards teachers is increasing and is an issue seriously affecting many teachers."

The survey, conducted by Galaxy Research late last year, found concerns about

student behaviour had increased since the same survey in 2009.

Thirty seven per cent of teachers said a student had "verbally threatened (them) with physical violence", up from 26 per cent two years earlier.

Greater numbers of teachers reported acts of

classroom vandalism by students, rising from 26 per cent of those surveyed to 33 per cent.

And 57 per cent of teachers said "a student has used aggressive or threatening body language".

Some called for more ways to discipline "as respect for authority figures crumbles".

"Schools need to be able to impose greater disciplinary actions — suspensions and expulsions — on severely unruly students, such as those who threaten violence," one teacher said. Just over one in 10 teachers surveyed said they had caught students with a weapon.

*"Half of Victoria's school teachers have battled violence or aggression in their classrooms - and primary kids are among the worst offenders, according to a poll."*

The Martial Arts Therapy (MAT) Pilot Program is based at the Croydon Community School and will enter its third year in 2012. The MAT programs include *Way of the Warrior*, which focuses on delivering anti bullying behaviour programs for groups as well as individual *redirection programs* for students which supervises students with behavioural problems in normal classroom environments.

MAT is a specialist program aimed at assisting to bring back a measure of normality to environments where disruptive behavior is present in the school.

***The MAT Program works to support children and youth where nothing else has worked. It is able to deliver sustainable change in behavior at school and at home.***

The program has already exceeded the original Key Performance measures set at the start of the 3 year pilot program.

Here are a few facts about what the MAT Pilot has delivered:

- » Since the start of 2010 MAT has delivered around 7,700

programs, across 203 schools and settings in the Eastern Metropolitan Region;

- » Real improvement in student engagement and wellbeing, through providing assistance to a significant number of students allowing them to re-engage in schooling;
- » MAT has delivered measurable reduction in staff stress and increased retention of teachers in the educational system.
- » In 2011 primary age students attended more than 1500 days of schooling that could not have been achieved without the MAT Staff being present.
- » The MAT Program delivers ongoing professional development sessions to teachers to enable them to effectively identify behavioral triggers, defuse potentially violent situations and to provide alternatives which build student confidence and resilience.

The funding for MAT is included in the School Resource Package base for the Croydon Community

School, (around \$230,000 in 2012) and the program is making a significant difference to the educational engagement and life destiny for young people facing challenging circumstances.

Current analysis shows that 14% of Australian children and adolescents aged 4-17 years have mental health problems. This rate of mental health problems is found in all age and gender groups, although boys are slightly more likely to experience mental health problems than girls. (Source Mindframe, <http://www.mindframe-media.info/>)

This means that in any given class it is likely that 3 to 4 of the students are suffering from some form of mental illness. Some of these students will display anti-social and potentially violent behavior, and as a result create disruption to the learning outcomes for themselves and those around them.

There are a range of mental health issues that occur for many children under ten years of age, including ADHD, conduct disorders, anxiety disorders and depression. If not addressed these conditions are likely to result in early disengagement

from primary schooling with significant impact on their educational outcomes.

Young people between the ages of 11 and 18 experience a range of issues which test their psychological fitness well beyond anticipated levels. The range of issues that contribute to the challenges faced by Students, Parents and the school are varied. They include: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, bullying (verbal, emotional, physical, social, cyber), anger and violence (physical, emotional, economic, social, spiritual), suffering loss/grief and experiencing traumatic events.

The evidence shows that if these issues are not addressed then young people may resort to violence, self harm, using drugs, criminal offences and potentially suicide.

***In 2011 Schools in Eastern Metropolitan Region used MAT Support Officers on more than 2000 occasions to successfully and positively manage violent students.***

### MAT Testimonial Excerpt

If not for the MAT aide we would have lost a child to schooling and their family would be in despair. I am indebted to this program and the wonderful array of people who work in it who consistently support you, seek feedback and meet to gauge progress and further needs. Their approachability and sense of 'child first' has been brilliant. This program is a must and needs all the support possible, or we will be losing children needlessly.

Tanya Cooke  
Principal  
Menzies Creek Primary School

### MAT Student Case Study Excerpt

"Tim" was eventually expelled from primary school after he had threatened the principal with a knife and the risks to teachers and children were deemed too high for continue to have him in a school setting.

At time of referral to the MAT program, Tim had been disengaged from schooling for 9 months and he was socially isolated and bored, while still presenting a significant behaviour challenge to his parents and siblings.

He now attends the Yr 7 class each day and has begun to establish relationships with his young people his own age. He still has a MAT Aide but they are able to provide more mentoring support now rather than physical containment.

## Conclusion & Recommendations

*The MAT Pilot program was established at the beginning of 2010 to specifically assess the value of the program to educational outcomes in Victoria. After 2 years the program has exceeded the benefits initially envisaged, and is now able to prove that the sort of intervention the MAT program delivers will provide significant benefits not only to disengaged students but also to the overall educational outcomes of all those in the environment.*

While the program is only 2 years into a 3 year pilot we are suggesting that the benefits of the program are clearly evident.

*We make the following two requests of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)*

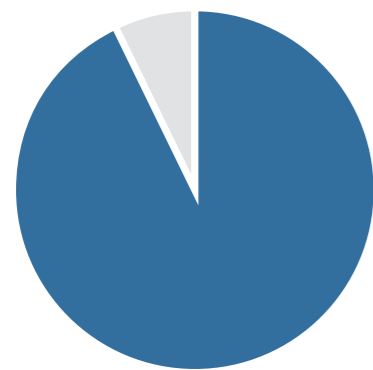
1. That DEECD provide ongoing funding of the MAT program at Croydon Community School through the SRP mechanism. This endorsement of the findings of the pilot and seeking certainty of funding will enable the team to plan with certainty for the future.

2. In line with the Victorian Government's determination to provide safe and caring schools for young Victorians, that DEECD consider rolling out the current pilot across other regions and replicating the model which has provided real benefits in the Eastern Region to disengaged students.

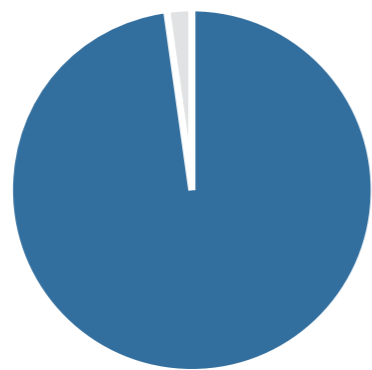
*We would be pleased to provide additional information if required. Please contact Bronwyn Harcourt, Principal, Croydon Community School or Steve Golding MAT Executive Officer through the School on 9724 2900.*

### MAT Program Evaluation Extract:

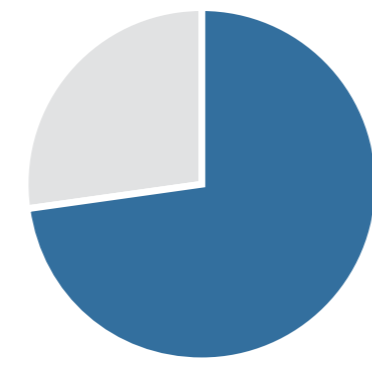
#### Achievements



- 93% agree MAT Life Skills Program is effective in engaging disconnected / at risk students



- 98% agree MAT Life Skills Program is valued by staff as an effective way of teaching VCAL personal development



- 73% agree MAT Life Skills Program has made a positive impact on student participation in learning

## Introduction



The Martial Art Therapy Program (MAT) is an active therapeutic approach and set of processes that combines the principles of psychosocial rehabilitation such as an emphasis on developing self competence and self mastery, the belief new behavior can be learned and a focus on a persons strengths, with those of traditional martial arts training techniques as a means of engaging young people in learning skills for life.

Psychosocial competence is a person's ability to deal with the challenges and demands of everyday life. It is the ability to maintain a state of mental wellbeing and to demonstrate this in adaptive and positive behaviour while interacting with others, one's culture and environment.

MAT programs can be of particular benefit for those students who struggle to learn in more traditional ways. The MAT Program is designed for children and young people between the ages of 5 to 25 years. Many of the programs include pathways that support young people to gain and maintain connections to their peers, school communities and families, along with providing

opportunities for further education and employment.

*The program aims to provide young people with new skills to successfully manage the challenges (social, emotional and behavioral) in their lives.*

A three year pilot program auspiced by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department) commenced in 2010, drawing upon the research base, learnings and respected practice of a private business established by Steve Golding in 2002 to support schools in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR).

The Department agreed to provide funding for the pilot with an allocation of \$201,500 in 2010, \$209,500 in 2011 and \$231,000 in 2012.

#### Martial Art Therapy Program

##### Vision

Schools being safe, orderly, supportive and inclusive educational environments, where all young people are engaged so that they develop the skills to successfully manage the challenges in their lives and to thrive in our community.

#### Mission

The MAT pilot program will demonstrate its capacity to improve the inclusion of students, engage them in schooling, support their wellbeing and make schools more productive places.

#### Purpose

The pilot program was established to:

- Address escalating challenges and risks in the school system through development and implementation of best practice programs and services  
Across the State there are students with severe behavioural and conduct disorders, mental health issues and other challenging and concerning behaviours. These behaviours place the students, staff and other students at risk of injury and constantly disrupt classroom learning.  
School staff members are seeking ways of managing at risk students and improving both student and staff safety and addressing the rising stress levels in staff.  
There are groups of students that have been identified as at risk of disengaging from

education and who need to develop the necessary life skills to manage the current challenges in their lives.

- b. Provide the Department and the Minister with facts related to the educational value of the MAT program, through measurement and documentation of outcomes and annual reports.

#### Values

Be strong

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Be calm

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Be kind

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Try hard

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#### Goals

1. Establish MAT program training centre based at EMR Options with a regional structure that provides for future growth across all regions.
- 11 Train 20 new MAT Support Officers to be employed and funded by schools as Education Support personnel.

*Status: achieved in 2011, additional personnel will be trained in 2012.*

- 12 Train 15 new MAT Life Skills Instructors to be contracted to schools on a fee for service. *Status: on track for achievement in 2012.*

- 13 Develop and deliver onsite Professional Development Programs for teaching and aide staff. *Status: implemented in 2010, 2011 and continuing in 2012.*

- 14 Develop a Professional Development Program Team that will deliver to teaching staff with regional schools on a fee for service basis. *Status: implemented in 2010, 2011 and continuing in 2012.*

- 15 Work with other associated Government departments, agencies and personnel such as Department of Human Services, CYMHS, Student Wellbeing Coordinators, Psychologists and Allied Health providers in order to provide an integrated support network for students, parents and teachers. *Status: implemented in 2010, 2011 and will be extended in 2012.*

- 16 Establish waiting list of demand for MAT services based on the fee for service funding in other regions. *Status: waiting list exists due to problematic funding access and numbers of trained MSO personnel available to meet the growing service demand.*

2. Streamline existing MAT programs into 4 Main areas: Life skills (primary), Life skills (secondary), MAT Support Officers (redirection aides), Professional Development of school staff.

*Status: achieved in 2011, refinement will continue in 2012*

3. Develop the recruitment, training and support processes for MAT trained personnel. *Status: achieved in 2011, focus in 2012 will be creating a sustainable source of trained and MAT accredited personnel.*

4. Formalise accreditation of MAT trained therapists/instructors. *Status: on track for achievement in 2012, with enrolments of MSO personnel expected to commence in 2013 for a Certificate 4 Community Services at Swinburne TAFE. Note this is subject to being able to source additional funding.*

5. Develop Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure required to support the projects on management, reporting and future expansion. *Status: achieved in 2011 with a web based referral, documentation and basic program management system operation via Croydon Community School, enhancement will continue in 2012.*

6. Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between MAT Pty Ltd and DEECD that covers Intellectual Property. *Status: MOU continues to evolve in context of EMR Options. Governing body established in 2010 and pro bono corporate critical friend engaged.*

7. Develop the measurement techniques and processes to provide feedback to DEECD and the Minister on the performance of the Pilot. *Status: assessment against Key Performance Indicators and report of pilot outcomes documented in 2010 and 2011 and proposed external evaluation in 2012.*

#### Testimonial from Somerville Secondary College on the MAT Program:

The MAT (Martial Arts Therapy) Program seeks to give students an alternative option to the violence and aggression that is evident in our society. The MAT Program has been working with students across all year levels (year 7 to 10) at Somerville Secondary College since 2007.

The MAT Program has proven to be a positive program for our school to work with the issues confronting our students, for example school refusal and non attendance, violent and aggressive behaviours towards students and teachers/staff, substance abuse and anger management issues.

The MAT Program has been running at Somerville Secondary College since 2007, and in that time has assisted over 100 students in providing them with the skills and knowledge to deal with the issues they may come across, whether it be at school or in other environments.

The teaching staff at Somerville Secondary College notices a positive change and reduction in students that were showing high level of aggressive & truant behaviour. The students respond in a positive manner when they attend the program & some of them show initiative in wanting to return as a mentor in future groups.

I hold a meeting with Assistant Principals & year level coordinators to select the students who show signs of challenging behaviour and would benefit from attending the MAT Program. There is a variety of students showing signs of low self esteem, low confidence, kids that bully and kids that are being bullied that are possibly placed in the same group together because the MAT Program is a safe and supportive environment for the students to learn and grow together.

Maryam Gharehbaghi  
Student Welfare Officer  
Somerville Secondary College  
Ph 03 5973 1000

#### Case Study: Dylan

The Martial Arts Therapy program has allowed "Dylan" to gain new and various skills whilst providing him with the ability and stability to effectively alter his behaviour patterns. His involvement within the MAT program began with a number of one on one sessions with a MAT instructor as he was not attending school and struggling to re-engage in an educational setting. Over time he became involved in a number of programs where his role was that of a Peer Educator which had a significant impact on his ability to engage with his peers and younger students. Since then and with each passing day Dylan continues to not only improve in his social skills but also his emotional regulation.

Dylan has now completed a sport and recreation coaching certificate and is currently completing a Certificate 11 in Business Administration. He is still attending Croydon Community School. His near future goals involve the completion of the Business Administration Certificate and Year twelve. One day in the future Dylan hopes to be a qualified Martial Arts instructor and within the next year or following year hopes to have successfully gained his black belt.

The Martial Arts Therapy program has taken a once confused, angry and frustrated boy and turned him into a functioning productive young man who not only continually works hard at bettering himself but also with the young people with whom he works.

# Alignment with Government Policy

The Minister for Education, The Hon. Martin Dixon, MP, in his extended special lecture to the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne on Tuesday 20th November 2011, outlined a vision of Victoria as a Learning Community. Whereby, all members of the community- students and their families, teachers and school leaders, business, community members and government- contribute to building our education system and working together to create better outcomes for our children and young people.

*The MAT Program has harnessed the energy and commitment of schools, educational settings, business leaders, support agencies, community members and the Department to work in partnership to improve outcomes for children and young people deemed most at risk of disengaging in education.*

The Government has identified five key areas of reform: student outcomes, order and inclusion, innovation, partnerships and internationalizing education. "The goal of improved student outcomes relies on our schools being safe, engaging and productive places where everyone feels included" and that currently "many principals and teachers are faced with students who pose challenges to maintaining order in the classroom."

*The MAT Program has a proven track record as an innovative and successful program which supports students, their families, teachers and principals. Schools can directly employ qualified MAT Support Officers, effectively utilising Primary Welfare Officer and Program for Students with Disability funding, to assist the school to support children and ensure a safe and productive learning environment for all.*

The Government has committed to investing "in professional development specifically designed to improve teachers' capacity to understand and manage classroom behaviour"; "to support teachers to receive training to better identify children and young people with mental health issues" and to enable schools "to work proactively against bullying in all its forms."

*The MAT Program delivers professional development sessions to teachers which enables them to effectively identify behavioural triggers, defuse potentially violent situations and to provide alternatives which build student confidence and resilience.*

"Today's students will need to be flexible, adaptable, outward looking, active, confident and creative if they are to thrive in the 21st century"

*The MAT Life Skills program gives children and young people direct strategies to successfully meet challenges (social, emotional and behavioural) now and throughout their life experiences.*

The DEECD Annual Plan 2011-2012 cites outcomes in student engagement and wellbeing, and youth transitions which are fundamental tenets of the MAT pilot program.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring people with a mental illness get the care and support they need. A key focus is upon improving early intervention services to better support young people with a mental illness, which includes funding youth services, (such as Headspace youth mental health centres) and developing a Victorian suicide prevention strategy.

*The MAT pilot program is delivering a successful early intervention and redirection program in support of children and young people from 5 to 25 years of age.*

The MAT Program goals are aligned to the Department of Human Service objectives of supporting children, adolescents and youth with severe emotional or behavioural disturbance or with a disability and high support needs; those who need support to remain with their family; those subject to, or at risk of harm, abuse and neglect; and youth social, economic and civic participation in their community (DHS Plan Update 2011-2012)



## Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

### Eastern Metropolitan Region

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#### To whom it may concern

During 2010 and 2011 Regional office DEECD has watched the significant growth and expansion of the MAT Support Officers Program. This program continues to assist the regional service provision of EMR Options and 250 Primary, Secondary, and specialist schools in the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Eastern Metropolitan Region has placed a significant focus and amount of resourcing and activity into the area of supporting students who are at risk of disengaging. Under the "Program for Students with a Disability" EMR has experienced increased numbers in students being funded for Severe Conduct Behaviours, and a significant growth of a student's funded under Autism Spectrum disorders.

In the past two years EMR has experienced an increase of incidence of violence and challenging behaviours at both a primary and secondary level. These behaviours often lead to suspension and expulsion, but more importantly impact on other students, teachers, and the school community.

The MSO program allows schools to support these students with high level aided time. The MSO program also focuses on building the capacity of teachers and school leaders to ensure that staged response, prevention through to intervention, and whole school approach is on improving each students learning and life outcomes.

The program has developed a framework for engaging schools in the program and holds firm on its approach to staged response, inclusive of the development of individual education plans, professional learning for the teachers, and accessing external agencies and supports for these students. It is often the MSO program which supports schools from crisis to effective functioning.

Prior to this program region was limited in the resources and support they could offer intensively to schools and often these students would be suspended and expelled multiple times.

Regional office continues to promote this program as a key determinant in the reengagement of many students to mainstream school and the level of support has been invaluable to not only a broad range of schools but to many families with students at risk of ongoing and prolonged disengagement.

Yours sincerely

**Kristen Douglas**  
Assistant Manager  
Student Learning Unit (Operations)  
Eastern Metropolitan Region



## Department of Human Services

Incorporating: Community Services, Housing, Women's Affairs and Youth Affairs

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27 October 2011

OUR REF:  
YOUR REF:

To whom it may concern,

### Re: **Martial Arts Therapy (MAT) Programme**

I have accessed the MAT programme in regard to one of my difficult teenage clients to assist in managing him within the classroom environment and assisting him manage his anxieties with the social interactions that occur in recess times.

The programme has been of great benefit towards my client and the MAT team have been excellent to work with. The MAT team leader has attended care Team Meetings and has been on board to gather a holistic view of the young person to best assist him match a support person that will best manage his needs.

Through utilising the programme we have been able to see a decrease in anxiety within the school environment and have seen the young person develop a great respect and positive relationship for his support worker.

I would recommend the programme to other protective workers to utilise as it has assisted in managing a very difficult and complex young person.

If you have any further questions in regard to the experience of engaging with the MAT programme, feel free to contact me on (03) 98436391.

Yours Sincerely,

Iain Mitchell  
Protective Worker

## Nature of Programs and Services



Applying the ideas from research into sensory integration; learning and developmental theories; trauma; and group theory, the MAT Program utilises a variety of martial arts techniques that support student learning. Research has shown children and young people who are struggling with ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, severe behaviour disorders or other behavioural difficulties, benefit from a variety of learning modalities and in particular, through the coordination of body and mind through active and calming activities.

MAT Programs are delivered by a team of qualified martial art support officers and life skills instructors from a variety of martial arts training and professional backgrounds.

Programs are generally conducted in school terms, five days a week, between 8am and 6pm, in either 60 minute or 90 minute sessions. The programs are non combative, and provide the means for students to re-engage with learning.

The suite of programs is provided to schools and organisations, including:

- » Government and independent schools (primary and secondary)
- » Community schools
- » Employment and training programs
- » Specialist education settings
- » Parent and child groups
- » Child and youth mental health service programs (CYMHS)
- » Family support, Youth services, Homelessness and Foster care organisations.

Programs can be tailored to meet the needs of the school or organisation, but are typically either 8 or 16 weeks in duration, and include a staff education session. The longer duration programs are usually for Peer Education and/or VCAL Personal Development components and are tailored to student/school requirement.

The MAT Program encompasses a wide variety of individual and group based programs, including Life Skills programs; gender specific programs; peer educator and mentor programs; 1:1 Individual Programs; Motivational and Life Skills sessions for VCE students; Staff Safety Programs.

### 'Life Skills'

Therapeutic martial arts based programs involving intervention and prevention approaches for children and young adults identified as needing social, emotional or behavioural support to learn life skills (including values of respect and responsibility, skills in decision making, growing a positive future, managing emotions and behaviours). Programs are usually conducted by two qualified life skill facilitators. Smaller less challenging groups can be conducted by a single facilitator.

There is growing recognition that many young people are not competent in these areas. They either lack the support required to reinforce and build on essential life skills from family and significant others or it may be that traditional mechanisms for passing on life skills (family

and cultural factors, role models) are not sufficient given today's stressors. The actual practice of skills in an active, experiential way is a vital component in integrating new knowledge for young people.

These skills can then be generalised to other environments such as in the home, playground and classroom settings.

The MAT program teaches life skills through a range of modalities including:

- » Interactive lectures.
- » Exercises focusing on fitness and strength (developing responsibility for self and resilience).
- » Games and play.
- » Martial art drills and skills (fun and challenging).
- » Behaviour rehearsal (using games/role play to practice life skills).
- » Relaxation and breathing techniques (managing frustration, anger and anxiety/ worry and to develop focus, happiness/calmness).
- » Story telling (metaphors to teach a life lesson by engaging young peoples' imagination).
- » Guided visualisation (an imaginary journey to discover new qualities/ abilities or to use the skills learnt to address a previously experienced stressful/ challenging situation).
- » Small group discussions (utilising worksheets to guide the flow of discussions).



Setting the scene and reviewing core values.

"Joe started them out with a brief discussion about what Martial Arts is and asked them what they have learned about it. He stressed the point that is about developing the mind and body and achieving personal bests. He also explained the format of the class and how it would flow as far as leadership is concerned. This was good for the leadership group to be reminded of their roles."

Templestowe College 13th December 2011

### Gender specific groups

#### W.O.W – Way of the Warrior

The 'Way of the Warrior' is a physically active therapeutic group program that combines the principles and philosophy of traditional martial arts with a structured opportunity to develop confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging for boys aged between 5 and 12 years of age. The program does not teach children how to fight but takes all of what it is to be a warrior on the inside and applies this in a therapeutic framework.

Program content is tailored to the specific needs of each group comprising up to 10 boys. Program topics include: feeling good about self, making good choices, respect and responsibility, managing strong emotions, managing anger and conflict, social skills training, growing positive futures.

Program participants are expected to obtain a range of

skills applicable to situations in the school and home/ family environment.

The WOW Program is delivered over 8 weeks, with sessions commonly being held on Friday afternoons.

#### 'Healthy Girls' for Secondary and Primary schools

These programs give girls and young women the confidence and self belief to live their lives more fully. A range of activities which are female inclusive are provided in a safe, stimulating yet challenging learning environment. Students are empowered and value the sessions which combine action with discussion.

An example being the Northcote High School Girls Power Class conducted over 6 weeks covering topics of: Self Esteem; Body Image; Friendships; Healthy Relationships; Staying Safe and Goal Setting.



## HAWTHORN SECONDARY COLLEGE

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DIVERSITY

ACHIEVEMENT

RESPONSIBILITY

ENDEAVOUR

26<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Dear Sir/ Madame

Hawthorn Secondary College has been fortunate enough to have had the MAT program at the school on three occasions. Hence it is clear that we value the program and support its philosophy. The focus of the program is on self-improvement, positive relationships, managing emotions and taking responsibility for personal actions.

The dynamic, active based program which uses traditional martial arts training techniques is a powerful hook and resonates particularly with our boys. Students with complex and challenging behaviours, anger management issues and those most likely to disengage have been targeted and we have been extremely impressed with outcomes achieved.

Although students respond in different ways with some showing immediate improvements, while others taking longer to exhibit positive changes, some common threads can be identified. These range from an improvement in school attendance, personal growth and self-esteem, and a significant reduction in violent outburst around the school amongst the boys involved. Throughout the program students are taught various strategies and are encouraged to implement them in the class room and school environment. Leadership skills are enhanced and are pivotal to personal growth, which empowers the participants to view themselves as positive contributors. This is highlighted in the Peer Education component which sees the participants help instruct Primary students over a number of weeks.

The most appealing aspect of the program is the fun that the students have. The physicality of the sessions and the no nonsense approach of the trainers definitely helps to engender an atmosphere unlike other programs. Even reluctant participants are quickly converted to enthusiastic members. This was certainly the case this year with a Year 9 boy. After a couple of weeks placating Administration by just watching, he finally joined in and is now a passionate devotee and highly valued member of the group. The fallout of this has meant that his participation in learning generally has seen a great improvement.

The program also provides valuable respite for some staff who battle to create an orderly learning environment. Students returning to class have a better repertoire of strategies that can be employed from the onset of the program to help them work more productively in class.

Again I would like to endorse the program, its values and structure and if money wasn't a barrier I would make participation mandatory for all students.

Yours sincerely

Rhonda Crouch  
 Director of Student Services  
 Hawthorn Secondary College



## Peer Educator and Mentor Programs

The MAT Peer Educator program provides young people with structured and supervised opportunities for personal development. Peer Educators experience success through the development of leadership skills, self esteem and self confidence as role models for their younger peers.

Peer Educators are graduates of a 6-8 week martial art based school based 'Life Skills' Program and are drawn from Years 8 to VCAL students. After completion of the program, Peer Educators act as assistants to a MAT Program group instructor. Peer Educators are required to model appropriate behaviour to their younger peers in other groups held at their own school or they may be part of Life Skills groups in other schools.

In 2010 MAT delivered 20 Life Skills programs with Peer Education component that trained 379 students as peer educators.

The students act as peer educators for a minimum of 4 weeks with younger students generally from local primary schools and sometimes from the same school.

In 2011 MAT delivered 14 Life Skills programs with a Peer Education component that trained 216 students as peer educators, schools involved included Keysborough Secondary College (28 students), Patterson River Secondary College (24), Croydon Community School (6), Hawthorn Secondary College (12), Somerville Secondary College (22) and Croydon Secondary College (4).



"We also went through the importance of being part of a team, and despite apparent strengths and weaknesses, when we are involved in a group effort, everyone needs to be supportive of everyone else. We put this into practice by doing the invisible chair exercise, which they all loved."

Frankston Headspace Session 5, 17th October 2011

### 1:1 Individual Programs

The one to one programs support students who are disengaged from education, at risk of disengagement from education, or unable to connect socially. They are designed to assist young people to re-engage with peers, education and/or employment.

The aims are to:

- » engage young people in fun and fitness;
- » work on goal setting and problem solving for education / employment;
- » provide pathways for socially isolated young people to become 'group ready'.



2.11.11

To Guy Rhynsburger,

### Regarding Take Two Western Metro Team's involvement with the Martial Arts Therapy Program.

My experience of having a **Martial Arts Therapist (MAT) as an Integration Aid at Brunswick East Primary School** for a Take Two client has been invaluable in many significant ways. **The Take Two client has been supported by a MAT full-time in class and the play ground in order to support his academic, social and emotional needs.** Initially the MAT worker was able to assist the school in developing a sense of safety for the client, staff and pupils through a clear, structured and predictable timetable and close supervision. This sense of safety has developed the client's capacity to function at school by lowering his baseline state of arousal which allows him to better learn and interact with others. **The clients' school are now setting goals for learning rather than previous goal of keeping the client safe and calm at school.**

**I have also appreciated MAT's participation in Take Two's Community of Practice in 2011. By volunteering to join this group, MAT has contributed to the thinking and practice development across a variety of agencies in the area of working therapeutically with traumatised children.**

I look forward to continuing to work with Martial Arts Therapy program in the future.

Regards

Kate Forbes  
Senior Clinician  
Take Two Berry Street



A partnership between Berry Street, Austin CAMHS, La Trobe University, Mindful and VACCA

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**Berry Street believes all children should have a good childhood.**  
growing up in families and communities where they feel safe, nurtured and have hope for the future



### Staff Safety

These sessions provide practical, effective ideas and techniques that educators can use to address their personal safety concerns in schools. The focus is upon implementing pre-cursor strategies (for example de-escalation) before the need for self defense. Thus enabling and empowering staff to have a front foot approach to behavioural management, rather than being drawn into reactive patterns.

Accredited instructor teams deliver self defence programs specifically tailored to primary, secondary and specialist school settings. This professional learning program can be tailored to individual school needs.

In 2010 eight programs of Staff Safety Professional Development encompassing twenty sessions were delivered to a range of schools and settings, including Heatherwood Special School, Ashwood Special School, Bayswater South Primary School, Traralgon Secondary College, Croydon Community School, Lilydale (primary) Education Support Cluster, Manningham Council Disability Services and Croydon Special Developmental School.

In 2011 five programs of staff safety professional development encompassing twelve sessions were delivered to a range of schools and settings, including Ashwood Special School, Croydon Special Developmental School, Burwood Special Developmental School, Concord School and Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School.

### Campus Support

The MSO Campus Support model is designed to augment a school's abilities to deal with ongoing behavioural issues. MSO's trained in campus support can assist in the design, development and implementation of Student Management /Engagement Plans in association with student/s, teachers, parents and other key stakeholders (eg. DHS, CYMHS). This is in addition to their ability to work with multiple individuals and small groups within the school environment.



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14/11/2011

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To whom it may concern,

In 2011 Yarra Hills had a significant number of student funded under the Integration Support scheme for behavioural issues. We realised that we needed a different type of aide for these students to what had been available in the past and sought the services of MATs Aides. Our experience has been that this has been a very wise decision and Paul Greenfield in particular has been an outstanding addition to the student management team on this Campus. During the year Paul has provided support for the three funded students as well as up to ten other very difficult students. He has the wonderful ability to prevent issues arriving by being able to judge the mood of a student and intervening early. He is also able to calm a student when they have become disconnected, argumentative or aggressive by taking them out of the situation and either counselling them or providing an alternate activity. Paul has made it possible for our funded students to attend camps and excursions by going with the trip. Paul has worked with staff to develop behaviour management plans for individual students. He has been part of PSG meetings and also has attended expulsion meetings.

Throughout the year our involvement with this trial has given us access to student-instructors who have been attending for short periods as part of their course. They have all played a significant part of developing the social skills and resilience of our students.

The MATs Integration support provided by Paul, Ben and the other student instructors has been invaluable for our school. The program has been cost effective for us and has provided the type of role model our funded students sp desperately need. We certainly hope to continue this into the future and would strongly recommend this program to any school who has children funded with behavioural issues.

Mr Greg Carroll  
Cambridge Campus Principal

# Review of Achievements



The pilot program (2010-2012) established **Key Performance Indicators** as the basis for determining and reflecting upon outcomes, in order to monitor progress and as a basis for continual improvement. Assessment methodology to date includes specifically designed surveys, testimonials and case studies. It is expected that in 2012 a formal external evaluation to independently assess the outcomes for students and the impact of the pilot program on schools and other organisations will need to be commissioned.

## Key Performance Indicators

### 1. MAT Support Officer Service

- » Reduce student behaviour that places the student or other students or staff at risk of injury.
- » Reduce teacher/staff stress levels and increase staff morale
- » Increase effective options for school leaders (principals etc) in managing entrenched challenging/concerning behaviours by students

### 2. Primary, Secondary, and VCAL programs

- » Reduce challenging / concerning student behaviours
- » Determine effectiveness in engaging disconnected/at risk students
- » Increase student participation in learning and education pathways
- » Increase staff support in VCAL programs using this approach

### 3. Specialist setting programs (Child and Youth Mental Health, Disability and Alternative Education Sector).

- » Decrease challenging/ concerning student behaviours
- » Determine effectiveness in engaging disconnected/at risk students
- » Decrease teacher /staff stress/ and increase staff morale levels
- » Provide effective options for school leadership teams

to manage challenging behaviours

## Progress: MAT Support Officer (MSO) Service

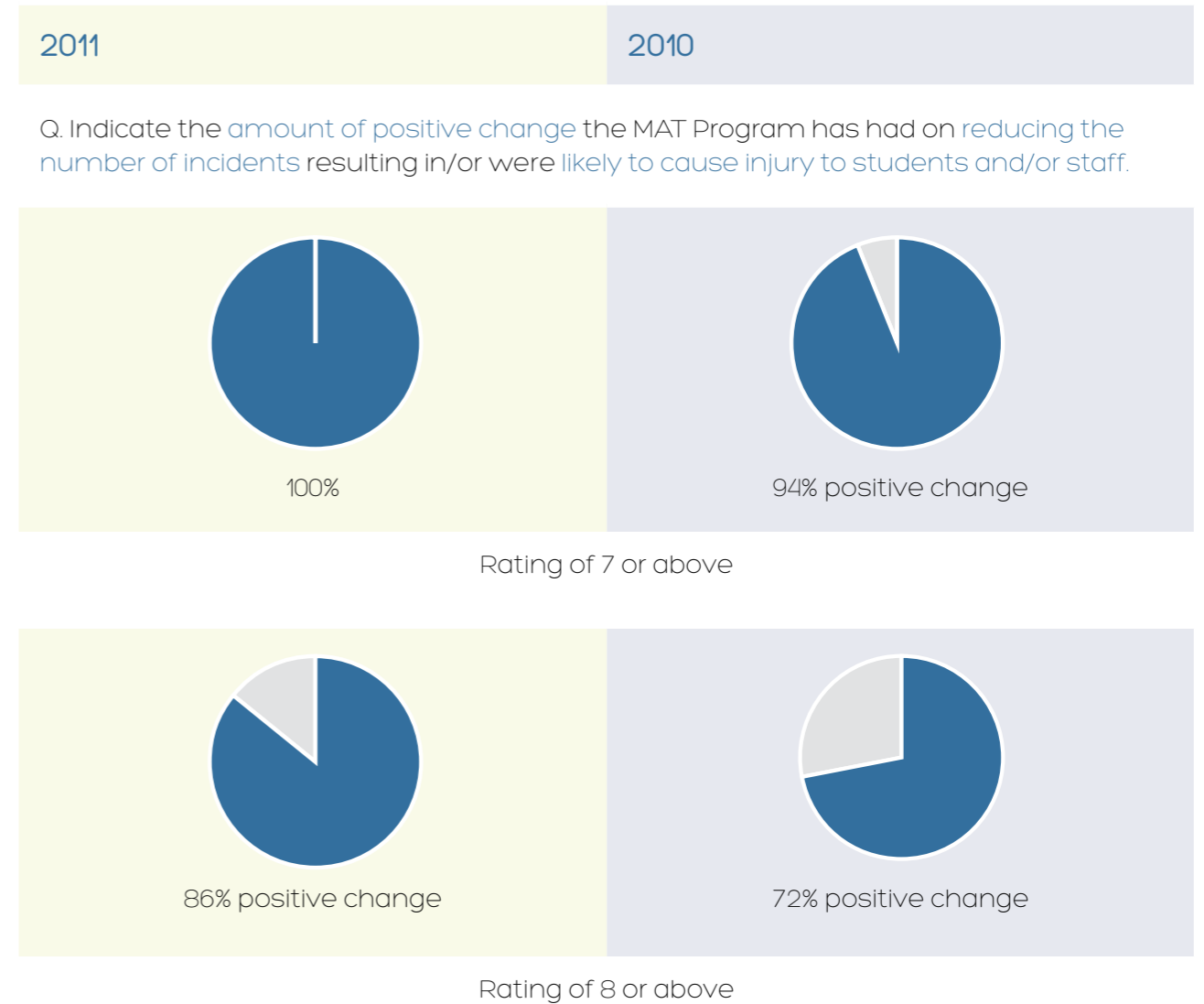
*The MAT Support Officer Service is affecting a high level of positive change in individual student wellbeing and engagement, improving student and staff safety, increasing staff morale and is providing an affordable avenue for schools and settings to engage qualified and skilled personnel.*

A survey asked schools and services to respond to a set of questions regarding the amount of **positive change** the MAT program has had within their schools, and rate the questions posed on a continuum from '0' (No positive change) to '10' (More change than was reasonably expected).

Responses on the ten point scale in relation to the key performance indicators for the MSO service have either increased or been sustained over the first two years of the pilot program as evidenced in Chart One.

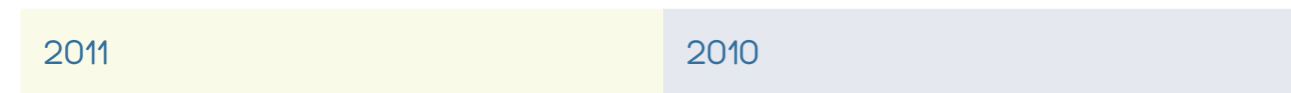
## Chart One

**MAT Questionnaire: Key Performance Indicators MAT Support Officer Service** in EMR Schools using the service for the first time, comparing responses in 2011 to 2010.



## Chart One

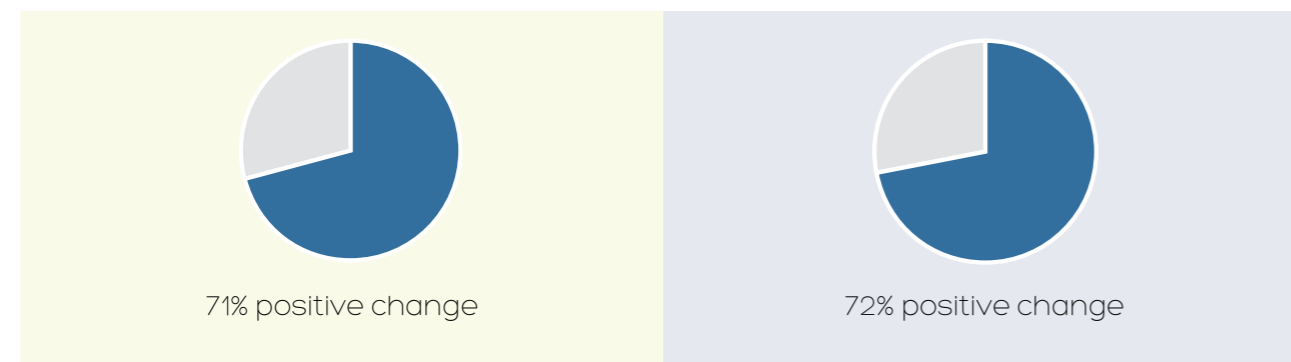
*MAT Questionnaire: Key Performance Indicators MAT Support Officer Service* in EMR Schools using the service for the first time, comparing responses in 2011 to 2010 - continued.



Q. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on reducing teacher stress and improving staff morale.

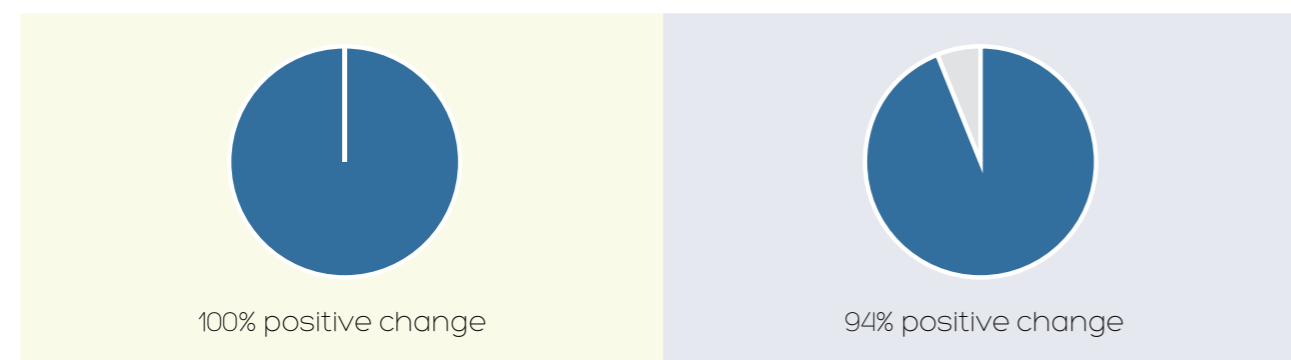


Rating of 7 or above



Rating of 8 or above

Q. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on the number of options for school leaders having to manage challenging/concerning behaviours.



Rating of 8 or above

In 2011 an extended questionnaire was developed and sent to school that had been using the MSO service for six months or longer to gauge a broader range of outcomes and impact to date.

Responses indicating the extent of positive change for the MSO service over an extended period are just shy of the top two levels on the ten point scale, reflecting a high degree of satisfaction and indeed at times exceeding expectations of our service recipients, as evidenced in Table One.

**Table One: MAT MSO Service: Extended Questionnaire 2011 in EMR schools using the service for 6 months or longer.**

1. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on the number of incidents resulting or likely to cause injury.	100% responded with a score of 7 or above 86% responded with a score of 8 or above
2. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on classroom safety in general.	100% responded with a score of 7 or above 86% responded with a score of 8 or above
3. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on disruption to classroom environment.	100% responded with a score of 7 or above 71% responded with a score of 8 or above
4. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on teacher / staff morale.	85% responded with a score of 7 or above 71% responded with a score of 8 or above
5. Indicate the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on number of options for school leaders having to manage challenging/concerning behaviours.	100% responded with a score of 8 or above

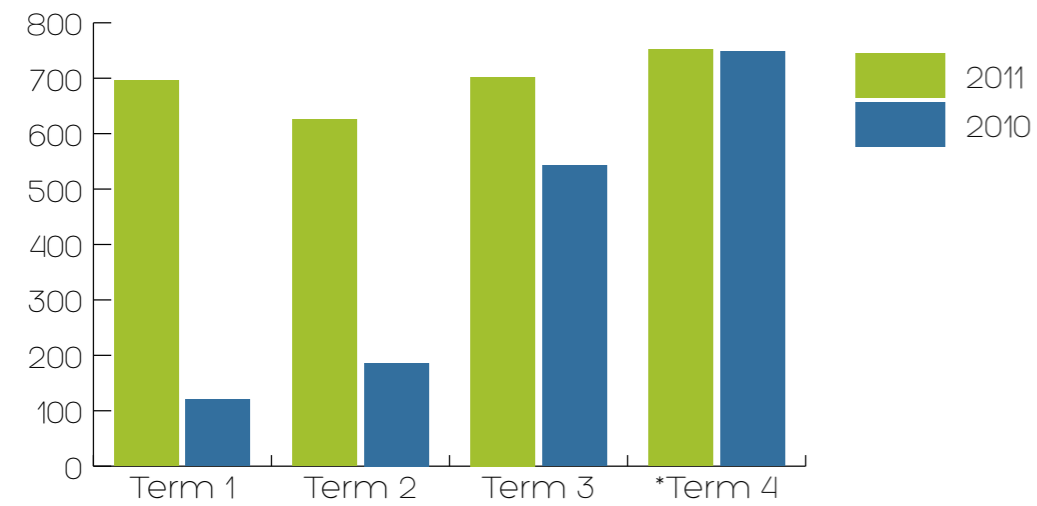
Respondents were also asked to estimate/predict the amount of positive change the MAT Program has had on participation in learning:

- a. Academic performance  
A 30% improvement in student's learning outcomes was noted by 86% of the schools using the MAT Service for the first time and 75% advised continuing improvement for the students six months later
- b. School attendance  
A 40% improvement in student's attendance was noted by 86% of the schools using the MAT Service for the first time and 100% advised continuing improvement for the students six months later.

### Increased Program demand

The significant growth in program delivery has been made possible through the pursuit of increased workforce capacity; that is, as MAT Support Officers (MSO) become qualified they have been immediately employed. However, current demand still exceeds supply.

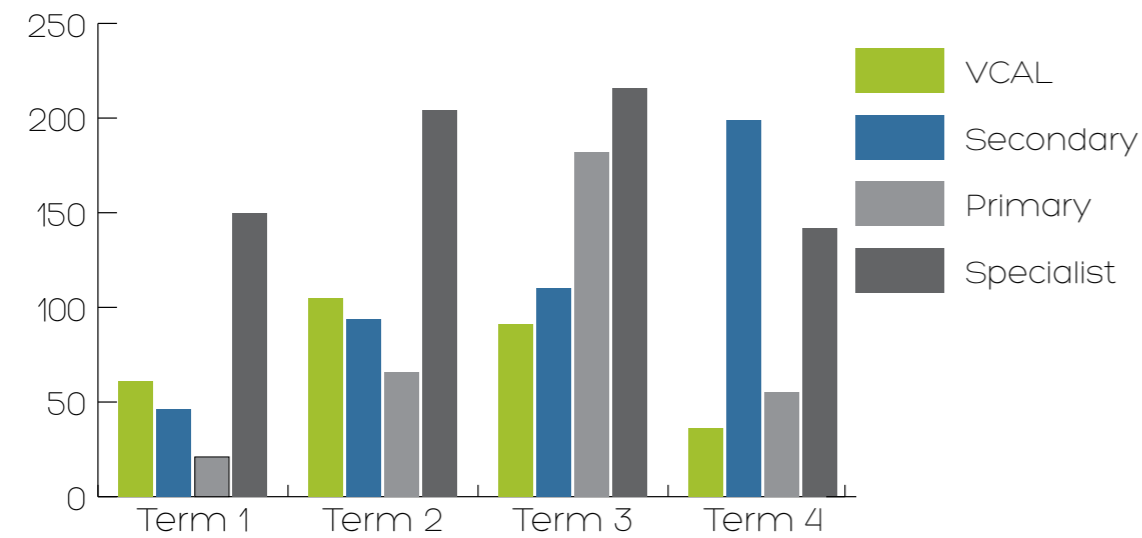
**Graph One: Number of MSO days per term 2011 and 2010**



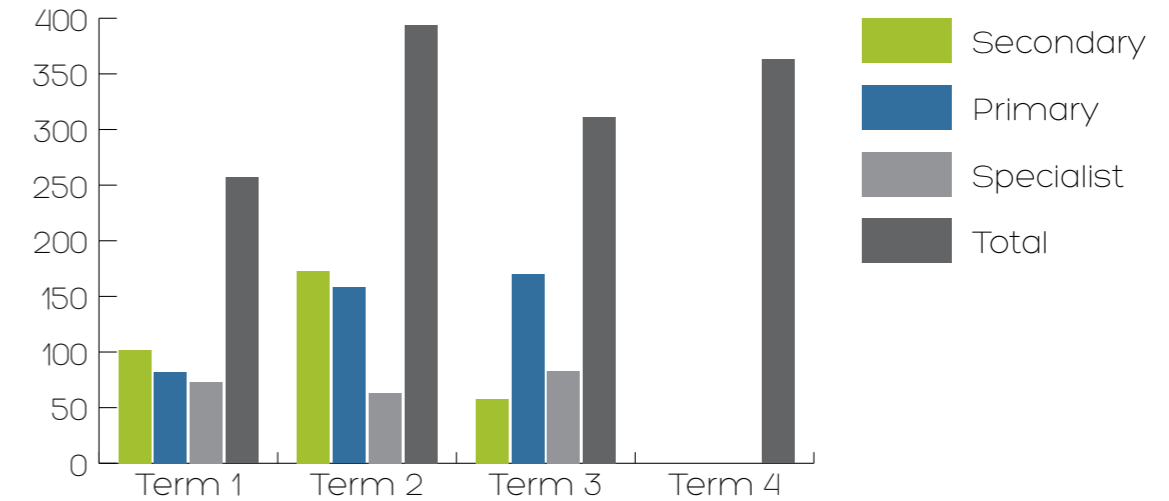
### Progress: Life Skills Programs

Over the course of the 2010 school year 3610 students participated in Life Skills program sessions offered in the context of VCAL (620), secondary (970), primary (1080) and specialist (940) settings.

**Graph Two: Number of Life Skills Programs per setting on a term basis 2010**



**Graph Three: Number of Life Skills Programs per setting on a term basis 2011**

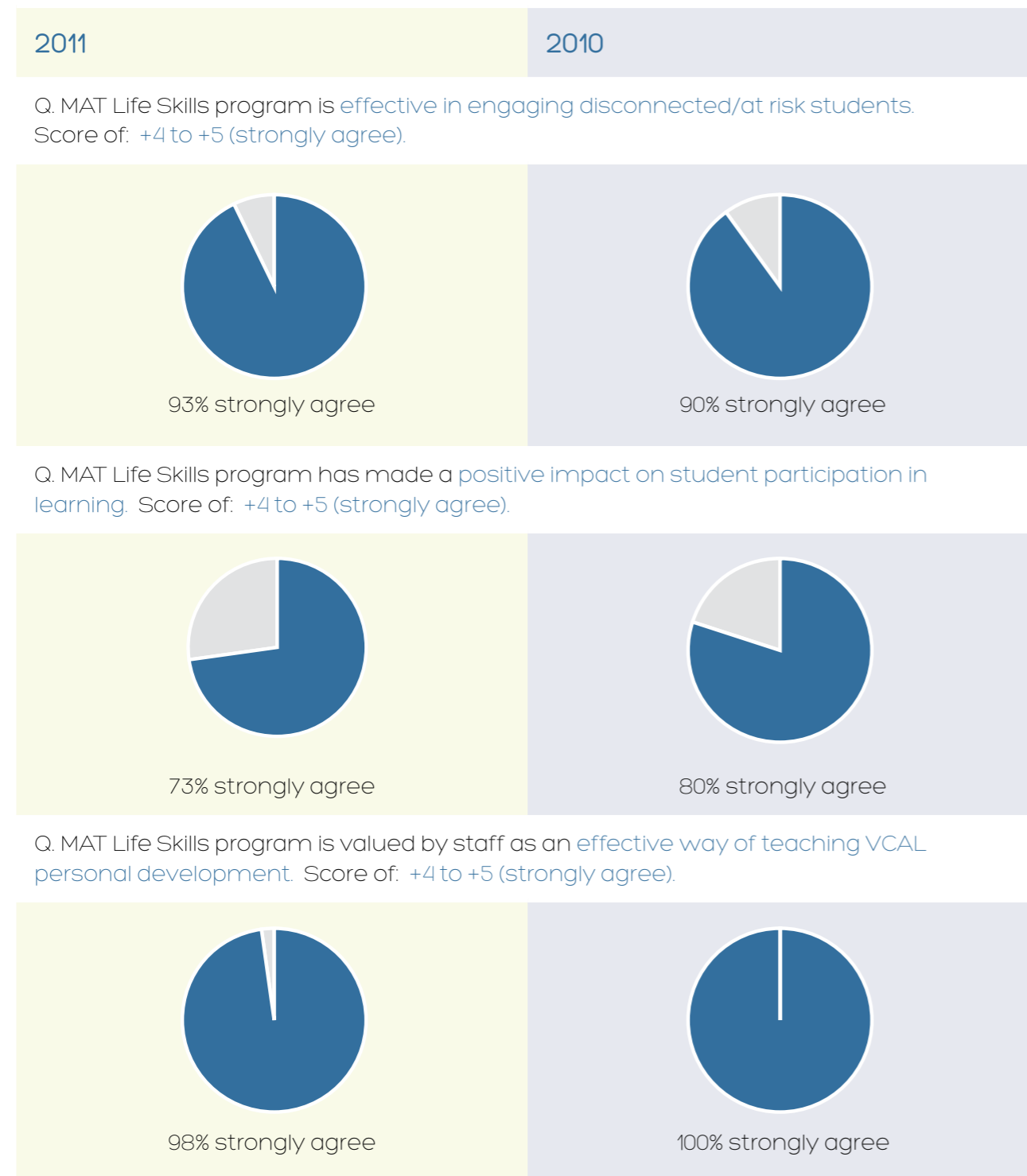


*Note: the Term 4 total is an estimated the number of programs across secondary, primary and specialist settings.*

Another survey was developed for schools and services to respond to a set of questions regarding the MAT VCAL Life Skills Program, and rate the questions posed on a continuum from: -5 (Strongly disagree) to +5 (Strongly agree)

*The ratings predominantly aligned with the top two levels of the scale indicating strong agreement with the intended impact/outcomes of the VCAL Life Skills programs, in particular an increased capacity to re-engage disconnected or at risk senior students, as evidenced in Chart Two*

**Chart Two** MAT Questionnaire: VCAL Life Skills



**Progress: Staff Safety Programs**

The feedback from these sessions has always been exceptionally positive with the teachers and carers stating that they learned useful and empowering skills, gained relevant information whilst having fun. Many said that the sessions have changed their lives by reducing stress levels; physically, strategically and mentally empowering them with skills and through awareness to be able to manage physically dangerous students.

Participant input is used to continually improve and target sessions enabling program development to evolve in a flexible manner to address emerging needs of staff, for example: the Staff Safety sessions are trending towards requiring more emphasis on body language, de-escalation and environmental concerns as opposed to being purely about when some level of violence is occurring. It is anticipated that a trend towards becoming a series of short sessions, not dissimilar to the life skills format, will be the focus in 2012.

*“A very honest approach to occupational violence. Skills were easy to adopt and follow”*

*“Explanation and information clear. Enjoyed the hands on approach. Covered lots of areas relevant to our school”*

*“Great presenters, approachable and willing to assist in clarification. Thanks”*

Comments from Teaching staff at Burwood East Special Development School

Hence, staff safety sessions will need to cover:

- » how to keep safe when the fists are flying,
- » how to use body language and body positioning to affect outcomes,
- » understanding the physical space, for example, is the ‘timeout’ room a pleasant or dreary place, am I standing between the child and exit? why?,
- » verbal de-escalation through empathy and understanding mixed with tone.

“Teachers reported that students were able to discuss how they might use these skills if they had a problem in the playground by ignoring behaviours or making good choices”. “Today at martial arts I learnt that you can use the codes at home or school. When someone is mean to me I will be calm like the game we played called the rock (Year 3 student)”

Louise Mathews Deputy Principal, Sacred Heart, Croydon

# Return on Investment



## Case Study: Sally

When "Sally" was first introduced to the MAT program she found it extremely difficult to speak more than a few words. She was 14 years old. She was extremely anxious and phobic of being around others. She had an extremely introverted personality and kept to herself. She describes a childhood filled with constant movement, little to no stability and no place that she was able to truly call home.

Due to her shy and introverted personality it would take Sally a while to participate in the Martial Arts elective. Day by day and little by little the strength, confidence and courage built inside of her and eventually she was able to attend the class that resulted in her 'buzzing'. Martial Arts was the first thing that captured her interest to stay at school for longer than an hour. It is what gave her a reason to attend school.

On her commencement at Croydon, Sally was asked what it was she wanted to achieve that year. Her answer was that by the end of the year she would have attended school for at least two weeks each day in a row. It was her goal and she achieved it.

Sally is now a Peer Educator with the Martial Arts Therapy Program and assists instructors in a number of and various settings. Her anxiety levels, behaviour and social capacities have changed dramatically.

The combination of the Martial Arts Therapy program and Croydon Community School has allowed her to relax and truly be herself whilst extending herself and her skills. Due to the strong relationships formed and intense work provided by the MAT Program and all its instructors this significant change was able to effectively occur.

Now a confident vibrant young women Sally has the absolutely amazing ability to stand in front of large groups of young people and effectively demonstrate and deliver the techniques she has gained from the MAT program and all its instructors.



## Testing for The Rock

The MAT Program is a **cost effective model** which delivers a range of outcomes, including improved student engagement in their learning, improved student and staff wellbeing and is meeting or exceeding all key performance indicators and will result in a program which can be replicated statewide leading to documented achievements in relation to Government policy for improvement in the education system.

***In 2010 the first year of the pilot program the Department provided \$201,500 in funding.***

### Outcomes:

1,742 sessions of Life Skills Programs were provided and MAT Support Officers were employed in schools for 1,640 days, totaling 3,382 elements of MAT Program delivery by a team of 41 people (28 Life Skills Instructors and 13 MAT Support Officers, assisting 96 schools / organisations (many with multiple programs).

The MAT pilot project successfully met all the Key Performance Indicators demonstrating that the suite of programs provided is effectively addressing the issues that students/teachers/schools

were previously struggling to resolve.

Significantly, the growth in the number of programs delivered was all by word of mouth between teachers/schools/ professionals (without the need for marketing or communication strategies).

Fee for service spending on MAT programs by schools / agencies totaled \$262,000, funding sources for Life Skills Programs include School Focused Youth Service, School/Agency VCAL and Welfare budgets, Advance, specialist grants (body image, mental health, drug and alcohol). MSO funding sources for individual students include Program for Students with Disabilities, DHS child protection and disability services, Non Government Organisations/ agency brokerage (for example Anglicare, Connections, VACCA).

MAT trained and supported staff directly employed by education providers for a total salary/wages value of \$137,000

In addition to individual student outcomes of improved learning outcomes and skills to sustain their wellbeing throughout their

life time, schools can identify a reduction in work cover claims, lost teaching days and reduction in time managing threats of legal action.

***In 2011 the second year of the pilot program the Department provided \$ 209,500 in funding.***

### Outcomes:

1579 sessions of Life Skills Programs were provided (reflects decision taken in relation to the best use of MAT resources) and MAT Support Officers were employed in schools for 2,726 days, totaling 4,305 elements of MAT Program delivery by a team of 42 people (22 Life Skills Instructors and 20 MAT Support Officers, assisting 107 schools / organisations (many with multiple programs)

Service continues to meet or exceed all Key Performance Indicators and is in high demand, above available supply.

The total fee for service spending on MAT programs by schools and agencies this year to date is \$426,000.

MAT trained and supported staff directly employed by education

# Unique Characteristics



providers for a total salary/wages value of \$433,000.

***In 2012 the third year of the pilot program the Department has committed to provide \$231,000 in funding.***

The expected growth in the MAT pilot program is in the area of MAT Support Officers Services, specifically in the aspect of one on one work. This will necessitate growth in recruitment and training of appropriate personnel.

A reduction in the provision of Life Skills Programs is anticipated arising from the changes in the School Focused Youth Service and VCAL funding models to schools/colleges, unless alternate supplementary funding sources can be identified.

The pilot aims to reach more than 150 schools / organisations, predominantly in Eastern Metropolitan Region and with some trials in other metropolitan regions.

A comprehensive and independent evaluation is proposed; refer to Directions for 2012 in this report.

The MAT Programs increasing use by schools over the last several years is due to the following factors.

### MAT Support Officer Services

- » Are very effective in reducing negative outcomes associated with student behaviour likely to cause the risk of injury to other students and staff.
- » Effective in reducing staff stress related to students with challenging behaviour
- » Effective in assisting staff improve disengaged student's participation in learning
- » School based support both in the classroom and the schoolyard
- » Have collaborative approach of [Support the School to Support the Child](#)
- » Cost effective as MSO employment at basic Education Support Officer rates
- » DEECD supported through funding from the Deputy Secretary School Education

and recommended by Eastern Metropolitan Region Senior Officers.

- » Safe
- » Accountable as all shifts are documented and reviewed
- » Professional support, all MSO's receive quarterly individual reviews and participate in mandatory professional development sessions
- » Flexibility of staff, able to interchange staff depending on performance/suitability, staff are able to move schools along with a student (within the region) so school isn't left with extra staff (avoiding potential excess), MSO's can be used on a short, medium and long term basis (including use of split ledger payment methods)
- » Are backed up by network of experienced staff to assist in development of student management plans, improving school/ staff capacity to manage challenging behaviours

### Life Skills Programs

- » Stronger therapeutic

background than other Martial Arts (MA) private providers and with greater Life Skills educational content versus MA skills content

- » More able to engage less willing and more disruptive students than other MA providers
- » Consistent recommendation by a major funding body School Focussed Youth Service as a quality provider
- » Proven track record using Peer Education concepts within programs
- » First MA life skills program to receive exemplar status by VCAL quality assurance as an effective method for reaching expected learning outcomes in the Personal Development stream
- » Cost effective in comparison to other MA skills program providers generally MAT is between 30 to 50% cheaper
- » Wider variety of Instructors in terms of MAT training background, life experience, age and gender than other MA providers



# Governance, Organisational Arrangements, Personnel



## Case Study: Keith

"Keith" is a thirteen year old boy currently living at home with his two older sisters and mother who is a single parent. All family members have been identified as having an intellectual disability. Keith has been described as a very shy, socially withdrawn young boy with poor social skills and a tendency to abscond when he is anxious. Keith and his mother had significant difficulty in separation and during the 18 months prior to referral, he had spent this time at home, socially isolated from his peers and spending much of his waking hours watching television.

In late November 2010, Keith was referred to the MAT program at EMR Options by the Student Wellbeing Officer at DEECD on behalf of the Department of Human Services Child Protection Service and his primary school. A MAT Aide was assigned to support Keith's participation at a small alternative farm based education setting as the first step in his return to schooling.

Within the time frame of a few days of this arrangement, each time the aide and caseworker arrived in the morning to pick him up, Keith was up and ready with his mother who had made his lunch and waiting to go to school. This was a significant change in previous behaviour of both Keith and his mother. The transitional support by both the MAT aide and DHS caseworker, which had a strong emphasis on building relationships, trust and a sense of safety with both parent and child seems to have contributed significantly to this behaviour change and the separation anxiety lessened significantly for both.

In January 2011, Keith attended the first day of a transition program at Croydon Community School and has since been attending school each day by independent means, no longer needing the direct support the CP caseworker and MAT aide taking him to school. The MAT aide is no longer working with him the entire school day but rather this visited him on occasion to maintain sense of continuity for Keith. He is remaining at CCS all day in a classroom with his peers.

## The MAT Code

力 穩 慈 努

Croydon Community School Council is the governing body for the MAT Program pilot.

### Accountability

The MAT Executive Officer reports directly to the Croydon Community School Principal Mark Heuston and the EMR Options Principal Bronwyn Harcourt.

Eastern Metropolitan Region, through the Assistant Regional Director, the Regional Network Leader (Maroondah), monitors the pilot program and authenticates the processes, data and outcomes associated with the MAT pilot program implementation.

### Administration

The administration of the MAT Program pilot has become more closely linked to EMR Options over 2011 with the Executive Officer, Program Coordinator and Program Administrator (part time) all located on the Croydon Community School campus.

All employment and management of human resources is in line with the Department processes and supervised by the EMR Options Business Manager and Principal.

All personnel are required to have a Working with Children check.

All personnel and student files are treated in accordance with the Department privacy policy.

All computer records are stored on Croydon Community School campus, with regular backups provided by the EMR Options Information Communications Technology Manager.

### Financial Management

The management of all financial processes for the MAT Program pilot is provided by the EMR Options Business Manager and adheres to all requirements as set out by the Department and Treasury.

### MAT Pilot Project Personnel

The pilot project budget allocates funding to employ the services of key people with specific knowledge of the MAT Program on the basis of 1 to 3 year contracts consistent with the project's timeline and expected outcomes. The MAT Program and EMR Options identified key people from within existing networks who are appropriately skilled and motivated to develop and implement this project.

The MAT Executive Officer is employed full time to lead the project with the position being co-funded by the Department and EMR Options. Four other positions on 12 month contracts assist to oversee the project delivery: a MAT Program Coordinator (full time); a MAT MSO Senior Worker (full time); a MAT Life Skills Coordinator (0.8) and a Program Administrator (0.8). The program coordinator position is fully funded from the pilot allocation, whilst the other three are co-funded by the pilot and EMR Options

### MAT Support Officers

In 2011 there are 28 MAT Support Officers (MSO's) each of whom has undertaken an initial intensive training program encompassing:

- » The Role of MAT Support Officers
- » Role of MAT Coordinator
- » Working in Schools - Things To Know
- » Normal Child Development Information
- » Causes of Behaviour Problems in Children

## Directions for the Pilot in 2012



- » Observation
- » Principles of Managing Challenging Behaviours Escalation and De-Escalation Cycles
- » Dealing with Concerns about Student Safety
- » Reporting Child Abuse
- » Minimising Risk of Allegations
- » Writing Reviews
- » Principles of Redirection and Technique

It was determined that ongoing training throughout the year was required to support the professional development of MSO's and enhance their capacity to support children and education staff. In the second half of the pilot four professional development days are now mandatory for all MSO's to attend as well as compulsory quarterly supervision meetings. These cover areas such as professional practice and standards, professional development needs and other issues as they arise. Hence maintaining a level of quality control and support to staff working with children with significant needs in school systems that are frequently under stress and are not able to provide the debriefing or guidance needed for MSO's to continue to be successful in this role.

### MAT Life Skills Instructors

In 2011 there are 27 Life Skills Instructors, each of whom has undertaken the Martial Art Therapist Training Program, Level 1. This aims to provide participants with the skills and knowledge they will need to act as Assistant and Lead Instructors in group and individual Life Skills programs.

The training program consists of 7 modules:

- » The MAT Program and Role of MAT Program Instructors
- » Standards Required for MAT Program Instructors and Peer Educators
- » The CODE and Martial Art Therapy Skills and Drills
- » Managing Challenging Behaviours
- » Managing Challenging Behaviours and Running Groups
- » Lesson Plan examples; MAT Manual; General Policies and Work Instructions
- » Assessment

It is supported in a practical sense by volunteering in MAT Programs for a minimum period of 30 hours.

In the third year of the MAT Program there will be a continued focus on achieving our mission to demonstrate the program capacity to improve the inclusion of students, engage them in schooling, support their wellbeing and make schools more productive places. Key priorities are to achieve or exceed all pilot goals and to identify further opportunities for growth.

It is expected that further expansion of the MAT Support Officer Service will occur, with a target of 25% increase in capacity.

Liaison with a tertiary institute will be sought to undertake an external evaluation of the MAT program; in particular to verify outcomes in relation to achievement of pilot goals and key performance indicators. To gain further details of improvement to student learning outcomes (Victorian Essential Learning Standards; Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning), student attendance patterns and student wellbeing.

To engage with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to consider rolling out the current pilot across other regions and replicating the MAT Program model in order to meet the Victorian Government determination to provide safe and caring schools for all children and young people.

To begin strategic planning for sustainability of a statewide MAT Program model by 2015, in which all members of the community (students, families, teachers, school leaders, business, agencies and government) work together to create better outcomes for our children and young people, to contribute to the Minister for Education vision of *Victoria as a Learning Community*.



## Ruskin Park Primary School

**"RISING TO THE CHALLENGE"**

Principal: Elle May Laikve  
Assistant Principal: Mary Kelly

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Danielle Nielsen  
MAT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

October 22, 2011

Dear Danielle,

This letter may be used as a testimonial describing how the MAT Redirection Aides have assisted in our school during the past few years.

Since 2008, Redirection Aides have been employed by our school to support students with severe behavior issues. We have found that for some children, the support of an integration aide is not sufficient for effectively managing these students in the mainstream school setting. Redirection aides are trained to restrain children only if absolutely necessary for their safety and the safety of others within this child's immediate surroundings.

Obtaining funding for some groups of 'at risk' students is becoming more challenging, as they do not qualify for aide support despite clear evidence of severe behavioural and/or psychological concerns. Schools are left to find alternative ways of managing these students and sometimes this means diverting funding allocated to other program areas in order to support these students.

Our school has provided redirection aides for both funded and unfunded students because:

- These students are at greater risk of disengaging from education
- These students compromise the safety and opportunities for other students to learn
- These students are more likely to injure themselves and/or others
- These students impact on the overall school morale and stress levels of staff, other students and families within the school community

We have observed that the Redirection Aides have presented as mature and cooperative individuals with excellent communication skills and the ability to work with our difficult students pro-actively and respectfully. They have also demonstrated great teamwork, liaising with the classroom teachers and school administration and when necessary, meeting with parents as part of organized Student Support Group meetings.

We have witnessed the changes in student and staff morale and stress levels before and after employing Redirection Aides to help with the management of highly disruptive and challenging children. Often, the circumstances for these difficult students are compounded by the lack of love, care and support that other children normally receive at home as well as the lack of boundaries and consequences that enable children to feel safe and develop a sense of trust in adults.

Offering schools the support and option to use Redirection Aides when a school has exhausted all other avenues of assistance is an invaluable and essential service. We have found that the Redirection Aides are often able to quickly develop rapport and positive relationships with these challenging children and the students have the chance to learn respect and understanding of consequences and boundaries.

I commend the MAT Redirection Aides Program – EMR Options as an extremely valuable, supportive and practical alternative for any school who must manage students with difficult and disruptive behaviours for which the support of an integration aide, school chaplain or participation in targeted wellbeing programs is either having no effect or is not possible.

Thank you to the EMR Options – MAT Program for their support of our students and school community over the past few years. This support is appreciated and highly valued and has made an enormous positive difference to so many along the way.

Yours truly,

*Elle May Laikve*

Principal

# Acknowledgements

- » MAT Program Pty Ltd
- » Croydon Community School (EMRO)
- » Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- » School Focused Youth Service
- » Career Advice Australia (CAA)
- » Chisholm TAFE
- » Department of Human Services
- » Child and Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- » Virginia Golding - Child and Family Therapist
- » Shukokai Karate Victoria
- » Ultimate Mixed Martial Arts
- » Chris Bennett - Partner Price Waterhouse Coopers
- » Paris Consulting Financial Services
- » Birdman Accessories
- » Hollywood Panels
- » Victoria Triggs - Director Leading Lady Consultancy

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