

## ***Building Optimism in Kids!***

### **Research Demonstrating the Effectiveness of 'Optimistic Kids' Workshops**

This brief report is based upon a series of 3 two-hour workshops that were held at Braeview Primary School over the course of 6 weeks.

The following results have been reviewed independently through affiliations with the School of Psychology, the University of Adelaide.

#### **The Project:**

Four of the service providers from 'Optimistic Kids' (Simon, Chris, Amanda and Edwina) took a class of about 30 Grade 6 and 7 children, and ran these three workshops.

These workshops covered the content normally presented in 'Optimistic Kids' after-school workshops: social skills, negotiation, compromising, problem solving, putting things in perspective, looking for evidence, and linking our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

#### **The Participants:**

The children involved were all aged between 10-13 years. This was an important age group to help, as research<sup>1</sup> has shown that optimism is highest in younger children (5 years old), and tends to decrease as kids get older (showing much lower levels by about 11 years).

This means we can get the most benefit from training programs like 'Optimistic Kids' if we work with children aged anywhere from 7-15 years, since this seems to be the age period where levels of optimism can be most affected. The aim of our program is to help optimistic kids to STAY optimistic, and non-optimistic kids to BECOME optimistic, so that overall, we see an improvement in optimism levels across large groups of children.

The work we did at Braeview Primary School indicated that our program is achieving this goal, as is shown by the evidence below...

<sup>1</sup>: For Example, see Lockhart, Chang & Story (2002); Farrall & Taplin (2004).<sup>2</sup>: YLOT, Ey et al (2005).

<sup>3</sup>: N = 20. <sup>4</sup>: All statistical results were according to a  $p < 0.05$  critical value.

## **The Evaluation:**

The children who participated in the 6-week course at Braeview Primary School all completed a questionnaire called the ‘Youth Life Orientation Test’<sup>2</sup>, or YLOT, which measures a child’s or teenager’s ‘regular’ or ‘natural’ level of optimism and pessimism.

Since optimism levels demonstrate beliefs in positive, or happy, future outcomes, and pessimism levels indicate beliefs in negative outcomes and events in the future, this questionnaire enabled us to get a “snapshot” of the level of optimism and pessimism in the entire Year 6/7 group.

After completing the questionnaire, the students all participated in the ‘Optimistic Kids’ course.

Once the course was completed, a smaller group<sup>3</sup> of children completed the YLOT again, so that we could test to see whether levels of optimism and pessimism had changed at all.

## **The Results:**

Excitingly, we found that there was a significant increase in optimism over the course of the ‘Optimistic Kids’ intervention, meaning that, on average, children were more optimistic when they exited the program than they were when they first began the program. The statistics also showed that the average level of pessimism in the group significantly decreased over the course of the program.<sup>4</sup>

This is all evidence strongly in favour of the effectiveness and specificity of the ‘Optimistic Kids’ program.

## **Conclusions:**

1. The Optimistic Kids program works well in a classroom setting during school hours;
2. The YLOT appears to provide a good measure of both optimism and pessimism that is sensitive to changes over time;
3. Children aged 10-13 years can definitely demonstrate an average increase in optimism levels, and decrease in pessimism levels;
4. Three intensive sessions (at least 2 hours long each) seem to provide a great foundation for achieving changes in optimism and pessimism; and
5. The ‘Optimistic Kids’ course works well when it is adapted to group delivery and demonstrates a significant degree of effectiveness.

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