

# Engaging and Educating the Community to Prevent Childhood Sexual Abuse: Project Evaluation Report Executive Summary

## Introduction

Body Safety Australia, under the aegis of the Salvation Army Children and Parenting Support Services (CaPPS), conducted a number of workshops for a Primary School in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, aimed at preventing sexual abuse of children in the community.

The purpose of the workshops was to provide education solutions to increase awareness of childhood sexual abuse, and educate parents, carers and children on practical body safety (sexual abuse prevention) strategies. Workshops were provided to parents, and teachers were present at all the children's workshops to ensure the information provided to children was fully understood and supported by parents and teachers.

Body Safety Australia conducted student programs in twenty-seven classes:

- Prep – Grade 2: One program, forty-five minutes per week, in five classes
- Grade 1/2: Two week program, one hour per week, in eight classes
- Grade 3/4: Three week program, one hour per week, in eight classes
- Grade 5/6: Three week program, one hour per week, in six classes
- 2 parent workshops, two hours per workshop

The workshops concentrated on imparting age-appropriate understanding of safe touching, differentiating between private and public body parts, and identifying strategies children could use if they were exposed to experiences that made them feel unsafe.

## About the school

605 children are enrolled full time at the Primary School, evenly divided between girls and boys. 6% of the students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 34% have a language background other than English. The school is significantly overrepresented in the lower socio-educational disadvantage scale. 59% of the students sit in the bottom quarter, 39% in the middle and only 3% in the top quarter of socio- educational advantage. The rate of disadvantage in the school has been increasing since 2008, when only 34% of the students were in the bottom quarter of socio-educational advantage.

## Outcomes

Children showed significant improvement across all age groups in their ability to recognise and name the differences between safe and unsafe touches, private and public body parts and strategies to deal with feeling unsafe. The improvement was most notable in the younger children, but was consistent across all age groups.

Despite the improvement, a small proportion of the children were still unable to identify private body parts and many did not understand nipples as also being private parts. Safety strategies were also more clear after the workshops, but again, still lacking in a small proportion of the students, indicating further education may be beneficial.

Both parents and teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the Body Safety Superstars program.

88% of teachers rated the program itself as “excellent” or “good”, and 100% rated the trainers as “excellent” or “good”. In response to the question “Does this program add value beyond the content of the existing school curriculum?” 50% said “very much” and a further 50% said “somewhat”.

The teacher’s lack of confidence in teaching body safety and awareness of sexual abuse was reflected in their preference for further teaching on these topics. 92% said they would prefer such classes be taught on school premises by a qualified external trainer.

83% of parents rated the program as excellent, and 92% said the trainer was excellent. Parents were asked about their confidence in discussing child safety and sexual abuse issues with other adults. Specifically, they were asked about:

- Reporting sexual abuse of children
- Child safety at home and at school

The majority of parents were very confident with these topics before the workshop, but showed an increase after the workshop.

## Further learning

Online safety was the topic where parents and teachers were most lacking confidence in their ability to understand the risks and protect children. We also note that online safety was an issue of some confusion for the children.

Most teachers reported increased confidence in teaching child safety and body issues after the workshops, but the lack of confidence in this area was still significant. We would strongly recommend further training or support for teachers in this area.

Another outcome that might indicate further learning opportunities was the increase in “hit or yell at someone” as a recognised response to fear after the workshops. The most likely explanation for this is that the children were able to recognise violent impulses as a response to fear, which may indicate a possibility for long term violence prevention in further education on this issue.