

JOURNEY OF HOPE:

Recovery and Resilience Evaluation



Save the
Children



The extraordinary Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 had a devastating impact on everything in their path, including the children living in fire affected communities.

In response, Save the Children delivered Journey of Hope, an evidence-based, post-disaster recovery program to approximately 5,000 children in schools from fire affected communities in NSW and Victoria. This included 77 schools – 59 in NSW and 18 in Victoria. This is the first evaluation of the program's impacts on Australian students.



WHAT IS JOURNEY OF HOPE?

Journey of Hope (JoH) is a school-based group-work intervention for children and early adolescents who have experienced a collective trauma, such as a natural hazard or disaster. The eight-week program aims to help participants identify and process emotions. Children learn that it is normal to feel angry, sad or frustrated during scary or difficult situations. The program also supports children to identify positive coping strategies that they can use to deal with current and future emotional challenges. Evaluations of the JoH program have been conducted in the US and New Zealand, and suggest children's coping skills and prosocial behaviours improved after participating. In order to build on this evidence, SCA conducted an evaluation of the JoH program in Australia.

WHAT WAS THE EVALUATION PROCESS?

Save the Children Australia worked with Professor Lisa Gibbs and a team of researchers from the University of Melbourne to design and conduct a mixed methods evaluation, which included student surveys and group discussions, and interviews with parents and teachers.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE EVALUATION?

671 students (average age 11 y.o) from 21 schools located in areas affected by the 2019-20 bushfires participated in the evaluation. Students completed a questionnaire which included the *Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)* and *Kidcope* before and after the program. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 36 students, 6 parents and 8 teachers.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Before JoH

Before the program, children reported experiencing much more difficulties in their daily lives than average Australian children of the same age, indicating they were continuing to struggle months after the bushfires ended.

After JoH

Children reported significantly less difficulties in their daily lives after participating in Journey of Hope (Figure 1). They also showed significant improvements in their relationships with others (Figure 2) and their use of positive coping strategies (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Improvement in SDQ Total Difficulties Scale Score

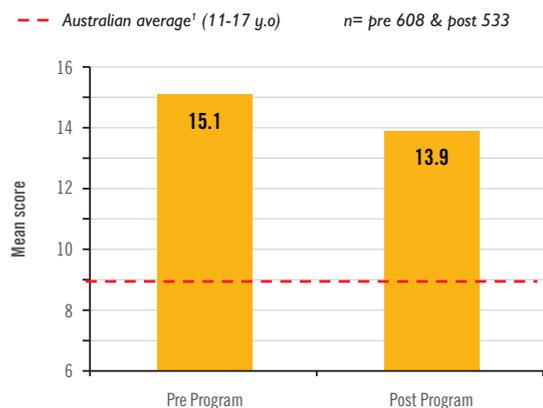


Figure 2. Improvement in SDQ Prosocial Subscale Score

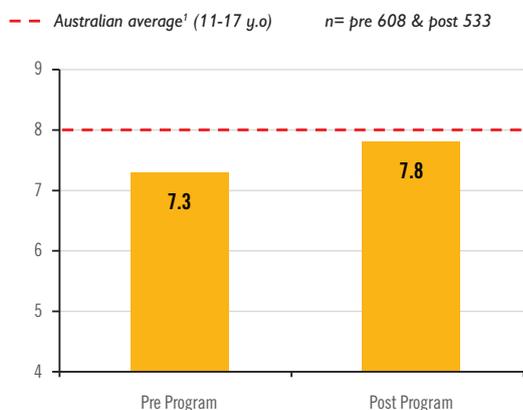
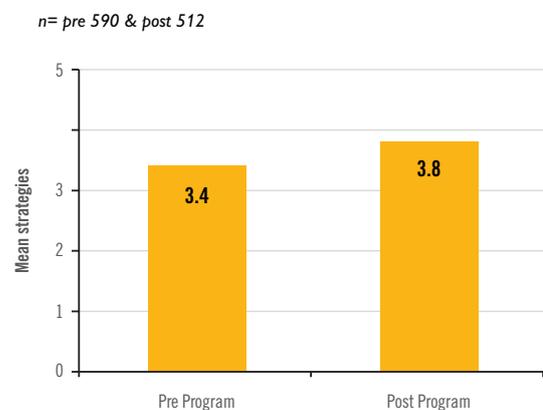


Figure 3. Increase in use of positive coping strategies



1. Mellor, D. (2005). "Normative data for the strengths and difficulties questionnaire in Australia." *Australian psychologist* 40(3): 215-222.



WHAT DID CHILDREN SAY?

I felt safe sharing my feelings

92%

91%

JoH taught me how to manage my feelings

I felt listened to

91%

97%

I liked coming

I practised what I learned

78%

92%

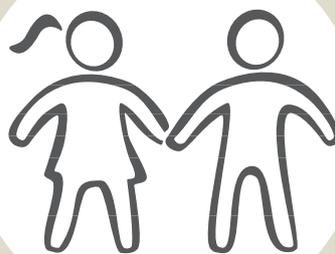
Coming made me feel better

I have talked with a grown up about my feelings

70%

84%

Coming made me feel better about school





It made me learn a bit more about where my daughter's coming from as a child.

– Parent



[The students] are much happier and our school and our behaviors are much more settled, and I believe that's been the impact of the program.

– Teacher

WHAT DID ADULTS SAY?



[My child] learned that it's ok to get angry. She has used tools learnt in the workshop. . . [She] can now come back and reset and deal with stressful things. [She] can easily acknowledge the frustration in a better way and come back and manage it in a calmer way.

– Parent

SUMMARY

Journey of Hope met a critical and otherwise unmet need, with its provision of specialist social and emotional wellbeing support in school settings particularly welcomed by students, teachers and parents. Children, school staff and parents reported very positive experiences with the program.

The positive changes found were greater than natural improvements over time. These findings are consistent with growing evidence of the benefits of implementing universal psychosocial support programs in schools and highlight the importance of every student receiving access to wellbeing support in the aftermath of a disaster.

JOURNEY OF HOPE IS PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY

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- QBE Foundation
- Sabemo Foundation
- St George Foundation
- World Nomads

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Lachlan Alexander, lachlan.alexander@savethechildren.org.au
Professor Lisa Gibbs, lgibbs@unimelb.edu.au



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