



# **The Resilience Doughnut: A Pilot Study in Four Primary Schools and One High School.**

Lyn Worsley 2008



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## **Introduction:**

A pilot study was conducted in 4 inner city Catholic primary schools using the Resilience Doughnut model. This study was initiated by the parent council of the inner west region of Catholic schools for the purpose of building resilience in the schools, families and the communities that surround the children in the inner western suburbs of Sydney.

The organisers expressed a need for the local communities, parents and schools to link together in some way in order to promote resilience in the young people. The children in the local schools were mostly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had a higher than average rate of special educational needs 29%, and experienced some level of difficulties with transitioning to the local high schools. It was seen as advantageous for parents to be involved in some way to promote and build resilience in their children and their families.

Funding was allocated from the parent council and meetings between Lyn Worsley and the executive staff of the 4 local primary schools and the feeder high school addressed the process of implementing the resilience doughnut model into a whole school program across 4 schools.

The aims of the study were to;

- Raise parental awareness of factors contributing to resilience, enabling parents to use resilience promoting activities in their children, families, schools and local communities.
- Provide Teacher awareness of factors contributing to resilience, enabling an optimistic and resilience promoting school environment.
- Educate year 6 students on factors that may contribute to their own resilience, and enable them to cope with the transition to high school in the following year.
- Reinforce the factors contributing to resilience through a peer support program with year 6 students as teachers to years 1-5 students, supervised by teachers and parents.

## **Subjects:**

The 4 primary schools were  
St Paul of the Cross, K-6: Dulwich Hill, 25 year 6 students (boys and girls aged 11 years)

St Brigid's primary school, Marrickville, 50 year 6 students (boys and girls aged 11 years)

St Michael's primary school, Stanmore, 30 year 6 students

St Pius primary school, Enmore, 20 year 6 students.

The feeder High school was Casimir College, Marrickville (approximately 1000 students).

Staff in all schools was involved in professional development activities and all parents were invited to participate on information nights.

Ethics approval was obtained through the Catholic Schools Ethics board NSW.

### **Method:**

#### **Stage 1. Parent education:**

Three parent information evenings were offered in 2 sites, to enable parents to attend from all schools, including the high school.

Session1: focussed on teaching the Resilience Doughnut model. Parents were asked to score their child's resilience and to think of ways to strengthen and build their child's resilience after establishing their three strengths.

Session 2: focussed on using optimistic language with children, giving parents examples and practice opportunities.

Session3: focussed on moral reasoning and social development of children at various stages, giving parents ideas as to how to strengthen the process of moral and social development.

These sessions were advertised in the local school newsletters, and were run from 7-9pm by Lyn Worsley (Clinical Psychologist) for three consecutive evenings. Approximately 100 parents attended the sessions in each of the locations.

#### **Stage 2. Staff education:**

Three staff development afternoons were run from 3.15-4.30 for three consecutive weeks in each of the schools.

This enabled all staff to attend and meetings were informal using the staff common room as a venue.

Session 1: The resilience doughnut model and principals of building resilience using three strong factors.

Session 2: Optimistic and pessimistic thinking patterns, changing behaviour and focussing on change in discipline and social interactions with children.

Session 3: The development of moral reasoning and social skills in the context of discipline and welfare decisions.

Clinical Psychologist, Lyn Worsley and a Masters Student from Monash University conducted all sessions.

#### **Stage 3. Year 6 workshops;**

Session 1: Year 6 was divided into groups of 20 students and 2 Psychology interns facilitated a workshop using a large floor model in the shape of the doughnut.

Students were asked to sit on the floor around the doughnut model and a fictitious character (in the form of a large teddy bear with the school uniform on), named “Sam” was used to demonstrate the resilience doughnut. Students were asked to rate each of Sam’s 7 factors from 0-10, and then to select the three highest scores. Students were asked to think of ways that Sam could combine the three strong factors to help him become more resilient.

Session 2: Students were divided into two groups of 10 and were given a small workbook designed for students’ k-6. Each of the items for the factors was reworded aiming at year 3 reading age. Each opening page represented a factor of the resilience doughnut with 10 items for each factor. Students ticked the items that were true and they added the number of items ticked to give them a score out of 10 for each factor. They could also draw or write about each of the factors in the space provided.

At the end of the session, students calculated the three strongest factors for themselves and wrote in the back of the booklet the things that made each of the factors strong.

Homework: Students were then given a cut out jigsaw model of the Resilience Doughnut to take home and to practice explaining it to their parents. (Parents had previously attended a parent evening session on the Resilience doughnut).

Classroom support: A follow up session was arranged with the classroom teachers to help year 6 students to be prepared to teach the Resilience doughnut in small peer support groups.

#### **Stage 4: Peer support year’s k-6**

2 Year 6 students were allocated a small group of students from year’s 1- 5. Time was set aside for peer support for 1 hour each week for a 10-week term and each student was given a booklet to fill in their details and pictures. A classroom teacher supervised year 6 students while they taught the Resilience Doughnut to the younger students using the small jigsaw puzzle. Each week a factor was explained to the younger students, with time was left at the end of each lesson for students to fill in their details.

A pre and post questionnaire was given to each classroom teacher to fill out 1 week before the program began and 6 weeks after the program was completed.

These questionnaires asked qualitative questions regarding the children’s resilience, their attitudes and involvement with friends and the school community.

It also asked about qualitative changes that teachers observed in the playground, classroom and parent interaction.

Feedback was sought as to ways the program could be improved.

### **Results:**

#### **Stage 1. Parent sessions**

A total of 200 parents from 5 schools attended the evenings, from a population of 1125 parents. Given the advertising of the evening and the importance to parental participation with the program the number of parents at the information sessions was disappointing. Parents were invited to give feedback via evaluation sheets at the end of each session. Most participants noted the evening sessions to be helpful and there was an increase in parental attendance with each session. From qualitative discussion during the sessions the following information was collected:

- Participants noted that the use of the resilience doughnut enabled them to think of the positives and build on them and felt that the pressure was off them to do everything for their children.
- Participants noted that it was good to see how important grandparents, priests, teachers and local community members were important to their children's development.
- 12 parents expressed they would return to mass each week and be more involved in the church community.

### **Stage 2. Teacher professional development**

- Teacher feedback was positive with many of them expressing the desire to know more about the optimistic thinking patterns and ways to promote resilience in conversations with their students.
- Teachers noted they needed more information as to ways to enhance the development of moral reasoning in their teaching.
- Primary teachers were aware that the use of the peer support program would cross a number of curricula areas such as reading and comprehension as well as resilience, self esteem, family and community connections. For this reason they were keen to implement the peer teaching component of the program.

### **Stage 3. Year 6 workshops**

Feedback from year 6 was very positive with students engaged and keen to take on the leadership in teaching the Resilience Doughnut on to younger students. While some students had obvious learning difficulties, classroom teachers were able to help them stay on task, however all students appeared to be engaged in the large group workshop.

### **Stage 4. Peer support.**

Observational reports from teachers involved in the peer support classes noted that students were engaged and involved however the young students did not appear to understand the concept being taught.

It appeared however that the year 6 students fully grasped the concept, and were able to understand the factors contributing to resilience.

### **High school student involvement:**

It was decided during the course of meeting and planning that to implement the whole school approach to the high school students, a new resource would be needed such as a computer program instead of small booklets. Thus the involvement of the high school students was postponed while a computer program was made.

## **Discussion:**

From the pilot program it would appear that there is qualitative changes that occur in implementing a whole community approach to building resilience, however the measurement of this is an issue.

Considering the whole school Resilience Doughnut program focussed on the processes and interactions involved in building resilience, qualitative analysis of teacher, parent, and student feedback was collated.

Parents who attended the seminars reported positive connections and an awareness of the resources in their community, families and schools and the importance of linking these regularly. Teachers considered the value of the program in linking the resources of parent's students and peers and community in the school setting in order to build resilience. All teachers noted there was value in the program across all curriculum areas.

While there appeared to be no significant differences in student attendance, student involvement, there was a reported change in attitude across all primary schools involved. It appeared however that the program induced feelings of community within the school and enhanced a number of self-esteem building factors for the year 6 students.

Year 6 students felt they belonged to their group, they had a purpose and skill to perform in their group and were able to gain some sense of status in their small group that enabled them to build on their internal resilience.

Further work would be recommended in helping year 6 students to build on their own resilience in term 4 as they prepare to go to their high schools the following year.

## **Findings and recommendations**

Since the program was in the initial stages of development a number of considerations need to be made. As the Doughnut model promotes the interaction of parents, school community and family in building children's resilience, creative ways to involve parents in the program need to be investigated.

It seems that knowledge of the model is helpful for students as they transition to high school. Therefore a tool, which is age appropriate for students in the high school (using social media), would be useful in helping students to continue using the model through their high school years.

Since the model is better applied individually and collaboration and connections in the school setting are considered for each student, an on going process of peer tutoring in the school would be beneficial as younger students eventually understand the application of the model to themselves and can then teach the model to younger students.

Considering the links to high school and primary schools have been shown to be beneficial, a peer tutoring system would also be beneficial where struggling high school students teach the younger primary students the model, thus benefitting both tutors and students.

The process of building resilience involves many factors in a child's life and the importance of linking the positive strong factors to boost a child's resilience during times of transition and change cannot be underestimated. For this reason this pilot program has been invaluable for all the participants. It is therefore recommended that further programs be implemented in cluster schools using some quantitative measures to establish changes in resilience.