



Evaluation of Travellers Programme 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Travellers is an in-school, small group programme that enables young people to learn skills to cope with change, loss and transition and to build their self-esteem and confidence to be able to face life's future challenges. Travellers has previously been evaluated four times by independent evaluators, the first two evaluations formative and process in nature, the third exploring short and medium-term outcomes undertaken in 2012 by NZCER, focused on participants from 2008 and 2009, and the most recent one in 2014 (Victoria University Education Department) focused on programme content.

The present independent evaluation again sought to explore short and medium term outcomes of the programme, and how well the programme is meeting the needs of young people and their schools, for the cohort who took part in the programme in 2014. In order to make comparisons over time, some elements of the 2012 evaluation were replicated, and in particular, some survey questions were the same across the two evaluations. The present evaluation expands on the 2012 NZCER methodology with considerably more qualitative data gathering incorporated into the present methodology.

The evaluation employed a mixed methods approach, triangulating findings across a number of different data gathering techniques.

Ethical approval for this project was sought and obtained from The New Zealand Ethics Committee (NZEC 2016_3). Participation in the evaluation was voluntary.

Limitations

There are two main limitations of the quantitative survey.

1. Failure to use a probability sampling technique significantly limits our ability to make broader generalisations from our results (i.e., our ability to make statistical inferences from our sample to the population being studied). In the present study it was not possible to obtain access to all the schools that had participated in Travellers in 2014. Some schools no longer had their facilitators on staff, while others were too busy with school work to participate. In future, Skylight may want to look at further embedding follow-up in the core requirements of conducting the Travellers programme, so that schools are better prepared to participate in follow-up.
2. The results of the survey can only infer that any changes between baseline and follow-up are due to the Travellers Programme. However, the inclusion



of multiple sources of information triangulating consistent findings across a number of different data gathering techniques adds weight to the conclusions presented. In future, the inclusion of a control group of young people who met criteria for inclusion but were randomly assigned to not receive the Travellers programme would strengthen the ability to draw robust conclusions.

Findings: Quantitative

The student survey found that overall, 63.5% of students reported the Travellers Programme was helpful (score of 5-7), 22.8% were unsure (score of 4) and 13.8% reported the programme was unhelpful (score of 1-3) two years after completing Travellers. Analysis was conducted to see if any subgroups in particular found travellers helpful. The programme was less likely to be identified as helpful by students demonstrating a high level of distress on the Subjective Experience of Distress Scale (SEDS) two years after completing Travellers than by those with lower scores on this scale.

The findings of the present evaluation identified a number of sustained impacts of the Travellers programme approximately two years-post programme. Travellers seeks to develop engaged, confident and motivated young people. Sixty percent of student survey respondents reported feeling confident to navigate changes and challenges, and for Pasifika students this portion was even greater, at 80%.

The survey included some questions that had been used in Skylight's initial screening survey so that responses from the screening data could be compared to follow-up responses to see if there were any changes over time in how students felt about themselves. Matched data from 2014 were available for 102 out of 199 students. Where data could not be matched between the two surveys, this was due in part to differences in the way in which students identified themselves in the two surveys. In at least one school, the follow-up survey was administered to students who undertook Travellers in 2015 and not 2014. It is unknown if this was a one-off occurrence. Further, for ethical reasons, students did not have to identify themselves in the survey and only 140 students (70.4%) chose to do so.

Of those with data in 2014 and 2016, there was a significant change in the percentage answering yes to "feeling good most of the time". In 2014, 50% reported "feeling good most of the time", while in 2016 this had increased to 75%. Statistical testing (McNemar test) showed that the two proportions were significantly different, ($p < .001$). Of those who said they did not feel good most of the time in 2014, 70% had changed their views at the time of the 2016 survey and indicated that they did feel good most of the time.



The 2012 evaluation conducted by Robertson, Boyd, Dingle & Taupo also found a significant decrease in students' reports of "not feeling good most of the time". In the screening survey 31% of the 129 young people said they did not feel good about themselves most of the time compared to only 18% in the follow-up survey.

Compared with the participants in the 2012 study (Robertson et al.), students who took part in the present evaluation demonstrated higher levels of distress in the last 12 months (i.e. between year one to two since taking part in Travellers), higher scores on the Life Events Scale, and a smaller percentage reporting that Travellers had helped two years post-Travellers. Further research is needed to determine if the right students are being selected to participate in Travellers.

A survey was also undertaken of facilitators of Travellers, to which 48 facilitators responded. The respondents rated the programme highly in terms of both short and medium term outcomes. They mostly identified the programme as contributing to improved overall wellbeing and increased resiliency and ability to manage challenges and changes. Facilitator respondents also indicated that they felt well-supported by Skylight in relation to the programme.

Findings: Qualitative

Thirty-five young people took part in seven focus groups run in early term 3, 2016 at six schools which delivered Travellers in 2014. The schools were selected from all schools where at least five students had responded to the evaluation survey, and purposively sampled to represent a spread of decile levels, school size and community composition in terms of ethnicity and to a lesser extent, urban/rural character. With a limited travel budget for the evaluation and no participating schools in Canterbury where the evaluators were based, selection was limited to three locations. Participation in focus groups was voluntary, with full informed consent obtained. The cultural mix of focus group participants was largely reflective of the cultural make-up of the participant schools, with the exception of Māori students at some of the schools. However, it should be noted that Travellers sits alongside Kaupapa Māori programmes in these schools which cater to Māori students who might otherwise have been enrolled in Travellers.

Student feedback about the manner in which the programme was delivered was overwhelmingly positive in all but one of the schools where focus groups were undertaken.

With the exception of a few students who felt that they would have benefitted from Travellers if they had the programme in year 8 before starting secondary school,



most felt that they had the programme at the right time, and none felt that it would have been better to receive the programme later.

Students particularly liked the Guidance Counsellor involvement in the programme, the programme format and activities, and the confidentiality and trust established within the programme.

Most commonly, the young people in focus groups identified increased confidence, especially around discussing their feelings with others, and a relationship of trust with both the Guidance Counsellor(s) and with others in their Travellers group as the key outcomes they experienced immediately after doing the programme. In the medium term, thinking about outcomes from Travellers that the young people still carry with them and experience at the time of the focus groups, confidence was most commonly identified as the lasting impact of Travellers. This confidence was especially noted around asking questions in front of others at school, talking about their feelings, speaking up in new groups and generally finding it easier to talk to others. The other medium term outcome identified most strongly by the participants of all but one focus group was the relationship they had with guidance staff in their school and knowledge of where to go for help if they, or a friend, needs it.

Thirteen Travellers facilitators took part in interviews or small focus groups at the six schools sampled. Of the 13 facilitators consulted, 10 were Guidance Counsellors, two were Year Deans / Heads and one a Health and PE teacher. Three of the six schools at which consultation was undertaken were in fact pilot schools for Travellers, and as such, some of the facilitators interviewed had been involved in the programme for more than a decade.

Feedback regarding the facilitator training was very positive, whether this had been undertaken several years ago or more recently. Because of its hands-on nature, the training was seen to equip facilitators well to deliver the programme.

A number of facilitators praised the hard copy resources provided by Skylight for Travellers. A number also praised the range of activities that make up the programme, and the fact that facilitators can pick and choose activities to suit the needs of the group, as well as their own strengths as a facilitator. Travellers was highly valued for the relationships it creates between students and Guidance Counsellors / Deans.

In terms of the manner in which Travellers is delivered in different schools, those where sharing of food and drink was an embedded part of each session identified this as valuable in affirming nurturing relationships and providing opportunities for



participants to help each other. Those who hold an end of year celebration for Travellers also identified this as valuable and something that works well.

In terms of the short-term outcomes for students, facilitators most commonly identified a sense of connection and belonging, a connection / relationship between the Guidance Counsellor(s) and high risk students, and increased confidence in students' ability to cope, their capacity to deal with stress and anxiety, and simply a confidence to express their views and feelings in front of others.

Medium term, Travellers was seen to result in greater readiness to access guidance counsellor support if needed and a lasting relationship between young person and counsellor, along with a sense of perspective around their feelings and being better equipped to access support than those who have not undertaken the programme. A number of facilitators were aware of friendships among students that had developed in Travellers groups that endured through high school.

Conclusions

Findings of the present evaluation suggest that Travellers is an intervention that is helpful for the majority of its participants, teaching young people strategies to deal with stress, and helping them see life as a journey of ups and downs. Travellers works well at helping young people feel connected at school, and building confidence to talk about their feelings. Travellers successfully informs students of where to go to access help and support if they require it, and builds confidence for young people who need it to reach out for this support. Qualitative evidence suggests that Travellers is likely to work best:

- when the programme has the full support of school management, and in turn that teaching staff at the school understand and support the rationale for student participation in the programme and the need for discretion around student participation in Travellers;
- when facilitated or co-facilitated by a trained Guidance Counsellor who understands the programme logic of Travellers and the purpose of each core exercise;
- where relationships of trust have been carefully and purposefully established within the group and with the facilitator(s) in the first three sessions of the programme, in part through full engagement in the Travellers process by the facilitator themselves; and
- when delivered largely intact as outlined by the training provided by Skylight (although additional activities can be added to meet student needs).



Suggested Improvements

Travellers is working well for many students in its current form. That said, a number of suggestions emerged for improving the programme for the future.

- Encouraging more discretion from teachers in responding to release and return / absence from Class for Travellers
- Peer co-facilitation
- Get-togethers of students who have participated in Travellers initiated by the facilitators at least yearly
- Follow-up sessions in later years of secondary school
- Outdoor activities, and more practical activities
- More information for students as to why they were invited to take part in Travellers
- Guest speakers
- Addition of content regarding bullying, social media and sexuality as part of Travellers.
- Update of music and videos
- More time to talk about their own experiences
- Te Reo and English wording should be included when the resources are next reprinted.
- It is strongly recommended that Travellers should always be facilitated either by a guidance counsellor(s) or a guidance counsellor alongside another member of school staff.
- On-going upskilling of facilitators is important, and opportunities to engage in refresher training and networking should be promoted and encouraged.

Future Research

Future evaluation of travellers should consider applying a prospective longitudinal study of programme outcomes, including a control group of students who met criteria for participation but were not included. It would be worth including several time points two and three years post-Travellers to examine if the outcomes reported are retained.