



Solid Kids, Solid Schools

working towards making things better for Yamaji kids

What is *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* about?

It is important to know how Aboriginal communities think about childhood bullying and what school and community programs are appropriate in responding to bullying among Aboriginal children and young people. *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* aimed to:

- collect cultural understandings of bullying among Aboriginal children and communities;
- work with Yamaji school communities to develop locally relevant and culturally secure bullying prevention and management strategies.

What did we do?

During 2006 and 2007 the *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* project collected Yamaji stories through interviews and focus groups with Aboriginal students, their parents and carers, Elders, and Aboriginal school staff including Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), Aboriginal Teacher's Assistants (ATAs) and Aboriginal teachers.


In 2008 *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* engaged in community focus groups to create strategies for a sustainable school and community-based bullying prevention and reduction program. Focus groups were held in four locations throughout the Yamaji region to collect community contributions of possible bullying prevention strategies for use with Aboriginal children and young people.

In 2009 *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* incorporated community feedback from the previous three years to develop an **information website** to assist parents and carers, students, and school communities in bullying prevention and management. The website was developed under the direction of the *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* Steering Committee (www.solidkids.net.au) and is expected to be tested in October/November 2009.


From 2006 to 2009 more than 200 people of different ages from all over the Yamaji region participated in this study.

What did Yamaji kids say?

121 kids participated in this project aged from 8-17 years. There were a range of responses from this group of participants about what, how and why bullying happens. One Year 4 girl from a remote school described bullying at her school as something where


 "the big kids pick on the little kids because they think that they are good and ... after school ... they have a fight".

A Year 7 boy from a regional school talked about fighting with his siblings,

 "Well, if it's my younger brothers or sisters ... I'll tell them to stop but if they don't, then I will start fighting with them".

What did Yamaji parents and carers say?

40 parents and carers participated in this project. One parent reflected on their own experiences of bullying and how that continued to impact them years later,

 "I hated being left out and bullied at school. I see my children getting teased and it makes me sad and I feel for people and children who get bullied because when it happens to you, you can't forget it. It still hurts".

What did Yamaji Elders say?

11 Yamaji Elders participated in this project. When asked what they thought schools could do, the Elders discussed the impact of bullying on the 'whole' community. One Elder talked about how bullying in her community escalated,



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“... they carry yarns, argue and then have a big smash then they go home and tell their parents then they get involved and then it gets bigger and bigger and before you know it is way out of control”.

Another Elder recommended the schools,



“get some feedback from Aboriginal parents and maybe encourage them to participate in some activities with their kids”.

What did Aboriginal school staff say?

In total **55** Aboriginal school staff (AIEOs, ATAs and Aboriginal teachers) participated in interviews and focus groups. During the focus groups Aboriginal staff frequently talked about the importance of involving parents and AIEOs in the management of bullying,



“A lot of parents don’t want to come to the school but want to discuss their children, so it is important for AIEOs to be involved [in the management process] and to have the opportunity to ... home visit”.



“Although our research is still a work in progress, we are beginning to see more clearly the picture of life faced by our [Yamaji] children within schooling and community settings ... This information is just the beginning and it was only possible with the strength and support of the Yamaji community, [who are] already leaders in making things better for their kids...”

What did school principals say?

35 school principals also participated in this project and were asked about their school’s guidelines and practices to support Yamaji children prevent or manage bullying. Principal’s responses suggested the following ways to strengthen and support Yamaji students:

- identify places where bullying takes place;
- form a behaviour management group that represents the whole school, including Aboriginal families;
- train staff to address bullying issues;
- assist parents and carers of Aboriginal children to

- address bullying with their children;
- provide areas where Aboriginal students feel safer from bullying;
- provide targeted programs for Aboriginal students who are bullied and/or bully others; and
- provide referrals for Aboriginal students who are bullied and/or bully others.

Conclusions

This study has helped to improve our understanding of the bullying experiences of Yamaji people. It also helped us to develop some strategies that could help our families and schools to prevent and manage bullying among our kids.

Juli Coffin, Project Director, said the following about the findings from this project:

Thank you

The *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* team thank the many Yamaji children and young people, carers and parents, Elders and Aboriginal school staff who gave their time and stories to this study and also acknowledges the school principals who were involved. Without these contributions our knowledge of ways to support Yamaji kids could not be improved.



This symbol is used to highlight Yamaji wangi (talk) or quotes collected from Yamaji community members who participated in the *Solid Kids, Solid Schools* project.



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