

A community approach to supporting young people in regional areas through an early intervention framework

Co-authored by: Renae Glouftsis,
Kathryn Cousins and Dr. Laura Hayes



Key points

Combining targeted therapeutic interventions, co-designed groups and a whole of community approach, children, young people, and their families are better equipped to address concerns regarding determinants of health and have improved mental health outcomes.

Background

Children, young people, and their families in regional areas are at higher risk of developing long-term mental health concerns and experiencing family breakdown and social disengagement. Factors contributing to this include reduced access to services due to geographical isolation, poor determinants of health, intergenerational trauma, mental health stigma and high prevalence of AOD use.

Mind's Always in Mind program provides outreach early intervention and prevention services to children and families living in rural South Australia who are at risk of, or are already, experiencing mental health challenges.

Our program in action:

The Wellbeing Coordinator at a primary school reached out to Mind following incidents of self-harm by students in years 4 and 5.

Mind met with the 21 students to provide support and strategies to manage their emotional distress and improve their wellbeing. Mind staff created a safe environment for the young people to ask questions and engage in open discussion. Two strong themes emerged through this process: parents fighting and friendship conflicts, with secondary themes of centering around catastrophising, trauma, being alone and loss.

Mind staff facilitated a discussion on these topics with a focus on safety, reaching out for help, respect, conflict resolution, stress, and anxiety. Mind staff facilitated a mindfulness exercise with the students and each student was provided with additional mindfulness resources to take away.

The classroom teacher was actively involved in this session and was left with activities to work through as a class in their weekly wellbeing afternoon.

Following the success of this one-off session, Mind engaged with the Wellbeing Coordinator and students to co-design group programs to meet the needs identified in this school. Mind subsequently facilitated three, six-session, group programs focusing on stress and anxiety, positive relationships and anger management.



Our approach



All of community approach

Mind's practitioners have developed strong relationships with key stakeholders in school communities in the Limestone Coast region by utilising in-reach and flexible approaches to individual and group intervention.

These relationships have led to a dual approach in identifying risks and responding to emerging wellbeing and mental health needs within individual school cohorts by co-developing therapeutic groups to meet the identified needs.

Assessment of needs

Assessment of needs and consultation with relevant stakeholders is conducted and adaptation of the group program is made to meet the unique needs of the target group. Groups are co-designed with school staff for sustainability and ongoing intervention.

Targeted therapeutic intervention

By intervening early and providing specialist support, schools are better equipped to increase community and capacity to respond to the mental health needs of children and young people, and reduce the prominence of mental health stigma in rural communities.

Principles of Mindfulness-based CBT, Narrative Therapy and Play Therapy underpin the groups.

One on one intervention

Opportunity to identify instances where individual children and young people within the groups may benefit from ongoing one-on-one support from Mind practitioners.

Evaluating impact

Outcome measure tools are implemented before and after intervention to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Impacts

48 children and young people were engaged in targeted capacity building groups over a 6-month period. Individualised and co-designed groups were delivered in a time limited (6 week) program within three schools across the region.

85% of children or young people engaged in the targeted groups reported positive outcomes (see Figure A).

Outcome measure data demonstrates a continuous increase in wellbeing and community connection for participants (see Figure B). This indicates the group programs are meeting the needs in the community and are becoming increasingly effective over time.

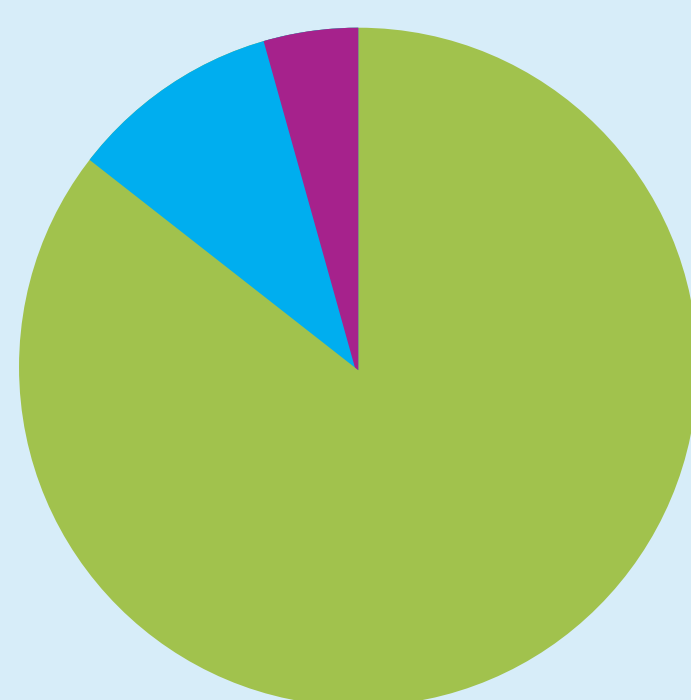
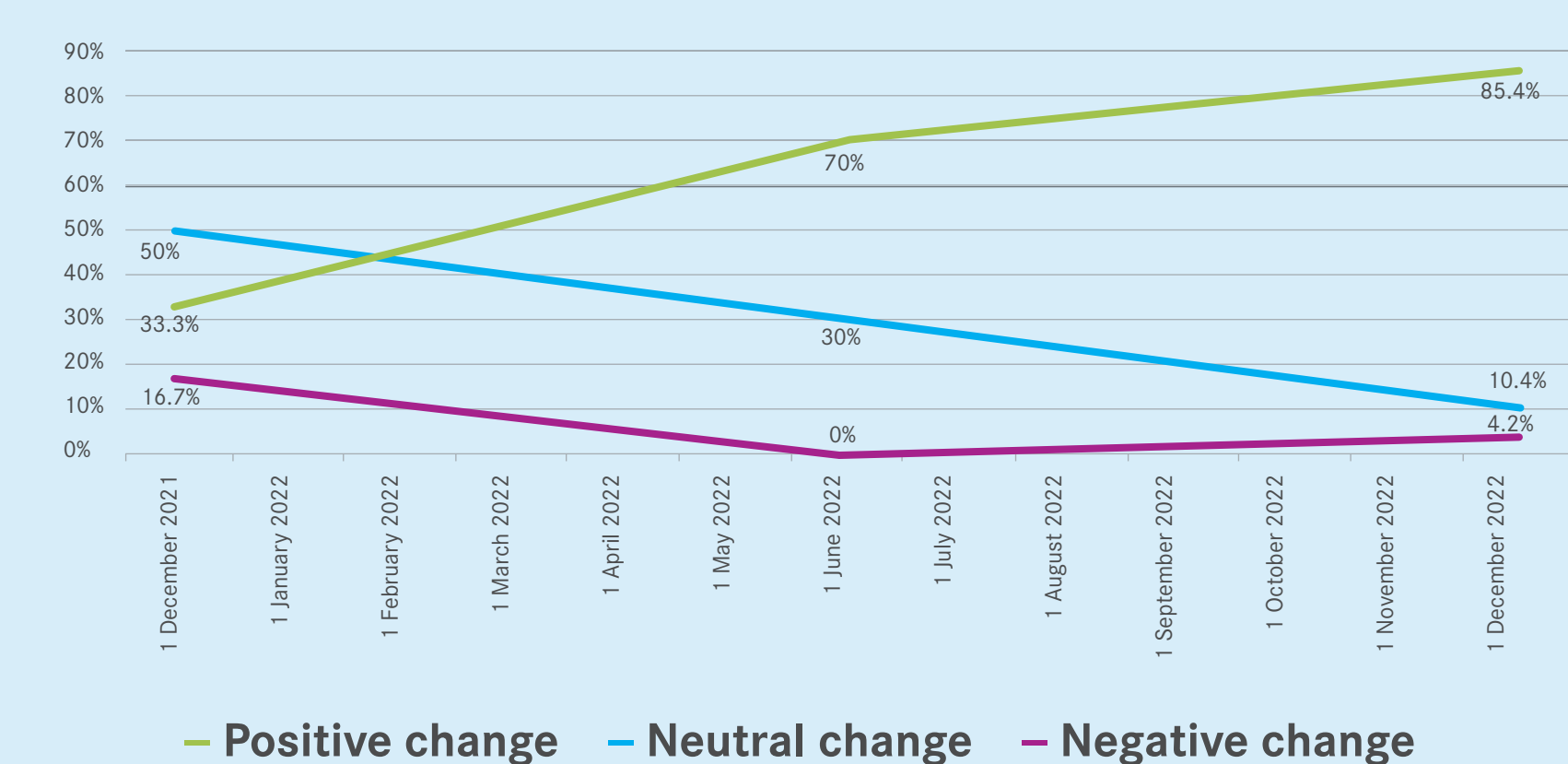


Figure A.
Wellbeing outcome measure
- group participants

- Positive change 85.4%
- Neutral change 10.4%
- Negative change 4.2%

Figure B.
Wellbeing outcome measure
- program improvement over time



Conclusions:

- Flexible and dynamic place-based groups provide tailored early intervention strategies for children and young people.
- Co-design and incorporation of school staff in the process contributes to sustainability and effectiveness of outcomes in regional areas.
- The all of community approach ensures local capacity building.
- Intervention that incorporates a tailored and targeted approach to needs, can produce improved outcomes for children, young people, and their families.

