

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT NOTES – Draft 19/06/2018

The Work of Panthers on the Prowl

Panthers on the Prowl works to provide meaningful education and healthy development opportunities for students in the wider Penrith area who are at risk of disengaging from school. Our programs are specifically designed and targeted at improving resilience, self-esteem and levels of physical and mental health for our young people. We achieve our aims through explicit teaching, social skill development and the modelling of positive connected relationships that actively promote and address' harm prevention and the minimisation of child and youth developmental health-risk factors.

Research Based Programs

Research shows that developmental health-risk factors such as; substance abuse, obesity, developmental injury, mental illness, school drop-out, and antisocial behaviours can be mitigated and prevented by increasing and enhancing protective factors in the lives of our students^{1,2,3}.

Numerous studies show that programs that focus on the explicit teaching and promotion of resilience and social-emotional competence are generally more effective than programs that have a narrow focus on the elimination of a particular problem that a child may face, such as bullying or alcohol abuse⁴. It is on this premise that Panthers on the Prowl approaches harm prevention.

Panthers on the Prowl recognises that when students and young people have high levels of resilience, self-esteem and self-awareness, with a quality set of skills with which they can approach life's challenges, they tend to be more successful⁵. When faced with difficult choices or

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Resnick, M. D. (2000). Protective factors, resiliency, and healthy youth development. *Adolescent medicine: State of the art reviews*, 11(1), 157-164.

² Toumbourou, J.W., Hall, J., Varcoe J., and Leung R. (2014) Review of key risk and protective factors for child development and wellbeing (antenatal to age 25). Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People.

³ Toumbourou, J.W., Olsson, C., Rowland, B., Renati, S., & Hallam, B. (2014) Health Psychology intervention in key social environments to promote adolescent health. *Australian Psychologist*. 49, 66–74.

⁴ Masten, A. S., Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., & Reed, M. G. (2009). 12 Resilience in Development. *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology*, 117.

⁵ Resnick, Michael D., et al. (1997) Protecting adolescents from harm: findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health." *Jama* 278, 10, 823-832.

circumstances that may result in risk or harm, they draw on the strengths and competencies that they have developed and learned. Students who have been educated and trained in developing resilience and self-esteem tend to think broadly and reason well. They also tend to have good emotional and social problem-solving skills, which allow them to make the most of relationships as well as mitigate the impact of challenges such as peer pressure. Finally, they tend to have a strong sense of identity and purpose due to quality supports and the presence of active mentoring⁶.

In acknowledging the breadth of research outcomes that connect the increase of protective factors, such as resilience, with the minimisation and prevention of harm, Panthers on the Prowl has developed its present range of educational, health and development projects for young people in our community.

⁶ Pittman, K. J., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2011). Preventing problems, promoting development, encouraging engagement. In Washington, DC: Forum for Youth Investment.

The Primary Classroom Program

The Panthers on the Prowl Primary Classroom program is the organisation's 'flag-ship' education model and longest running program. This cornerstone program targets students in the middle and late primary years who are at risk of disengaging from school and who may need additional assistance in order to reach their full potential. These students may have issues with self-esteem, lack of resilience or other difficulties around discipline and respect that without effective and targeted early interventions can result in negative developmental and psychological health outcomes⁷.

Research shows that at-risk students who benefit from early and quality interventions in the primary school years are much more likely to maintain a positive developmental course through high school and enjoy improved academic achievement with a minimisation in harmful health-risk behaviours⁸.

To address these issues and to contribute effectively in the prevention of harm for at risk primary students, Panthers on the Prowl partnered with the NSW Department of Education and commenced the Primary Classroom program in 2002. The main objective of the Primary program is to provide a comprehensive range of research-based opportunities for our students to undertake social, emotional, and psychological learning. The program offers students the chance to develop strategic practical skills with real life practice that assists students in understanding and building protective factors in the face of potential developmental risk and harm factors that school disengagement presents.

The focus of the Primary Classroom Program is to build self-esteem, social skills, resilience and leadership in the students who participate. The content and process of the Primary Classrooms lessons are embedded in Dr Martin Seligman's theoretical Positive Education Model⁹ that focus' on developing; Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. Under the guidance of the Prowl's specialist qualified teacher and teacher's aide, daily lessons involve; fitness

⁷ Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82(1), 405-432.

⁸ Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Kosterman, R., Abbott, R., & Hill, K. G. (1999). Preventing adolescent health-risk behaviors by strengthening protection during childhood. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 153(3), 226-234.

⁹ Seligman, M. (2015). *Evidence-based approaches in positive education: Implementing a strategic framework for well-being in schools*. Springer.

activities, mindfulness sessions and reflective journaling. In addition to these daily practices, lessons contain core elements from established best practice programs from; DRUMBEAT, Rock & Water, Peaceful Kids and Bounce Back! Within this differentiated teaching framework, lesson delivery occurs within various curriculum areas such as PDHPE, Science, and the Visual and Creative arts. The Primary program lessons also have a strong emphasis on community involvement and the participation of Penrith Panthers Rugby League players, which significantly enhances student engagement and motivation.

In its practical implementation, the Primary Classroom program observes normal school terms and runs over the school calendar - five days a week. Students selected for the program attend each day for half a day over a school term with stage 2 primary students attending in the morning and stage 3 students in the afternoon. Each class is made up of 10 students from schools participating in each term. The stage 3 primary program also aims to equip students with a wide variety of social skills in readiness for the all-important transition to high school where risk factors for disengagement can often intensify.

Schools are able to access the Primary Classroom program by submitting applications for students to the Principal of Cambridge Gardens PS. The selection panel meetings take place at the beginning of Term 4 each year. The selection panel identifies and prioritises students at risk of becoming disengaged from school. Students may be demonstrating low self-esteem, social issues or emerging behavioural concerns that may place them at risk of harm. The panel considers information provided by their school learning support teams that identifies students as appropriate for tier 2 targeted intervention.

Nomination forms for students to join the program are available from the Principal, Cambridge Gardens Public School.

The Panthers on the Prowl – Primary Classroom program is coordinated and administered by Primary Teacher Lawrence McDonell, assisted by Learning Support Officer, Venetia Lovett. For more information feel free to contact Lawrence at Panthers on the Prowl (02) 4725 6478 or at Cambridge Gardens Public School - (02) 4730 1201.

Healthy Active Lifestyles

The Panthers on the Prowl Healthy Active Lifestyles program aims at providing quality education and improving awareness on nutrition, diet and physical activity for children in the wider Penrith area. The program encourages children and their families to make healthy lifestyle choices whilst reinforcing the importance of physical fitness through regular exercise. The Healthy Active Lifestyles program targets and visits at least 10 schools per year that involves approximately 1500 students.

Research shows that for children aged 5-17 years, being physically active every day can have significant positive emotional and intellectual benefits such as; improved self-esteem and confidence, assists with management of depression, anxiety and stress, and improved concentration¹⁰. A healthy active lifestyle also has helpful social benefits as it; provides opportunities for fun with friends and family, it is also a proven factor in reducing levels of anti-social behaviour, including aggressive and disruptive actions. The more obvious health benefits include; promoting healthy growth and development, strong muscles and bones, and improved coordination and movement skills. Most significantly healthy active lifestyles reduce the risk of disease, such as diabetes, and unhealthy weight gain as well as other harmful health-risk behaviours associated with eating and diet¹¹.

In its practical implementation, the Healthy Active Lifestyles team assists targeted schools to implement a research informed strategic healthy lifestyle program. Professional development and in-service support is provided for school teachers as they implement these school-based programs. During their involvement with the program students and staff receive education on anthropometric testing, diet and nutrition. Parents of participating students are also invited to a session with a dietician and Panthers players to discuss specialised aspects of physical training and diet. Testing and data collection for measuring of improvement in physical fitness levels occurs at the end of the term.

The overall aims of the Healthy Active Lifestyles program are to;

- develop students understanding of healthy lifestyle choices relating to diet and nutrition;
- assist schools with curriculum development in the subject of physical education;

¹⁰ Penedo, F. J., & Dahn, J. R. (2005). Exercise and well-being: a review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity. *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 18(2), 189-193.

¹¹ Penedo, F. J., & Dahn, J. R. (2005). Exercise and well-being: a review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity. *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 18(2), 189-193.

- provide professional fitness and nutrition education to parents, teachers;
- promote the healthy active lifestyle message through Panther player attendance at Healthy Active Lifestyle Program activities in a mentoring role.

Each year as part of the Healthy Active Lifestyle program, a full day Sport Expo is conducted at Panthers Stadium to promote wider participation in community sports. The Expo targets school children in Years 5 and 6 from the schools participating in the Healthy Active Lifestyle Program. Over 40 development officers and coaches from 15 different sports provide students with an opportunity to try new and exciting sports, with the aim that they will find something that they can get further involved in outside of school.

The Panthers on the Prowl – Healthy Active Lifestyles Program is coordinated and administered by our qualified Physical Education Teacher, Mr Darren Horgan. For more information feel free to contact Darren at Panthers on the Prowl (02) 4725 6421 or the General Manager of Panthers on the Prowl, Brad Waugh (02)4725 6420.

Building Young Men - Youth Mentoring Project

Building Young Men is the Panthers on the Prowl secondary schools mentoring and leadership project for high school students in the wider Penrith area. This ground breaking project targets students in Year 10 who may be at risk of disengaging from high school or who have leadership potential that requires further development. These students, at the crossroads of teenage development, require intensive support in order to further develop their self-confidence, resilience and coping strategies. In this context, Building young Men provides explicit and interactive learning opportunities where boys can engage in a positive, safe and caring environment with experienced and reliable male role models in order to enhance psychological wellbeing and mitigate the impacts of potential harmful risk factors that typify this stage of male adolescent development.

Contemporary research on adolescent risk and harm suggests that there are three consistent factors that contribute to a teenager's ability to overcome adversity and 'beat the odds'; Firstly, a strong relationship with reliable and trusted adults who have high expectations, secondly, a strong sense of self-worth fostered and modelled through these adult relationships, and finally , opportunities for meaningful social participation¹²¹³¹⁴. These protective factors combined, contribute to a critical sense of connectedness and confidence which allows them to build on competencies and contribute positively to their families and communities. Teenagers provided with these protective supports enjoy improved mental health, enhanced academic achievement and are at a significantly lower risk of engaging in harmful and risky behaviours¹⁵.

In response to these issues and to contribute effectively in the prevention of harm and risk for secondary students, Panthers on the Prowl developed the Building Young Men (BYM) mentoring project that commenced its pilot operations in 2016. BYM provides a cohesive research-based program of activities where young men are provided with social, emotional, and psychological learning opportunities in a group environment rich with narrative and ritual that leads to authentic

¹² Benard, B. (1993). *Turning the Corner from Risk to Resiliency*. Portland, OR: Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Northwest Educational Laboratory.

¹³ Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?* Available online at www.forumfyi.org.

¹⁴ Werner, E. E., & Smith, R. S. (1992). *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹⁵ Resnick, M. D. (2000). Protective factors, resiliency, and healthy youth development. *Adolescent medicine: State of the art reviews*, 11(1), 157-164.

personal transformation and growth. The program offers students the chance to develop practical skills and psycho-social understanding with the support and guidance of trained mentors that serve as protective factors in the face of potential developmental risk and harm factors that students often face in this stage of adolescence¹⁶.

In its practical implementation, the BYM project operates over a 20 week schedule that is embedded in a 'rites of passage' model. Groups typically comprise of 8-12 mentors and 10-12 students who meet for weekly sessions that are generally conducted throughout school terms two and three and are normally two hours in duration. Each weekly session has a theme and associated learning objectives aimed at progressively developing learning around positive psychology and positive masculinity. Meetings give participants a chance to learn and engage with topics such as relationships, responsibility, sexuality, mental health and facing challenges. Each meeting is a structured forum where boys can be heard and encouraged and to consider taking responsibility for their actions and their future. In addition to the weekly sessions there is a 'Challenge Weekend' in the middle of the project schedule, as well as a final 'Rites of Passage' camp weekend which are critical elements to the project model. Students who go to fully complete the project are accepted into the BYM Alumni and are encouraged to stay involved and active within the BYM community.

BYM groups are directed by an experienced and trained lead facilitator with professional experience in working with at-risk children and youth, who manage and facilitate the weekly sessions. All participating mentors are required to undertake specialised training and accreditation as mentors through TAFE NSW, as well as child protection training and training in working with 'at-risk youth'. All Mentors have undertaken a NSW Working with Children Check and are not permitted to engage in any activity without proof of a valid clearance.

Schools are able to express their interest in Building Young Men by making contact with the BYM coordinator. The BYM Project Development Team meets at the end of Term 4 each year to identify and prioritises school cohorts with most need in term of students at risk of becoming disengaged from school and are at most risk of harm. The team considers information provided by their school executive and learning support teams that identifies students as appropriate for tier 2 targeted intervention.

¹⁶ Zimmerman, M. A., Bingenheimer, J. B., & Notaro, P. C. (2002). Natural mentors and adolescent resiliency: A study with urban youth. *American journal of community psychology*, 30(2), 221-243.

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The Panthers on the Prowl – Building Young Men project is coordinated and administered by our qualified School Counsellor, Community Development Worker and Teacher, Mr Brogan Mulhall. For more information feel free to contact Brogan on (02) 4725 6434 or the General Manager of Panthers on the Prowl, Brad Waugh (02)4725 6420.

Kokoda Leadership Project

The Kokoda Leadership Project is the Panthers on the Prowl's senior schools leadership project for students in Year 11 at senior high school in the wider Penrith area. The Kokoda Leadership Project is a biennial undertaking that aims to empower and strengthen leadership in young people through mentorship and the challenge of completing the Kokoda Trail walk.

Undertaking challenging physical activities, side-by-side, strengthens relationships between individuals and instils comradery and cohesion for the larger group which in turn fosters a sense of connection and support. Tackling challenging physical journeys also builds mental resilience and tests personal character¹⁷. These elements are significant for the building of self-esteem and resilience in late teenage-hood¹⁸; qualities that are critical for students to effectively navigate the stresses and challenges of the HSC and transition successfully into the next phase of adult life.

In acknowledgment of this and to contribute effectively in the healthy development and leadership of our senior students, Panthers on the Prowl launched the inaugural Kokoda Leadership Project event in October 2013. The project involved seven senior high school students from the Penrith area to join trek leader Charlie Lynn (MLC). The students were joined by executives from various business houses, Panthers on the Prowl Community Development Foundation staff and Penrith Panthers players and coach to walk the Kokoda Trail, which provided opportunities for intensive mentoring.

Along the trek the students were confronted with significant physical and emotional challenges that required pushing the boundaries of personal resilience, team work, goal setting and leadership skills in order to develop and implement strategies to overcome and persevere. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to witness the sites of historic battles that were fought along the trail during World War II. Through these experiences students learned about the unique character of Australian leadership that inspired our Diggers to achieve victory in the most adverse circumstances and against overwhelming odds.

¹⁷ Saunders, R., Laing, J., & Weiler, B. (2013). Personal transformation through long-distance walking. *Tourist experience and fulfilment: Insights from positive psychology*, 127-146.

¹⁸ Resnick, M. D. (2000). Protective factors, resiliency, and healthy youth development. *Adolescent medicine: State of the art reviews*, 11(1), 157-164.

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The Panthers on the Prowl – Kokoda Leadership Project is coordinated and administered by the General Manager of Panthers on the Prowl, Brad Waugh. For more information feel free to contact Brad on (02)4725 6420.

Secondary Schools Program

The Panthers on the Prowl Secondary Schools Program aims to provide high school students in the local community area with unique opportunities and broader awareness of different careers and career pathways available to them. Through this program targeted students are given the opportunity to visit businesses and learning institutions where they are able to meet key people, develop relationships and gain insights into industries and environments of interest.

Research shows that youth who experience spells of early unemployment disproportionately go on to experience further unemployment and less professional success in their prime adult years¹⁹. Studies also clearly and consistently indicate the severe negative psychological impacts that unemployment often has on wellbeing and mental health²⁰. Research evidence suggests that unemployment is a significant risk indicator for substance abuse, criminality and youth suicide²¹

In this context, Panthers on the Prowl recognises that there is often a large 'gap' between school and the workforce, particularly for students at risk of disengaging from their learning. This program seeks to bridge that gap not only by providing direct workplace exposure, but also by providing students with the opportunity to fully develop themselves as young people in the pursuit of their career and life goals. The Secondary Schools Program main objective is for students is to be able to participate in a positive workplace environment with an adult who is involved in a career field similar to that in which they have expressed interest in order to prevent the harmful impacts of youth unemployment.

In addition to the careers program, Panthers on the Prowl has been able to offer an additional opportunity for students to experience a real life situation of working in a commercial kitchen environment, by running the Nepean Schools Culinary Challenge in cooperation with Penrith Outback Steakhouse. Each year eight high schools compete in the Challenge.

¹⁹ Gregg, P. (2001). The impact of youth unemployment on adult unemployment in the NCDS. *The economic journal*, 111(475), 626-653.

²⁰ Clark, A., Georgellis, Y., & Sanfey, P. (2001). Scarring: The psychological impact of past unemployment. *Economica*, 68(270), 221-241.

²¹ Hammarstrom, A. (1994). Health consequences of youth unemployment—review from a gender perspective. *Social science & medicine*, 38(5), 699-709.

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The Panthers on the Prowl – secondary schools program is coordinated and administered by Mr Brogan Mulhall. For more information feel free to contact Brogan on (02) 4725 6434 or the General Manager of Panthers on the Prowl, Brad Waugh (02)4725 6420.

Adult Computer Literacy

The Panthers on the Prowl Adult Computer Literacy Classes are weekly computer and information technology lessons aimed at adults in the community that have little or no computer skills and would like to develop their confidence with technology.

Classes run for 2 hours weekly over a 20 week period and are run at no cost to participants. The lessons are aimed at the basic beginner level with the goal of building skills and confidence across a range of computer programs and devices. The classes are delivered with an adult education focus and are structured in a way that participants can build on learnt skills and experiences in order to achieve success and gain confidence.

One of the main benefits of this course is the interaction adults get with other members of the community. As well as developing their computer skills, many strong friendships have also developed throughout the course of the program that participants maintain and continue to learn with. This element of the program is significant as research shows a strong correlation between social interaction and well-being for older adults²². Social relationships are consistently associated with positive biomarkers of health while social isolation constitutes a significant risk factor for morbidity and mortality in older adults²³

Members of the computer classes come from a broad spectrum of the community. Many of the adults undertaking the course start with negative or fearful attitudes towards using computers. Many indicate that they have felt 'left behind' when it comes to using and understanding computers. Some of the participants have undertaken computer courses with other organisations only to find them too advanced and overwhelming.

The Panthers on the Prowl – Adult Computer Literacy Classes are coordinated and administered by Mr Brogan Mulhall. For more information feel free to contact Brogan on (02) 4725 6434 or the General Manager of Panthers on the Prowl, Brad Waugh (02)4725 6420.

²² Pinquart, M., & Sörensen, S. (2000). Influences of socioeconomic status, social network, and competence on subjective well-being in later life: a meta-analysis. *Psychology and aging*, 15(2), 187.

²³ National Institute on Aging. Research Suggests a Positive Correlation between Social Interaction and Health. Accessed on 04/06/2018 at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/about/living-long-well-21st-century-strategic-directions-research-aging/research-suggests-positive>.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Risk Factors (developmental and health)

Protective Factors

Risk of Harm

Harm Prevention

School Disengagement/Engagement

Resilience

Self-Esteem

Self-awareness

Explicit teaching

Social skills

Social and Emotional Competencies

Seligman's theoretical Positive Education Model – PERMA

Mindfulness

Anthropometric testing

Wellbeing

Psycho-social

Rites of Passage

Positive Psychology

Masculinity

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REFERENCES