The goal of our evaluation of the Jade Speaks Up programme was to demonstrate that a relatively small and short-term intervention giving year 5-8 school children the tools to develop trusting relationships and the strategies to keep themselves safe from violence, could result in children feeling safer and more resilient and teachers finding the programme most effective in the areas of relationship learning. This project is funded by the Accident Compensation Corporation, because they are looking for ways to reduce the cost of injuries due to violence in our communities.

With 1300 children from 47 classrooms in eight schools (seven in Auckland and one in the Bay of Plenty) involved in this research, we were able to show, at the outset of the research, using two measures of childhood wellbeing and depression (Child Outcomes Rating Scale\(^1\) and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies of Depression Scale for Children)\(^2\), that 46% of children were in the category of “at risk” of psychological distress. The percent of children (0-14) with a diagnosed mental illness has trebled to 7% from 2007 to 2017 (Ministry of Health, 2017)\(^3\) and underlying this change is the increasing uncertainty in children’s lives driven by poverty, poor housing, homelessness and school pressure (Woulfe, 2018)\(^4\). These issues, added to children’s stories of parental emotional instability, unsafe family arrangements, addictions and harsh punishment impact on classrooms, which potentially make them unsafe environments for some children. The Jade Speaks Up programme uses the classroom as the base for creating in children a sense of safety that can extend into their wider environments.

The first year of this enquiry has shown overall that the programme has been successful in achieving its stated goals. However, a more detailed analysis has shown many areas for improvement such as allowing more time for the programme to run and a greater focus on teacher support, meeting the specific needs of each classroom and keeping the learnings from the programme alive after it has finished. How best to engage parents is also a key question in this second phase of the pilot study. What follows is an interim snapshot of our key findings.

Brief introduction to Jade Speaks Up:
JSU is a programme that provides safe classroom exploration of being violence-free. It helps children and young teens to learn about:

- feelings and safe ways to express them
- trust and the importance of having trusting relationships in our
- the fundamentals of respectful relationships
- how to keep ourselves safe from violence

The Jade Speaks Up programme is a detailed exploration of the skills connected with “feelings”, “trust”, “respect” and being “safe”. These skills are the foundation of the essential “4th R” of the school curriculum, the competencies required for Relating.

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1Duncan, B. L., Miller, S.D., Sparks, J. A. (2003). The Child Outcome Rating Scale. Ft. Lauderdale, FL
1. Positive changes in children’s attitudes and behaviours around safety

The evaluation showed significant shifts in children’s behaviour around key messages that were part of the programme such as “going to a safe place”, “just breathing and keep calm”, “asking for help from a friend to help sort things out” “talk to the person you are scared of”, “making a safety plan” and “keeping calm in a time when you could have been angry”.

- Year 7 girl student went to the neighbours and phoned the police during a domestic violence incident. The student had recently shifted to the town and did not have a strong support network. She also self-referred to the school counsellor after the incident and talked the counsellor through the steps she had taken in implementing her JSU safety plan to keep herself and others safe. She said that the jingle taught in the programme was what kept playing over in her mind in this scary situation.

2. Greater children’s access to people and environments they can trust

Children in the programme were more likely to learn the phone numbers of non-family members they could trust and to identify a wider range of environments (friends, relatives, libraries, sports venues, meeting places in shopping centres and malls) where they can be safe, beyond the expected ones of family, school or the police. This may have encouraged children to speak more freely about family spaces that did not feel safe.

- One male student noted the phone number for CYFS in the lesson on safety planning. On his own initiative, he later called the 0508 number and told them that things were not OK at home. CYFS took prompt action and placed him in a safe home with extended family. The school had been aware that the family had issues but had been unable to initiate change for the parents.

- A school counsellor noted a significant increase in disclosures from Year 7 students compared to previous years when the new Year 7’s usually didn’t approach her for this help. JSU was run with only the Yr 7 cohort in this school.

3. Positive children’s assessments of the value of the programme

Eighty-two percent of the children who rated the programme said it was helpful and 43% said that it was “a lot” helpful. As well 79% thought the programme was interesting and 75%, fun. Only 3.4% rated the programme as being of no help. They especially liked the safety planning, the trust and problem-solving tasks, the Jade video, the stories and conversations they had. Children who were neutral or negative about the value of the programme had poorer wellbeing, fewer trusted support people, more aggressive beliefs, lower responsiveness to upsetting situations and fewer protective strategies.

- There was initial concern amongst students that talking of home situations would ‘contaminate’ their safe/happy place within the school environment. However, once the talking had happened and appropriate support was given, they settled down with new understandings of what happens when a child talks with a trusted adult (teacher, SWIS, Counsellor) This was reported in two schools.
4. Significant improvement in children’s wellbeing and risk of depression

Overall there was a significant improvement in the measure of well-being and depression between pre-test and post-test which was sustained into the follow-up test, 6 months later. The percent of children meeting the “at risk” criteria fell by 11% between pre- and the post-tests, with the greatest improvement shown by the children who rated the programme as being helpful and by high trust children who had significantly better wellbeing and lower depression scores than low trust children.

- One child from a home where domestic violence used to occur had parents who separated. When she was with Dad she ‘took the weight’ of Dad’s behaviour towards her younger sisters. She used to talk only with her teacher about problems. Since participating in the Jade programme, she became able to share with a wider circle of classmates and she felt less isolated from her peers.

5. Improvement in the areas of teaching that teachers considered vulnerable

Teachers were asked to rate the vulnerability of their class in the pre-tests. The four areas of most concern were that children: didn’t know how to keep themselves safe; were unable to talk about their feelings; were unable to ask for help; and were unsupportive of children who were struggling to keep up (Figure 1). In the post-tests, these were the four areas where the teachers judged the children as having made the most progress (0=no change, 1=a bit better, 2=much better).

- One of our pilot teachers agonised over the evident distress displayed by one of her students who was from a very unstable and troubled family, already under attention of CYFS. The teacher’s query, taken to her colleagues and contacts was “are we doing these children any favours by opening up these painful feelings?” In the teacher’s supervision session, we discussed this perplexing question. Between us all, we acknowledged the importance of staying with the process, listening compassionately and providing the student with the pastoral support needed. During their post programme interview, the teacher reported significant change to the girl. She was lighter, more confident, more outspoken and engaged with people around her. It seemed that not only had there been a release of blocked emotion, but the support gained by having safe adults attend to her had helped.
6. Positive teacher assessments of value of the Jade Speaks Up

Overall the teachers rated the programme helpful and practical. The key features such as the Jade Speaks Up video, the training sessions and the modules on keeping myself safe and choices to keep myself and others safe were rated as being more than helpful (Figure 2). The programme met clear needs within the schools. It had components that worked well and were successful in making positive changes in children’s lives.

- A beginning teacher in a rural school reported:

“One student … has had some incidents at school but recently was able to come to his teacher with tears in his eyes, able to process what had happened and articulate what was happening for him. He understood why he may have reacted in that way and why the situation was what it was. Jade Speaks Up undoubtedly contributed to that”.

7. Pastoral care and training for teachers

In both training and supervision, it became evident that professional development for responding to disclosures received by teachers in their initial training years was either lacking or inadequate. We noted that in several schools there was a policy in place, but the actual procedures were not familiar to some of the teachers. There was also a significant gap in the information loop between CYFs and teachers following a referral. The supervision offered to the teachers was a unique part of the JSU programme and appreciated by teachers and school management. Teachers noted that while the kaupapa of care of others was consistent throughout the JSU training and supervision sessions, they usually don’t have supervision so it could be difficult for them going through disclosure processes.

Teacher enthusiasm for the programme was mirrored by student appreciation of it. Figure 3 demonstrates this. The feature that most strongly correlates with student support of the programme is that of having available external support and supervision ($r=0.54$, $p=0.000$). Only for this feature is there a significant correlation with two other student ratings, those asking how interesting ($r=0.341$, $p=0.025$) and how much fun ($0.377$, $p=0.013$) was the programme. This tells us that teachers who valued the ongoing supervision and support of programme leaders were more able to make the programme interesting and fun for the students.

Figure 2: Ratings of the value of Jade Speaks Up (1=slightly helpful, 4=helpful and 5=very helpful)

Figure 3: Correlation between average class recommendation of the programme and teacher's average rating of the features of the programme

$r=0.39$; $n=43$, $p=0.009$
Not unexpectedly, not all teachers and students liked the programme. From figure 3 there were 5 teachers whose enthusiasm is marginal (below 3.5), and 9 classes whose recommendation is only a little better than “maybe” (below 1.25). However, there was an overall improvement in child wellbeing, though it improves more for some schools (full primaries did less well) and cultures (Asian, African and Pacific Island cultures made the most progress, while Pākehā / European made the least progress). Older children showed greater improvement in wellbeing scores than younger and boys made more progress than girls. These school and cultural patterns were repeated in the outcomes to many questions and in the ratings that children gave for the usefulness of the programme. There were no outcome differences for age. Girls were more enthusiastic about the programme and more likely than boys to put into practice its teachings.

Informally, it was our observation that for Māori and Pacific students, having teachers of the same culture helped. Particularly where aspects of the programme promoted a different approach to the student’s home-discipline practices and survival skills’ regimes in deprived social and economic environments. We heard teacher comments such as “this programme aligns to my Māori and Pacific values so I feel at home with this work”

- After having cultural supervision with a Samoan social work lecturer as part of the JSU support, some teachers commented that they were now willing to take a stand in conversations with their students on the “White Elephant in the Room” — parental practice of using physical punishment. The teachers had been shocked to find so many students had been normalising excessive use of force by parents in punishing their children. Students were adapting to the variance between home and school by “taking off their Palangi hats” when they went home. After the cultural supervision several Pacific Island teachers were prepared to say that the parent’s practice of using physical punishment is
Looking towards 2018

Seeing the positive shifts in children’s wellbeing during the 2017 pilot in aspects of self, home and school has been encouraging for the JSU team and ACC. The 6-month post programme interviews with teachers and school management were very affirming of the value of this programme with teacher’s comments on the changes that had occurred to their classes, pedagogy and class culture. Also, the 6-month follow up showed that children had more positive ideas about the use of Jade Speaks Up strategies than at the post-test.

However, there were some gaps and significant questions that arose from the 2017 research which we aim to pursue in the 2018 pilot. The manual has been updated based on the 2017 teachers’ feedback and the need to tailor the delivery of the programme to different cultural groups and school and community environments. More input from teachers and students in other regions of the North Island as well as one city in the South Island will be valuable.

Can the results of the 2017 pilot be replicated in the regions outside of Auckland - i.e. can children in other settings easily use the strategies taught to keep themselves safe and to get help? What will it take to ensure classrooms become even more of a safe haven for the children of New Zealand - are we resourcing and supporting our teachers sufficiently as the ‘chalk-face’ agents of keeping children safe? Who can we partner with in rural and Māori communities further away from centralised resources?

There is opportunity now for tangatawhenua in the regions to provide their local perspective through pre-pilot consultation and engagement with the researcher and developers of JSU to ensure that Māori participation in the research project aligns with their ‘tūmanako’ (aspirations) and that tangible benefits are obtained.

We enter round two of our research with a mix of confidence and curiosity. We are assured that we have found parts of the answer towards supporting resilience and wellbeing in our children, but we know that the ultimate solution is beyond the reach of any single programme or organisation. Our data can contribute to these conversations, the full report is expected to be completed by May 2018. This year ahead is about us entering deeper collaborative conversations with others sharing our aim of keeping our children safe from the challenges of violence in our communities and homes.

‘Kei a tatou katoa te taonga hua wairua hei tainga mo te katoa’.

*Everyone has potential access to the treasures of the spirit for the highest good of all.*

(Whakatauiki gifted to this work by Awa Hudson, Kuia to Violence Free Waitakere)


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