Kids as Catalyst
Wyndham region 2016
Outcomes Evaluation Report

Introduction

This report presents a summative evaluation of the *Kids as Catalyst* program provided in 3 primary schools in Wyndham – an outer urban region in the west of Melbourne, comprising a mix of old and new suburbs.

Kids Thrive received funding from the Federal Government's Australia Council - Creative Community Partnerships Initiative, Victorian Department of Education and Training's Strategic Schools Partnerships Program, William Buckland Foundation, Sidney Myer Fund, Newsboys Foundation and Vichealth's Research Innovation program to deliver the ***Kids as Catalyst*** program to the Wyndham region during 2016.

The Kids as Catalyst Program

Kids as Catalyst is a six-month resilience and creative leadership program. It aims to ignite and skill children to become catalysts for positive change in their local communities. 'Kids as Catalyst' builds children's resilience, community connections and mental wellbeing, whilst using literacy, numeracy and teamwork skills. Kids as Catalyst is delivered in upper primary schools, through direct training and self-directed, action-based learning over two school terms.

In the first term of delivery Kids as Catalyst is a weekly program - with direct training and project support delivered by the Kids Thrive team. Students connect with their personal values; engage with local community groups; conceive, co-design and budget a project to benefit their local communities; and write persuasive applications for funding. This phase culminates in students pitching for funding and project support to a panel of community leaders.

In the second term of the program children deliver their community projects with community partners selected by the students. They manage project schedules, finances and documentation, supported by schools, community and the Kids Thrive team. The program culminates in a community celebration at which students share their project outcomes, challenges and achievements with an audience of family and community members.

The program also delivers professional development for teachers in arts-based learning, community engagement and project development.

Kids as Catalyst engages children in the later years of primary school and the early years of secondary school. This vital time in a child's development - known as the 'middle years' - is characterised by rapid emotional, physical, social and cognitive development. *Kids as Catalyst* closely matches the needs of children in this age group, which have been summarised as ' to have good self-esteem; belong, feel connected and supported; have increasing independence in a safe environment; be able to achieve, learn and feel competent; and be heard, participate, and be listened to' (Committee on Children and Young People, 2009: 17). Promotion of resilience is key to supporting mental wellbeing at this time of transition; and factors promoting resilience are similarly germane to the program. These include developing individual attributes

such as self-efficacy, social competency, and problem-solving skills; and supportive relationships with family, other caregivers, peers, teachers, and members of the broader community (Hunter, 2012; Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000).

A logic model is attached, describing the theory of change underlying the *Kids as Catalyst* program. In summary, the intervention comprises an innovative, child-led social change program that empowers children to engage in, and take the lead in social change activities. It is delivered in partnership by Kids Thrive facilitators with educators, community agencies and children, and uses the arts as a learning and community engagement strategy. It explicitly:

- Builds links and relationships between children, schools, agencies and their community.
- Develops the skills of teachers and children to investigate and understand themselves, others and their community from a philanthropic/social action perspective.
- Inspires and equips children to lead change at a community level.

Program outputs include partnerships between children, schools and community organisations to co-design and deliver local philanthropic projects. The project logic maps outcomes onto a socio-ecological framework at individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels. Individual level outcomes include increased self-esteem, self-confidence, resilience and expanded social networks for children; interpersonal outcomes include increased connectedness between children, teachers, schools and communities; at a community level, children become active participants in addressing local issues; and at a societal level, we expect to see improved cohesion and wellbeing with children better equipped to be contributing members of society.

The program has been delivered to over 20 Victorian schools since 2011.

Previous internal evaluations of *Kids as Catalyst* have included collecting simple data sets, and interviews with key informants from participating schools, community groups and students. These have demonstrated that students respond very positively to the program, with schools noticing key improvements in children's learning, creative thinking, leadership, agency, self-esteem and mental wellbeing. In 2015 the evaluation included a simple pre-and post-test to understand students' community connections emerging from involvement in the program.

Kids as Catalyst aims to increase child and youth confidence and capacity to identify issues of importance to them and their local communities, and to take action to address these issues. It also aims to build students' resilience, self-esteem, social connections and sense of agency by:

- Using the arts to explore their personal values and to rehearse key social and community development skills
- Promoting social inclusiveness and community connectedness
- Encouraging community cooperation and participation
- Fostering awareness and understanding of community issues
- Enacting alternative, positive pathways for children and communities in environments with few perceived options
- Exploring creative approaches to transforming challenges and obstacles into opportunities for growth.

The Evaluation

This evaluation identifies the impact of the *Kids as Catalyst* program in the Wyndham primary schools in 2016.

Project Logic

The evaluation has been guided by a project logic. The project logic is included at the end of this document. The project logic makes the thinking that underlies the project explicit and exposes the underlying 'hypothesis' on which the program is based. The purpose of the project logic is to be clear about the activities, outputs and expected outcomes of the project so that the correct evaluation questions are identified.

Evaluation Approach

This evaluation uses a summative approach aimed at determining the impact of the *Kids as Catalyst* program during 2016. Summative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program's activities. The focus is on the outcomes achieved, changes observed in participants, and the difference that has been made.

Evaluation Questions

Based on the project logic the following summative evaluation questions have been developed for this evaluation. The questions are based on the project outputs and short-term outcomes identified in the project logic:

1. To what extent have children, teachers and community members participated in *Kids as Catalyst*?
2. What has *Kids as Catalyst* delivered?
3. To what extent have children demonstrated, self-confidence, empathy, teamwork and positive social skills?
4. To what extent have children learnt and applied creative learning skills, and improved their educational engagement?
5. To what extent have children learnt and applied leadership and community engagement skills?
6. To what extent has the community had a positive engagement and improved participation with the school?
7. To what extent have children built their community networks?

These questions form the framework for the presentation of the Evaluation Results in the next section.

Data Collection

Key documents and data sources for this evaluation have included:

- Minutes of meetings with teachers and principals
- Student Progress Reports - these detailed reports were completed by teachers for each child in their class detailing progress as a result of *Kids as Catalyst*
- Student interviews
- Teacher and Principal Evaluation interviews and surveys

Data has been analysed using a constructivist approach - based on the understanding that the

"truth" of a situation is individually and collectively ***constructed*** by the people who experience it[1]. In constructivist evaluation it is assumed that there are many different ways of interpreting or understanding the intent and impact of an activity and that to understand the activity the evaluator must gather together those understandings from a range of sources. For a constructivist evaluator the truth of the situation is what the people who experience it describe.

Evaluation Results

In this section each evaluation question is answered based on an analysis of the data. A summary of the results is provided at the end of this section.

1. To what extent have children, teachers, and community members participated in *Kids as Catalyst - Wyndham*?

Data collected by Kids Thrive indicates that the program ***directly*** involved:

- 67 children in grades 5/6
- 2 government schools and 1 catholic school
- 1 local social welfare and education agency (The Smith Family)
- 4 teachers
- 3 school principals
- 2 Kids Thrive Artist/Trainers
- 11 local community organisations (see Appendix 2)
- 92 local community members – 7 community panelists; 20 engaged in community projects; 64 engaged in community events

Student Progress Reports prepared by teachers in relation to each individual child indicate that 97% of children showed improved willingness to engage jn class through their involvement in *Kids as Catalyst*.

2. What has *Kids as Catalyst* delivered?

During 2016 *Kids as Catalyst* delivered:

- 33 workshops with Kids Thrive Artist/Trainers
- 2 community engagement events (Project Pitch and Community Celebration)
- 11 community projects realized by children with community partners

3. To what extent have children demonstrated improved self-confidence, social and emotional skills?

Teachers provided Student Progress Reports identifying their perception of the impact of *Kids as Catalyst* on each child. The progress reports include four areas of relevance to this evaluation question. The progress reports indicate that:

- 99% of children demonstrated improvement in confidence as a result of their participation in *Kids as Catalyst*;
- 98% demonstrated improved teamwork;

[1] The other major approaches to evaluation are positivist or post positivist. These approaches start from an understanding that truth is objectively knowable (positivism) or able to be accurately approximated (post-positivism).

- 93% demonstrated improved empathy;
- 97% demonstrated improved social awareness.

'Before Kids as Catalyst I was just an ordinary schoolgirl, but now I'm a legend. I've made a change in the community.' Heba

4. To what extent have children learnt and applied creative learning skills?

Three dimensions in the Student Progress Reports have been selected as relevant to the development and application of creative learning skills by children. These are the dimensions of 'self-directed learning', 'literacy' and 'numeracy'.

The Student Progress Reports indicate that:

- 96% of children demonstrated improvement in self-directed learning as a result of participating in *Kids as Catalyst*;
- 75% demonstrated improved in literacy;
- 44% demonstrated improved numeracy;

Not all teachers felt able to assess against numeracy skills as not all were involved in broader numeracy classroom activities.

5. To what extent have children learnt and applied leadership and community engagement skills?

Two dimensions in the Student Progress Reports are relevant to the development and application of 'leadership' and 'community engagement' skills by children.

The Student Progress Reports indicate that:

- 96% of children demonstrated improved understanding and practice of leadership skills;
- 99% demonstrated improved understanding and capacity to participate in community engagement.

'I really loved playing with the elderly.' Micko

6. To what extent have children engaged with their community, and the community had a positive engagement with the school?

Data shows the children and schools developed new relationships with:

- 10 local community groups,
- 20 community members directly
- Over 60 family and community participants in celebratory events.

'My discovery about my community is that it's filled with helping organisations.' Micko

'My discovery about myself is that I can communicate with children with disability.' Harmony

Summary of Evaluation Results

The following table presents a summary of the Evaluation Results:

Evaluation Question	Result
1. To what extent have children, teachers, and community members participated in *Kids as Catalyst?*	67 children participated in 2016. 92 community members directly engaged as project participants or event participants. Teachers and Principals fully engaged.
2. What has ***Kids as Catalyst*** delivered?	11 Workshop / training sessions; 2 community engagement events; 11 community projects fully realized by children.
3. To what extent have children demonstrated improved self-confidence, and positive social and emotional skills?	99% increased confidence; 98% show improved teamwork; 93% show improved empathy; 97% demonstrated improved social awareness.
4. To what extent have children learnt and applied creative learning skills?	96% improved self-directed learning; 75% improved literacy; 44% improved numeracy (not all teachers able to assess against numeracy)
5. To what extent have children learnt and applied leadership and community engagement skills?	96% improved leadership skills; 99% improved community engagement.
6. To what extent has the community had a positive engagement and improved participation with the school?	Schools and students have new connections / relationships with: 10 local community groups, 80 community members.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above results, it is possible to conclude that:

Kids as Catalyst builds children's resilience by significantly improving their: • Self confidence • Teamwork • Empathy • Social awareness • Self-directed learning • Educational engagement • Literacy and numeracy • Leadership skills • Community engagement	*Kids as Catalyst* also makes a significant contribution towards improved: • Engagement of families with schools • Connection between schools and local community groups • Children's safe community networks

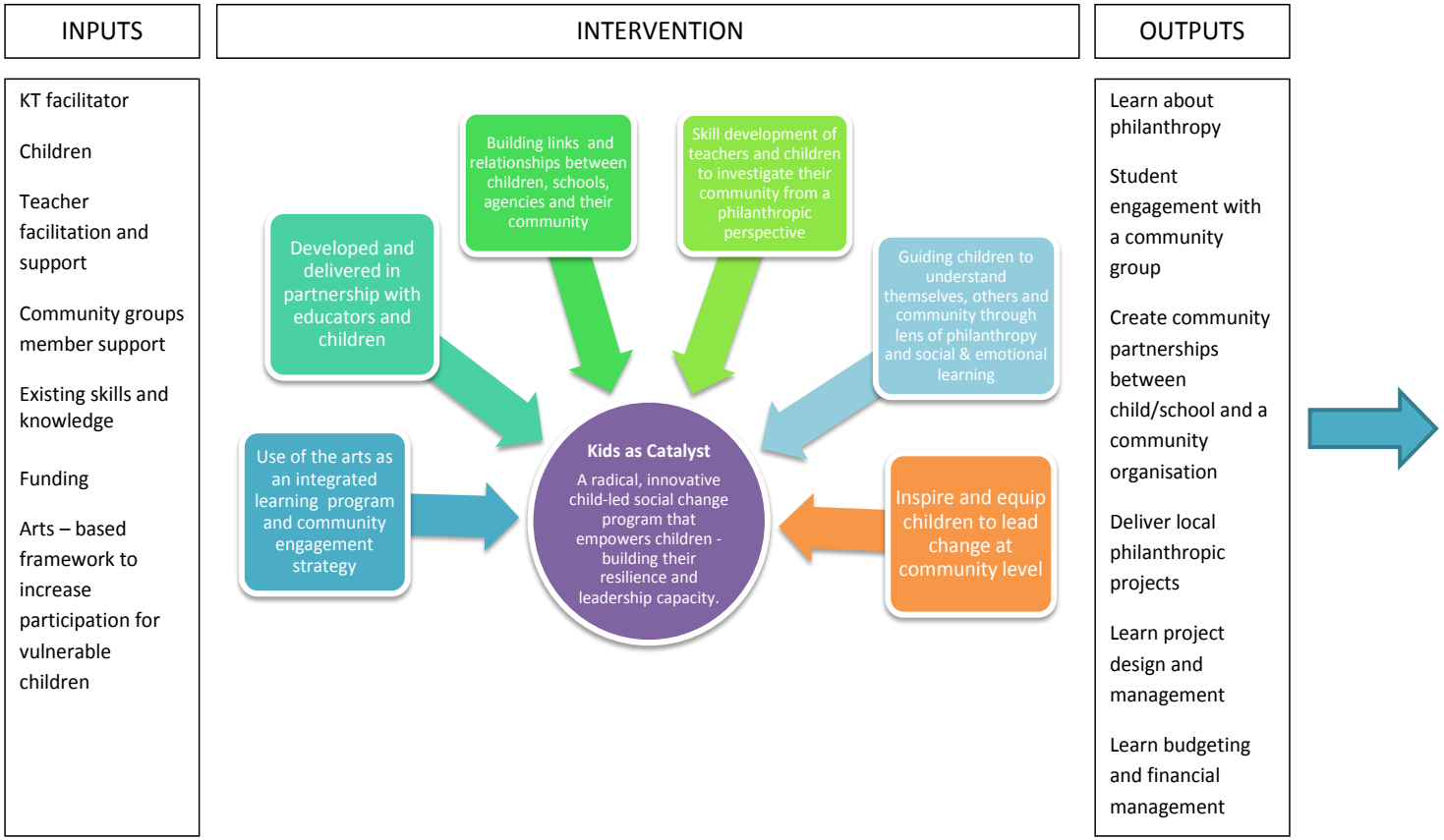
Kids as Catalyst is based on sound evidence of the value of the arts in engaging and educating young children. *Kids as Catalyst* delivered a successful program in these primary schools in a significantly disadvantaged region of the outer west of Melbourne. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that the program has improved children's learning skills and community capacities, built links between families, schools and community groups, and extended children's safe community networks. From these results we can draw the conclusion that *Kids as Catalyst* contributes significantly to building children's resilience and leadership skills.

'Before Kids as Catalyst I didn't go and help others. Now I help the community.' Kyeisha

'To all different kids, from up top to down below, I would like to say, it doesn't matter if you are different; but what does matter is that you try, and never doubt yourself that you're going to make friends.' Harmony

Appendix 1 – Kids as Catalyst project Logic

Kids Thrive 'Kids as Catalyst' Program Logic



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OUTCOMES

Short Term outcomes

Skill development
- Leadership
- Team work
- Communication
- Pitching for funding
- Literacy and numeracy
- Community engagement
- Self-directed learning
- Financial management/budgeting
- Project design, planning and implementing

Personal attributes
- Social awareness
- Empathy
- Confidence
- Willingness to participate
- Responsibility

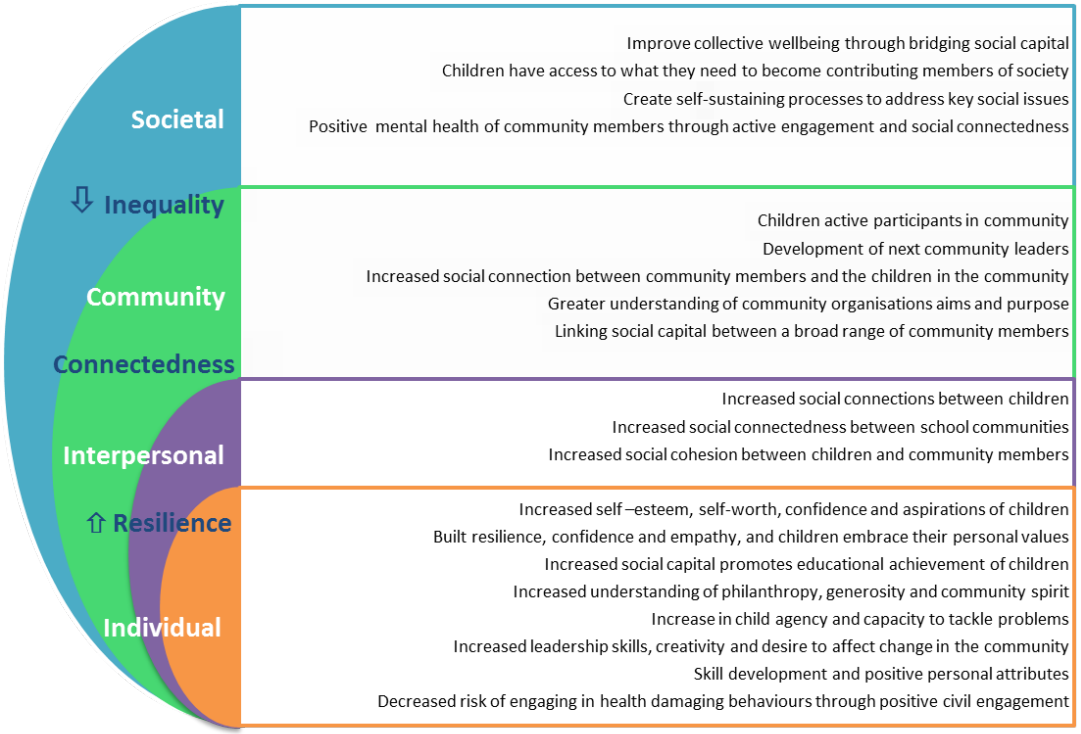
Medium Term Outcomes

Increased social connection between community members and the children in the community
Increased social connectedness between school communities
Increased self-esteem and self-worth of children
Increased leadership skills of children
Increased understanding of philanthropy, generosity and community pride
Built resilience, confidence and empathy of children
Increased creativity, awareness and desire to affect change in the community
Linking social capital between a broad range of community members

Long Term Outcomes

Improved collective wellbeing through bridging social capital
Children active participants in community
Increased social capital promotes educational achievement
Decreased risk of engaging in health damaging behaviours through positive civil engagement
Create self-sustaining processes to address key social issues
Development of next community leaders
Increased aspirations due to community connectedness, pride and self-worth

Kids as Catalyst outcomes mapped against the socio-ecological model



Appendix 2 – Kids as Catalyst Wyndham
Student Community Partners and Projects

Community Partner	Focus issue	Community Project
Manor Lakes Aged Care Homes	Elderly	Art for the aged – drawing portraits of elderly residents and sharing morning tea
YMCA Northern Interchange	Disability	Creating sensory boxes for children who need support to focus in school.
Second Chance Animal Rescue	Animals	Baking and selling cupcakes to raise money for animal rescue
Uniting Age Well	Elderly	Purchasing an ipad for the elderly residents and teaching them how to set up a gmail account and use email to communicate with their loved ones.
St Andrews Parish Playgroup	Girls & Women	Holding a morning tea for local African women and their children to encourage them to participate in community activities.
Werribee Basketball Association	Disability	Hiring a court and playing basketball with local disability group.
Men's Shed Wyndham Vale	Boys & Men	Building wooden trains for local kids
Heathdale Kindergarten	Cultural Diversity	Holding a cultural games day at the local kindergarten to encourage an appreciation of diversity
Wyndham Men's Shed	Elderly	Participating in building a carpet bowls set, and playing bowls with elderly residents.
Karingal Garden	Disability	Partnering with children from Karingal Special School to build a 'welcome' garden bed at both schools.
Melbourne University Veterinary Hospital	Animals	Collecting second hand blankets for the hospital, and making unique tags saying 'with love from…'