



STARTTS IN SCHOOLS EVALUATION REPORT



STARTTS acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and Traditional Custodians. We acknowledge their living cultures and we value their continuing connection to country, waters and kin. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

STARTTS welcomes all people with refugee backgrounds, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, faith or ethnicity. STARTTS is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the way we provide services to people with refugee backgrounds.

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**NSW SERVICE FOR THE TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION
OF TORTURE AND TRAUMA SURVIVORS**
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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the findings of an evaluation into the NSW STARTTS in Schools Strategy.

Since my appointment as NSW Coordinator General for Settlement (previously NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement) in 2015, I have had the pleasure of working very closely with NSW STARTTS and seen first-hand the value of helping refugees cope with the trauma and violence they have often experienced before coming to Australia.

STARTTS have also been an integral member of the Joint Partnership Working Group. The JPWG is comprised of senior public servants and community leaders who have played a key role in developing a whole-of-community approach to improving settlement outcomes for refugees beginning new lives in NSW. I have been heartened by the compassion and care that members of the JPWG have brought to this collaborative enterprise and their role in co-designing initiatives with the NSW Government. This includes the School Liaison Program discussed in this report. This cross-sector collaboration has resulted in more than \$170 million of NSW Government additional investment since 2016/17 in services which have improved refugee settlement in NSW and in particular have accommodated the additional intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

This report highlights the achievements of the NSW STARTTS in Schools Strategy. It reveals how successful partnership with NSW Government has enhanced learning and wellbeing outcomes for young people. Collaboration between the NSW Department of Education's Refugee Student Counselling Support Team and Refugee Support Leaders with the School Liaison Program has improved access and delivery of support to refugee students and families across the state.

Young people from refugee backgrounds have enormous potential to engage and participate as active members of Australian society. They are a resilient group with many strengths, resources, and capabilities. They bring broad international and cross-cultural knowledge to enhance and strengthen our multicultural society. Supporting the transition of young people into schooling has a positive impact on refugee student wellbeing and provides valuable support for refugee families and broader school communities.

By focusing on the initial years of enrolment, the School Strategy recognises that young people with refugee backgrounds need time to learn English, acquire literacy and familiarise themselves with school settings to access and engage with the full curriculum. It helps them to gain confidence and find their distinctive voice in a new society.


We need these young people to stay connected, to be vocal and to be involved in the community. Government investment in programs like the School Strategy can help reduce the need for government interventions later in life, as young people develop their sense of agency and become self-reliant. It presents opportunities for them to be active participants in the decisions that affect them. Successful integration of young newcomers is better achieved when they get the support they need and feel included in Australia's multicultural community.

I look forward to NSW STARTTS continuing this important work. I remain persuaded that ongoing engagement and collaboration in schools will continue to deliver positive outcomes for young people from refugee backgrounds, and, by doing that it will enhance their capacity to contribute to our nation.

Prof. Peter Shergold, AC
NSW Coordinator-General for Refugee Resettlement



Foreword



One of the saddest aspects of the world we live in is that far too many children and young people are exposed to extremes of trauma and even torture at the hands of people in power and authority.

Loss of loved ones in traumatic circumstances and the indirect impact of extreme trauma and torture on parents and guardians affect an even larger proportion of young refugees.

As our expertise in assisting survivors to have a life after torture and extreme trauma evolved over the 30 plus years of STARTTS journey, one of the most important things we learnt was how deep and pervasive the impact of this exposure to trauma related stressors could be in young people. We realised how it could affect their conduct, and in turn how they were perceived by other people. How it could affect their ability to forge close relationships with others. How it could affect their capacity to learn and their prowess at school. In short, how it could have a substantial and long lasting impact on their ability to realise their potential and live fulfilling and contributing lives.

The beauty of our long STARTTS journey is that, over the years, we have also learnt how to better support young refugees and their families with the dual challenges posed by the traumas of their refugee experience and the challenges of resettling in a new country. We have learnt how important their immediate context is for their healing, and that schools are not only one of the most important aspects of their context, but also possibly the one most amenable to change. In short, we have learnt that school settings, and the interventions that STARTTS and the school system can make available in these settings can make an enormous difference to the lives and future of young people from refugee and refugee like background.

The implementation of STARTTS School Liaison Program funded by the NSW Premier's and then the NSW Department of Education as part of a suite of programs championed by the Refugee Resettlement Coordination effort led by Peter Shergold complemented STARTTS existing counselling services for refugee young people and STARTTS Youth program. Together they form the "STARTTS In Schools" program, offering what I consider to be the state of the art in provision of services to support refugee young people who have been affected by the impact of trauma and other stresses associated with the refugee experience and resettlement.

I am proud to present this report, which I believe not only describes the value of STARTTS and the Department of Education jointly offering complementary services to young people in the school environment, but also goes a considerable way into developing an evidence base for the efficacy and appropriateness of this approach to service provision.

Jorge Aroche
CEO, STARTTS



Executive Summary



STARTTS provides direct trauma-informed and recovery-focused individual and group-work interventions to school aged children and young people with refugee backgrounds and over time has consolidated and expanded its services in schools through the STARTTS in Schools (SIS) strategy.

Within SIS, the School Liaison Program (SLP) was funded by NSW Government and established as an interface between schools and STARTTS' programs and services, and to promote systematic changes at the school level to improve the learning environment and healing outcomes for children and young people of refugee background.

The SIS strategy is delivered through internal collaboration between the School Liaison Program, Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team, together with an external partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Catholic Education Office. This integrated model has increased STARTTS' capacity to provide targeted and specialized support to schools and students across New South Wales.

Support provided includes individual and trauma-informed group-work interventions to children and young people of refugee background, professional learning for school staff, development and support of clusters of schools to promote partnerships and implement whole school approaches and systemic changes in schools, and personalized consultation for school staff.

STARTTS also supported and led the SLP's Steering Committee established via the NSW Joint Partnership Working Group (JPWG) for Refugee Resettlement.

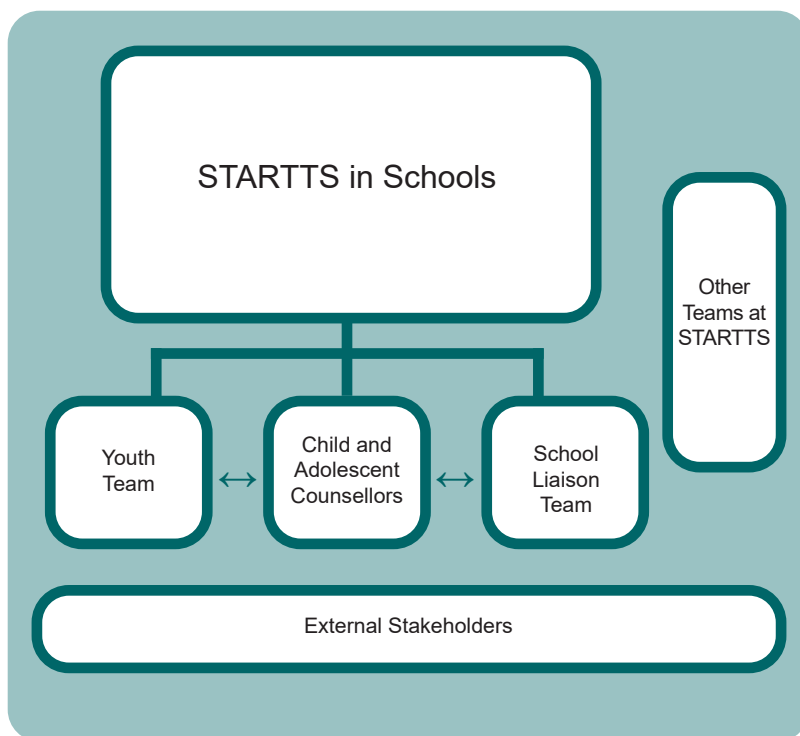


Figure 1.0: STARTTS in Schools (SIS) Program Structure

The Steering Committee later evolved to a structure that enabled multi-agency collaboration and provided feedback and support to the STARTTS in Schools strategy as a whole.

This evaluation was informed by the Bio-Psychosocial and Complex Interaction Models, the whole school approach and social capital conceptual framework, which confluence in a holistic and systemic approach that guides STARTTS' interventions in schools. The evaluation was guided by the objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of the SLP and used qualitative and quantitative approaches and multi-methods for data collection and analysis.

This report is divided into nine chapters. The first and second chapters include an introduction and background of STARTTS In Schools and a brief literature review. Chapters three to seven address the findings of the evaluation. Lastly, chapters eight and nine present the general conclusions and recommendations.

An important objective of SIS and SLP was to provide seamless access for children and young people of refugee background to STARTTS' services where a specialist service is required.

Between 2017 and 2019, a total of 4,743 school-aged children and young people of refugee background benefited from STARTTS' specialist services including 14,792 individual counselling sessions and 275 trauma-informed group-work interventions (2,958 group sessions). The rate of acceptance to STARTTS' services in this period was 98%. Notably, school referrals showed an increased trend with 552 referrals in 2017, 608 in 2018 and 864 referrals in 2019.

Accessing STARTTS' services also supported different dimensions of wellbeing of school aged children and young people of refugee backgrounds. The analysis of the World Health Organization's Five Wellbeing Index (WHO-5) from 123 students indicated an average increase of 12% in scores of wellbeing suggesting that students experienced improvements in their mood, stress levels and sleep as a result of their participation in STARTTS' programs. Similarly, the analysis of 23 completed Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) shows a decrease on average stress scores of 20% which indicates an improvement in emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity/inattention, social difficulties such as peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviours.

Findings from attribution of change interviews with teachers (15) and students (93) also indicate positive wellbeing outcomes for students as a result of STARTTS' interventions. Student participants reported feeling happier (97%) as STARTTS' programs supported them to increase their sense of belonging, friendship and connection with others within or outside their own community or locality. They also reported improvements in their physical and mental health and confidence, feeling calmer and developing new skills. Similarly, teachers reported improvements in their students' academic performance (87%) including grades, self-confidence, focus, concentration and engagement in the classroom.

“ I feel lucky to be part of this. I feel special. I got this opportunity to be picked for this group and I'm happy. ”

- STARTTS Group Participant

Notably, teacher responses (80%) indicated that students who participated in STARTTS' programs experienced significant positive change in their interaction with peers and teachers at school. Teachers also reported that students were more respectful towards themselves and others, including people from different backgrounds, between females and males and towards their teachers as a result of participating in STARTTS' programs.

Another important component of the STARTTS In Schools strategy is the professional development delivered to school staff aiming to enhance the capacity of schools to deliver coordinated services and support for children and young people of refugee background.

In total, 191 training sessions were delivered to 6,054 school staff between 2017 and 2019, some of them delivered with the support of other teams within STARTTS.

Data collected from forty-eight training sessions provided to 1,118 school staff across NSW schools, between 2017 and 2019, indicates that a variety of school staff (mainly classroom and support teachers) benefited from receiving this training. Participants self-reported a significant increase in knowledge and confidence in their ability to work with children and young people of refugee background after completing training sessions. School staff also self-reported a high level of satisfaction with training.

Another key objective of the SLP was to promote collaboration between STARTTS and schools to deliver coordinated services and support for children and young people of refugee background. To achieve this objective, the SLP developed and/or supported clusters of schools (networks) and led and supported the SIS' Steering Committee.

Seven clusters of government and non-government schools were supported or established by STARTTS between 2017 and 2019. Of those, six clusters were in the Sydney metropolitan area across regions of North Western, Western and South Western Sydney. The seventh cluster was in regional NSW in Albury.

Information gathered from cluster participants shows systemic changes resulting from their participation in these clusters. It was identified that collaboration between schools to address common needs and challenges was greater and awareness and understanding of the refugee experience and needs of children and young people of refugee background increased systematically. Cluster members reported improvement in the enrolment and school transition processes and a progressive implementation of Refugee Readiness Audit (RRA) in schools which targeted school processes and practices, curriculum and programs, organisation, ethos and the environment, as well as the partnerships with parents or guardians with community organisations.

Overall, the experience of school representatives in clusters was extremely positive.

Cluster members were able to establish and strengthen professional networks with other schools and non-school-based support services. They also had the opportunity to exchange knowledge and collectively explore issues, challenges and solutions and learn different practical teaching strategies in classrooms. Notably, the rural and regional schools and communities highly valued the existence of the cluster in their area and the support provided by STARTTS.

Data from interviews and a focus group discussion conducted with members of the Steering Committee indicated that the committee has been very useful for key education stakeholders to learn about each other's initiatives, services and priorities. It enabled a well-coordinated and collaborative approach to providing services to schools and enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background, limiting duplication between services. Notably, members reported that STARTTS leadership and the creation of an environment of inclusivity, openness and respect in which all agency representatives could speak openly were important elements in the success of the committee.

Overall, the evaluation results show significant and positive outcomes of the STARTTS in Schools strategy (SIS) and its School Liaison Program. The SIS strategy has developed a comprehensive and effective intervention approach that benefitted school aged children and young people of refugee background, their families and their schools.

Challenges during program adoption and implementation included those associated with the initial positioning of STARTTS within schools and the NSW Department of Education, the low participation of school senior and executive staff in clusters due to competing priorities and implementation of whole school approaches in school due to the heavy workloads and limited capacity of school staff representatives. Other challenges were related to the increase of resettlement in rural and regional areas of NSW and the limited capacity of the program to cover the growing needs of all schools in those areas.

Identified challenges for the future include ensuring sustainable funding for the School Liaison Program and STARTTS in Schools strategy and for the expansion of trauma-informed group-work interventions and continuing to provide the same level of support without the partnership with the Refugee Support Leaders (RSL's) program from the NSW Department of Education, which concluded in 2019.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.

That NSW Government continues to fund the network of services designed to support children and young people of refugee backgrounds. This includes STARTTS School Liaison Program.

2.

That all school-age education providers in NSW (Department of Education, Catholic Education Office and Independent Schools) prioritise screening for Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) for anyone entering the education system to activate early intervention services and supports for individual students, their families and communities.

3.

That all Tertiary Education institutions providing Teaching Degrees include content related to refugee experience in their regular curriculum. Teacher education should equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to apply trauma-informed pedagogy.

4.

That all Tertiary Institutions providing Allied Health Degrees (psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and nurses) include content related to refugee experience in their regular curriculum to ensure their work is trauma-informed post-graduation.

5.

That implementation structures are developed by all providers of school-education to support teachers to deliver syllabus content that may be regarded as confronting or that has the potential to cause distress for students or teachers.

6.

That regional settlement planning be tailored to the numbers, cultural backgrounds, experience of trauma, specific circumstances and resource availability in each region. Numbers alone are an insufficient planning tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7.

That NSW Department of Education and Catholic Education Office continue funding systems specifically designed to address needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

8.

That interventions for children and young people from refugee backgrounds be encouraged within school grounds during or after school hours by all school-education providers.

9.

That Department of Education and Catholic Education Office continue supporting the Clusters Approach in collaboration with STARTTS School Liaison Program. This encompasses support for both existing Clusters and creation of new Clusters in relevant geographical areas.

10.

That relationships between expert external agencies and the NSW Department of Education and Non-Government Education be governed by clear, mutually agreeable parameters allowing for equal contribution of expert knowledge and competence to ensure trauma informed and culturally safe support is provided to children and young people of refugee backgrounds.

11.

That other FASSTT agencies consider implementing a model of work with schools that incorporates a multidisciplinary (youth workers, clinicians and liaison/systemic support workers) approach and establishment of a Steering Committee bringing together relevant stakeholders. STARTTS is to ensure findings of this report are made available to other FASSTT members.

12.

That in recognition of the complex impact of trauma on brain development, STARTTS continues to prioritise children and young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13.

That STARTTS continues to prioritise work with schools as an essential recovery environment across all areas of service (including individual clinical work, trauma informed groupwork, training and consultancy for school staff) using a multidisciplinary systemic approach.

14.

That STARTTS continues to learn from our work with children and refugee young people and ensure that knowledge is shared widely through training, consultancy and research.

15.

That all schools with enrolled children and young people from refugee backgrounds adopt a Whole School strategy that brings together the relevant school structures including: the Wellbeing Team, Year Advisers or Stage Coordinators, School Counsellors, EAL/D Teams and relevant community engagement school personnel.

16.

That Government and Non-Government school education providers facilitate an opportunity for annual reporting on the Whole School strategy and the reflections of students and their families on the quality and impact of the strategy implementation.

17.

That schools continue to allow learners to take time out of lessons (in a carefully coordinated way) to participate in STARTTS' trauma-informed group work and counselling interventions.

18.

That schools prioritise provision of and participation of teachers and welfare staff in professional development tailored to their specific learning needs and school context to support children and young people of refugee backgrounds. This includes formal training or professional learning events, professional conversations (for example those enabled by school clusters), professional exchange and webinars.

19.

That schools continue to identify students who can benefit from services delivered through STARTTS in Schools.

KEY INSIGHTS

Fig 1. REFERRALS TO STARTTS



In 2017-2019
STARTTS received

4,816

referrals of children and young
people of refugee backgrounds



98%

of total referrals
were accepted

Fig 2. NUMBER OF REFERRALS ACCEPTED FROM SCHOOLS

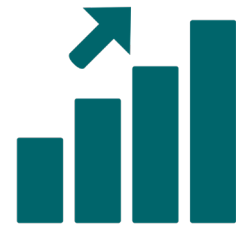
2,024

referrals in 2017-2019

99% of referrals
accepted



referrals were
more than doubled
in the 1st year of SIS



Referrals increasing
year on year
since 2016

Fig 3. COUNSELLING & GROUP SESSIONS

14,792

Total counselling sessions
for school aged children
and young people of refugee
backgrounds in 2017-2019



Total trauma informed group-work
sessions in 2017-2019

2,958

session delivery growth
more than doubled in 2017

Fig 4. TRAINING: INCREASE IN KNOWLEDGE

88%

of training participants reported
an increase in knowledge about
refugee experiences & trauma.

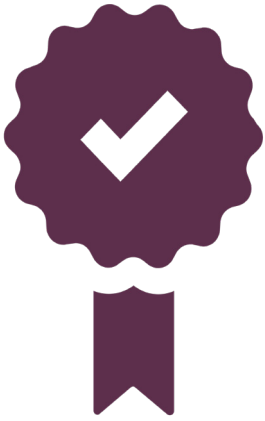


86%

of participants reported learning
more about STARTTS services &
referral processes.

KEY INSIGHTS

Fig 5. TRAINING: INCREASE IN CONFIDENCE



85%

of participants felt more confidence to offer support to children and young people of refugee backgrounds.

Fig 6. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: HAPPINESS

997%

of students reported feeling happier as a result of participating in STARTTS programs.

Fig 7. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: NEW SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



77% of participants reported making new friends

Fig 8. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: SLEEP



50%

of participants reported having better sleep as a result of their participation in STARTTS programs.



Fig 9. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



87%

of teacher responses indicated academic performance improvement as a result of participating in STARTTS programs.

Fig 10. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: CONCENTRATION

86% 

of teacher responses indicated observing an improvement in the concentration of participants.

Fig 11. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

53% 

of teacher responses indicated increasing attendance and/or truancy reduction attributed to participants engagement in STARTTS' programs.

KEY INSIGHTS

Fig 12. WELLBEING INTERVIEWS: INCREASED RESPECT



80%

of teacher responses indicated observing a significant positive change in the respect that participants showed towards themselves and others.

Fig 13. SCHOOL LIAISON CLUSTERS

Between 2017-2019, STARTTS has supported or established 6 clusters in the Sydney Metropolitan area and 1 in a regional rural area of NSW.

Metropolitan Sydney Network

Albury Network

1. Liverpool & Glenfield
2. Sydney Catholic Schools Refugee network
3. CORE (Community of Refugee Educators) Northwest Sydney
4. Fairfield Cowpasture
5. Bankstown & Canterbury
6. Blacktown LGA (concluded in mid 2018)





“ It’s been amazing, sometimes as an EAL/D teacher, you are the only one in the whole school and it’s hard to be able to bounce ideas off each other when you are the only person. So having a network of people helps with confidence and gives me extra ideas ”

- School Teacher





Chapter 1:

Introduction and Background

Introduction

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) is a not-for-profit Affiliated Health Organisation which has been providing services to survivors of torture and refugee trauma in NSW for over 30 years.

It provides culturally appropriate services to help people recover from torture and refugee trauma, foster their empowerment and self-determination, and rebuild their lives in Australia. STARTTS also fosters a positive, effective and culturally sensitive recovery environment through the delivery of training to services that work with refugee populations, advocacy and policy work.

Since its foundation, STARTTS has supported children and young people of refugee background in schools. STARTTS provides direct individual and trauma-informed group-work interventions and over time has consolidated and expanded its services in schools through the STARTTS in Schools (SIS) strategy. Within SIS, the School Liaison Program (SLP) was established to connect directly with schools, increase awareness of STARTTS' services and provide direct support to schools across NSW. The program is an interface between schools and STARTTS' programs and services and promotes systematic changes at the school levels to improve the learning environment and healing outcomes for children and young people of refugee background.

Other key components of the SIS strategy are the Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team interventions which deliver a large number of programs in schools and work collaboratively with the SLP to enhance STARTTS' interventions in schools and increase benefits to children and young people of refugee background.

Through the SLP, the SIS strategy also includes a professional learning platform for school staff on topics related to refugees and trauma, with reference to current research and best practice skills. Similarly, the School Liaison Program supports and coordinates networks of schools across NSW, also called clusters. Through the clusters, STARTTS aims to promote a place for learning and capacity building where best practice can be shared based on the expertise and the needs of each individual school.

This evaluation aims to identify and explore the STARTTS in Schools and School Liaison Program outcomes between 2017 and 2019. It assesses the achievements of the programs against the objectives and key performance indicators agreed with the NSW Department of Education. It also identifies challenges and makes recommendations to inform future program implementation. As the School Liaison Program forms a part of the STARTTS in Schools Strategy, the evaluation report focuses on the whole of STARTTS in Schools strategy and all its components including the work of the Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team.

The evaluation report contains three main sections. The first section includes the context, background and description of the School Liaison Program and STARTTS in Schools Strategy. This section also includes the evaluation purpose, methodology and brief literature review. The second section contains the evaluation findings through the exploration of the key performance indicators (KPIs). The final section explores challenges, conclusions and recommendations.

Context

STARTTS in Schools provides services to all children and young people of refugee backgrounds in NSW who are of school age regardless of their visa class or date of arrival.

This includes those who arrived under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (off-shore); those who applied on shore, were found to be Refugees and were granted Permanent Visas (866); Temporary Protection Visa (TPV)/Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders; and asylum seekers. In the period of 2015-2019, 31,846 refugees who arrived or were granted protection are currently recorded as living in NSW. Of these 11,574, or just over 36%, are under the age of 18. These numbers do not include asylum seekers or refugees who have been granted a temporary visa (TPV/SHEV). The proportion of refugees settling in regional areas of NSW has varied considerably in recent years. In 2019 32% of new humanitarian entrants initially settled in regional areas. Below is information on arrivals under Refugee and Humanitarian Program and those who were granted the 866 Visas.

Table 1.1

Offshore Humanitarian Visa Grant by Age in Australia Per Financial Year

Age	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
0-17	4,281	4,289	6,232	7,701	5,872	6,870
18-29	2,674	2,526	3,209	3,971	3,226	3,900
30-49	2,815	2,810	4,169	5,374	3,775	4,268
50-69	1,013	1,122	1,591	2,595	1,620	1,748
70+	201	234	351	616	332	326
Total	10,984	10,981	15,552	20,257	14,825	17,112

Source: Department of Home Affairs. Australian offshore program reports 2017 to 2019

In New South Wales (NSW), 31,443 people were resettled between 2015 and 2019 representing almost 40% of the total national intake (Department of Home Affairs, Personal communication, March 20, 2020). Between 2016 and 2017 the intake in NSW increased, this is partly due to the additional 6,570 humanitarian entrants, as part of the special intake of 12,000 people from Syria and Iraq post 2015 (NSW Family and Community Services, January 31, 2019). The number of humanitarian entrants being resettled in regional NSW also presents an increasing trend. From 2017 to 2018 the number of humanitarian entrants resettling in regional NSW increased by 94.06%. From 2018 to 2019 a 31.37% increase occurred in resettlement to regional NSW (Department of Home Affairs, 2020).

Table 1.2

Offshore and Onshore Humanitarian Visa Grant by Age in NSW Per Financial Year

Age Band	Year of Arrival	VISA SUBCLASS					
		200	201	202	203	204	866
00-05	2015	140	5	169	0	13	100
	2016	350	10	679	<5	21	68
	2017	231	23	351	0	12	48
	2018	212	69	199	<5	6	39
	2019	249	94	350	0	21	15
00-05 Total		1,182	201	1,737	<5	6	39
06-12	2015	162	6	228	0	28	51
	2016	444	8	994	<5	55	23
	2017	314	24	504	0	38	30
	2018	291	91	309	0	28	21
	2019	342	125	506	0	50	5
06-12 Total		1,553	254	2,541	<5	199	130
13-18	2015	122	0	183	0	33	26
	2016	294	<5	711	0	71	26
	2017	214	<10	395	0	33	17
	2018	203	48	214	0	38	19
	2019	245	89	394	0	45	7
13-18 Total		1,078	144	1,897	0	220	95
19-24	2015	123	0	184	0	19	53
	2016	257	<5	590	<5	42	45
	2017	180	<15	387	0	18	46
	2018	168	35	239	0	25	41
	2019	259	91	456	0	23	20
19-24 Total		987	143	1,856	<5	127	205
24+	2015	545	18	1,019	0	72	270
	2016	1,210	14	3,743	0	234	279
	2017	854	32	2,249	0	125	246
	2018	718	123	1,214	<5	65	225
	2019	1,067	211	2,234	<5	109	69
24+ Total		4,394	398	10,459	<5	605	1,089
Grand Total		9,194	1,140	18,490	9	1,224	1,789

Source: Department of Home Affairs, February 2021

Of the total number of humanitarian entrants in NSW, children and young people of refugee background represent a significant percentage. Between 2015 and 2019, approximately 47% of the humanitarian entrants in NSW were children and young people of refugee background between 0 and 24 years old (Department of Home Affairs, February, 2021). Of those, almost 55% were between 6 and 17 years old.

More limited data is available for TPH/SHEV Holders and those in the community awaiting Refugee Status Determination as below:

Table 1.3

Current TPV/ SHEV holders granted between 1 January 2015 to 21 February 2021, by age range and are currently residing in NSW

VISA CLASS - 785 (TPV)	
Age Range	Total
0-5	31
6-17	118
18+	1,001
VISA CLASS - 790 (SHEV)	
Age Range	Total
0-5	149
6-17	371
18+	3,664

Source: Extracted from department systems on the 22 February 2020

Table 1.4

Bridging Visa Awaiting a decision currently residing in NSW

Age Range	Total
0-5	82
6-17	130
18+	1,042

Source: Extracted from department systems on the 22 February 2020

Background to STARTTS in Schools and the School Liaison Program

Since its inception, STARTTS has become increasingly aware of the many ways in which school aged children and young people of refugee background are affected by the impact of traumatic events on themselves and their families and has also been able to develop more effective ways to work with this client group.

STARTTS has also identified that school settings are a critical part of the recovery environment and offer an array of possibilities for effective individual and trauma- informed group-work interventions. As STARTTS' experience in working with schools increased, it also became evident that effective work in such settings depends on the school's readiness, understanding and experience in working with children and young people of refugee background as a client group. Working with schools at the systemic level has, therefore, become a crucial aspect of STARTTS' work.

In order to systematise and coordinate the work of various STARTTS sections in school settings, a School Liaison Officer position was created at STARTTS in 2008. It soon became apparent that the position was both highly effective in mediating a better interface between school settings and STARTTS services and facilitating systemic change in the few schools that were able to be assisted within the limited available resources. This position was particularly useful in terms of increasing the effectiveness of other STARTTS resources deployed in school settings as part of the STARTTS in Schools (SIS) Strategy, for example the Child and Adolescent counsellors and Youth Team interventions. Since this initial investment, STARTTS has committed to the expansion of the school liaison initiative as part of the SIS strategy and has advocated for funding to expand the program at a number of levels.

In 2017, STARTTS was able to consolidate and expand the School Liaison Program (SLP). The special additional humanitarian intake of 12, 000 refugees from Syria and Iraq in 2016 generated a relevant landscape to propose the implementation of STARTTS' School Liaison Program in NSW schools, in alignment with the NSW Government initiative to enhance the state's approach to refugee resettlement. Consequently, the SLP was successfully proposed to a working group (Joint Partnership Working Group – JPWG), led by the Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement in NSW, Professor Peter Shergold.

The School Liaison Program was then identified as one of the priorities for funding in 2016 which was granted and received, initially through the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, and later through the NSW Department of Education. In 2017 STARTTS used this funding to establish a multidisciplinary team to work across the Sydney metropolitan and rural and regional areas of NSW and to start the implementation of the program across the school systems as a whole, including state schools, independent schools and the Catholic school system.

Partnerships

Through STARTTS' intervention in schools, it was also identified that the needs of schools and children and young people of refugee background were different and multi-dimensional across all schools in NSW.

This required tailored interventions and a multi-disciplinary and a multi-dimensional team approach. Another key element was that a greater level of support and coordination was needed in order to meet the needs of schools and children and young people of refugee background to increase the benefits of and access to STARTTS services.

The essential pathway towards meeting the identified needs was the development of the SIS Strategy and collaboration with government and non- government schools and relevant agencies. In 2017, the School Liaison Program Steering Committee was created with the aim of bringing together different agencies and organisations to guide the direction of the program and enhance interagency partnerships, collaboration and mutual referral pathways. A partnership with the NSW Department of Education was also established, specifically with the Refugee Support Leadership Strategy (ended in 2019), and the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team (RSCST). STARTTS and these specialist teams created a road map that clarified the roles within the partnership during the implementation of the SLP and worked toward the establishment of strategic networks of government and non- government schools within New South Wales, also called clusters. The clusters aim to increase participation and mutual exchange and learning between schools of best practice in providing support to children and young people of refugee background in schools.

STARTTS and Catholic and independent schools started collaborating to support children and young people of refugee background enrolled in their schools. Representatives of some non-government schools became active participants in the clusters and the steering committee and have worked with the School Liaison Officers and other teams at STARTTS to support their school staff and students.

To deliver effective and appropriate interventions in schools, internal collaboration within STARTTS sections is crucial to success. To meet this need, a leadership working group was created by the Team Leaders of the Youth, and School Liaison Teams and the Senior Child and Adolescent Counsellor. The 3 meet regularly to discuss the SIS strategy and share and coordinate the multiple interventions that each team/staff group delivers in schools.

Description of the STARTTS in Schools Strategy

STARTTS in Schools Strategy (SIS) supports the psychological welfare of children and young people of refugee background.

It works in close partnership with the education systems and directly with school communities. Its overall aim is to improve education, employment and mental health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people of refugee background. SIS consists of three main components – the School Liaison Program (SLP), trauma-informed direct service programs and individual interventions through Child and Adolescent Counsellors and a team of specialist Youth Workers.

School Liaison Program

The School Liaison Program (SLP) was designed by STARTTS as a coordination interface platform to enhance capacity amongst government and non-government schools in NSW for better educational and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people of refugee background and to facilitate access to STARTTS' services for them, their families and teachers.

It uses the whole-school approach, STARTTS' biopsychosocial systemic and complex interaction of stressor models and Whole School and Social Capital as frameworks underpinning its interventions.¹

To support the SIS strategy's strong focus on external collaboration for its implementation and the delivery of STARTTS services, the School Liaison Program works in partnership with NSW Department of Education, other health services, interagency networks, primary and secondary schools and tertiary education providers. The School Liaison Officers also work collaboratively with each other to increase the program's impact and respond to the specific needs of both children and young people of refugee background and educators in schools.

The program covers the Sydney metropolitan area and rural and regional areas in NSW. School Liaison Officers, who cover the metropolitan area are based in STARTTS offices in Liverpool, Fairfield, Blacktown and Auburn. There is one officer based in Fairfield covering rural and regional areas. Each officer oversees clusters or networks of schools within their geographic areas of work.

Currently the program coordinates six clusters of government and non-government schools in the Sydney metropolitan area and one cluster in regional NSW.

The ongoing delivery of the School Liaison Program in collaboration with other teams at STARTTS responds to specific needs of schools and children and young people of refugee background through various complementary approaches:

1. Referral pathways to STARTTS services and programs:

SLP serves as a contact point and link to assess and match the needs of schools and children and young people of refugee background and the services offered by STARTTS. For example, it facilitates access to the following:

STARTTS individual interventions.

STARTTS offers assessment of trauma symptoms and their impact on schooling and home life. It offers trauma treatment by using appropriate child and adolescent psychotherapeutic approaches by tailoring to the needs of students. Additional services are offered such as psychiatry, physiotherapy, acupuncture and neurofeedback.

School trauma-informed group-work interventions.

There are a variety of trauma-informed group-work interventions that target the specific needs of school aged children and young people of refugee background and their families. The majority of trauma-informed group-work interventions are delivered by the Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team. This includes group counselling, parenting programs, youth camps, leadership, music, sport, art and Capoeira Angola groups. Some of the trauma-informed group-work interventions are delivered directly by School Liaison Officers. The schools also receive support through the implementation of groups by the Families In Cultural Transition (FICT) team who engage with the families of children and young people of refugee background.

2. Consultation and advice to school staff:

The School Liaison Officers and in some cases with the support of other STARTTS teams provide tailored advice and consultation by phone, email and face to face on topics that involve children and young people of refugee background. These topics cover bullying, strategies to support refugee students in the classroom, enrolment and transition from primary to high school or from Intensive English Centres (IEC) to mainstream settings. The School Liaison Officers offer consultation and advice on particular learning or training needs and link schools with other external support services. Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team also support consultation and advice to schools when required.

3. Specialist training for School Staff:

STARTTS provides professional training to school staff on challenges related to refugees and trauma, with reference to current research and best practice skills. The training is designed in accordance with the specific needs of each school so as to increase their capacity to provide better support to children and young people of refugee background. Training is either delivered through the clusters of schools or in response to direct requests from schools.

4. Specialist support on vicarious impact for school staff:

Teachers and school welfare staff are equipped with specialised support to process the vicarious impact of working with children and young people of refugee background and their families. Through training and interactive workshops, the program aims to increase understanding of vicarious trauma and provide self-care and healthy boundaries strategies when working with trauma survivors.

5. Cluster development and implementation:

These are networks that aim to address the specific educational and wellbeing needs of children and young people of refugee background and their families. School Liaison Officers work in partnership with NSW Department of Education, the Catholic Education system and the Association of Independent Schools NSW to co-facilitate and support the development and implementation of networks of schools across NSW. The networks facilitate mutual exchange and learning between schools and provide an opportunity to address systemic issues faced by a number of schools across particular regions.

6. Resources development:

School Liaison Officers support the development and circulation of resources for school staff. These resources aim to support all participants and their schools with activities, strategies and information to work with children and young people of refugee background.

STARTTS Youth Team

STARTTS' Youth Team offers a variety of integrated programs to support children and young people of refugee background who are experiencing challenges in their lives associated with the impact of trauma and migration experience.

Its goal is to help them develop skills and strategies to cope with life related stresses, solve their problems and increase their overall wellbeing.

STARTTS' Youth Team uses youth-centred, relationship-based, and collaborative approaches in its interventions and works with clients to build on their personal strengths such as leadership, self-esteem, self-awareness and identity in order to increase participation in the community.

The Youth Team programs are designed for children and young people of refugee background between the ages of 10- to 24-years old who are experiencing challenges at school and in their daily lives, including struggles with education, mental health, family, employment, peer pressure, bullying or other persistent issues.

STARTTS' Youth Team programs include:

- Residential programs such as camps.
- School-based trauma-informed group-work interventions:
 - Capoeira Angola
 - Sporting Linx
 - Momentum, Rock & Water
 - Tree of Life
 - Team of Life
 - Urban Art (murals and screen printing)
 - Beth Mosaic
 - Drumming
 - I Am Beautiful
 - Head Start
- Community support programs.
- After hours youth programs.

STARTTS' Child and Adolescent Counsellors

A core aspect of STARTTS' approach to assisting children and young people of refugee background and their families to overcome the impact of trauma is through providing counselling and psychotherapy.

Child and Adolescent Counsellors provide psychosocial and psychological assessment, referral service and short to medium term counselling and support services in NSW. Those services are provided at STARTTS' offices and also in schools and other outreach locations such as youth services when appropriate.

Child and Adolescent Counsellors use a variety of counselling techniques and therapeutic approaches to help refugees overcome the effects of their experiences. These interventions include play therapy, sand tray, music and art therapy. These are provided to a range of age groups from infants to adolescents and include work with parents. A range of trauma-informed group-work interventions are also provided by Child and Adolescent Counsellors including the innovative Jungle Tracks program which uses storytelling to help children work through their trauma experience.

Child and Adolescent Counsellors also support SIS through:

- Supporting youth camps.
- Collaborating with other teams within STARTTS, especially the Youth Team and the SLP, to provide services such as training and upskilling to school staff and other relevant parties.
- Providing consultation and debriefing to teachers/counsellors/school executive staff when required.
- Providing case management to clients where indicated and participating in case management meetings when there is a need for coordinated care of clients.
- Liaising with schools to ensure that child protection concerns are identified and responded to accordingly.

Many of the Counsellors come from refugee backgrounds, are familiar with the cultures and experiences of STARTTS diverse client group and speak the same language as clients. If they don't speak the relevant language, they use the services of a professional interpreter.

Evaluation of the Program

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This evaluation aims to assess the impact of the SIS Strategy and STARTTS School Liaison Program over the period 2017 to 2019. The evaluation findings will be used by STARTTS to report on program progress to partners and funding bodies and to guide future program implementation.

As the School Liaison Program works in collaboration with other sections at STARTTS, the outcomes of this evaluation also reflect the work of the Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team during this period.

Key evaluation questions

1. What impact has the program had on children and young people of refugee background access to STARTTS services?
2. What impact has the program had on schools' capacity to support children and young people of refugee background?
3. What impact has the program had on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background?
4. What impact has the program had on the linkages and collaborations between STARTTS, schools, and other stakeholders (inter-agency coordination)?

Program expected outcomes as per the original proposal:

1. Improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background.
2. Improve school participation and engagement of children and young people of refugee background
3. Improve the capacity of the NSW education system to support children and young people of refugee background
4. Increase staff understanding of psychosocial wellbeing issues affecting children and young people of refugee background
5. Improve coordination and access to STARTTS specialist services and support for children and young people of refugee background.
6. Improve linkages within and across schools to support children and young people of refugee background.

Program Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as per the Contract with NSW Department of Education

This evaluation uses the following criteria and standards of performance to establish the success of the SIS strategy and the School Liaison Program:

KPI 1. Number of children and young people of refugee background referred to STARTTS per annum by schools

KPI 2. Percentage of children and young people of refugee background accepted for service (Target: 85%)

KPI 3. Number of trauma-informed group-work interventions per annum

KPI 4. Percentage of school staff stating that they are satisfied/highly satisfied with the training (Target: 80%)

KPI 5. Percentage of staff reporting that they feel more skilled and/or confident engaging with children and young people of refugee background (Target 75%)

KPI 6. Percentage of children and young people of refugee background students receiving STARTTS service who reported significant improvements in psychological wellbeing

KPI 7. Number of agencies/organisations represented in the steering committee

KPI 8. Number of clusters established or supported by STARTTS.

Table 1.5

Relational Matrix of Objectives, Evaluation Questions, Expected Outcomes and KPIs

Objectives as per Agreement with DoE	Evaluation Q	Outcomes	Key Performance Indicators
Provide seamless student access to STARTTS services where a specialist service is required	<p>What impact has the program had on children and young people of refugee background access to STARTTS services?</p> <p>What impact has the program had on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background in participating schools?</p>	<p>Improve coordination and access to STARTTS specialist services and support for children and young people of refugee background</p> <p>Improve school participation and engagement of children and young people of refugee background</p> <p>Improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background in NSW schools</p>	<p>KPI 1. Number of children and young people of refugee background referred to STARTTS p/a by schools.</p> <p>KPI 2. Percentage (%) of refugee students accepted for service (Target: 85%)</p> <p>KPI 3. Number of trauma-informed group-work interventions p/a</p> <p>KPI 6. Percentage (%) of students receiving STARTTS services reported significant improvements in psychological wellbeing.</p>
Enhance the capacity of schools to deliver coordinated services and support for children and young people of refugee background	<p>What impact has the program had on schools' capacity to support children and young people of refugee background?</p>	<p>Improve the capacity of the NSW education system to support children and young people of refugee background</p> <p>Increase staff understanding of psychosocial wellbeing issues affecting children and young people with refugee-like experience</p>	<p>KPI 4. Percentage (%) of school staff stating that they are satisfied/highly satisfied with the training (Target: 80%)</p> <p>KPI 5. Percentage (%) of staff reporting that they feel more skilled and/or confident engaging with children and young people of refugee background (Target 75%)</p>
Promote collaboration between STARTTS and schools to deliver coordinated services and support for children and young people of refugee background	<p>What impact has the program had on the linkages and collaborations between STARTTS, schools, and other stakeholders (inter-agency coordination)?</p>	<p>Improve linkages within and across schools to support children and young people of refugee background</p>	<p>KPI 7. Number of Cluster/Network established or supported by STARTTS.</p> <p>KPI 8. Number of agencies/organisations represented in the steering committee</p>

Methodology

This evaluation used quantitative and qualitative approaches to guide the data collection and analysis. Methodological design is based on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) established by the Department of Education and STARTTS. It also responds to the evaluation questions and expected outcomes of the program.

STARTTS in Schools and the School Liaison Program have diverse and specialised components which required adaptation of the evaluation methodology to capture the complexity of the program. Consequently, data was gathered from different sources to respond to the objectives of the program and to strengthen and increase the validity of the findings. The use of multi-methodologies and multi-informants also required the design and application of different instruments to meet the characteristics of evaluation participants and the complexity of the program.

A general description of data collection techniques used is included below and more details are provided before the findings in each chapter:

Questionnaires

Different self-report questionnaires were designed and adjusted to gather information from participants of SIS programs:

Pre and post questionnaires were used to measure participants' knowledge, confidence and level of satisfaction from training delivered to 1,118 school staff as well as to cluster members.

To evaluate training sessions of three or more hours in duration, pre and post questionnaires were used. To evaluate training sessions that are less than three hours in duration, post questionnaires (short form) were used. A consistent ID code was used to link between pre and post responses and ensure confidentiality. Questionnaires used 5-point scales and some included open-ended questions.

Psychological questionnaires (World Health Organization Five Wellbeing Index [WHO-5] and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ]) were used to measure the impacts of STARTTS' programs on the wellbeing of participants. A sample of 146 children and young people of refugee background participated in the evaluation. WHO-5 is being trialed and implemented with child and adolescent clinical and community development trauma-informed group-work interventions that are run in schools. To examine improvements in psychological wellbeing, a pre-post design was adopted and given to students in the first and last sessions. WHO-5 is a validated and reliable measure of subjective wellbeing and is also used as a screening tool for depression, further strengthening STARTTS internal referral pathways. The WHO-5 has been professionally translated/back-translated into more than thirty languages and in this instance; some students used the version translated into their community language.

The teacher-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to assess the students before and after the intervention. It is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 3-16-year-olds. It has been widely used in schools with children and young people of refugee background internationally, including to measure the impact of interventions (Birman & Chan, 2008; Ford, Hutchings, Bywater, Goodman, & Goodman, 2009). One of the benefits is that it is brief and uses clear English which was important for ensuring prompt responses from the participants. It consists of 25 Likert-scale items that include both positive and negative behaviours, such as, 'Often loses temper' or 'Kind to younger children', with answers chosen from 'Not true', 'Somewhat true', or 'Certainly true'. Answers to these 25 items are scored on 5 scales:

1. emotional symptoms (5 items)
2. conduct problems (5 items)
3. hyperactivity/inattention (5 items)
4. peer relationship problems (5 items)
5. pro-social behaviours (5 items)

The teacher version of the instrument was chosen for this evaluation because of logistical and administrative issues. While using teacher ratings of student behaviour was not ideal, the close relationships of the teachers and students added reliability to their ratings as they were able to observe them functioning in a range of different situations at school.

Interviews

Brief and in-depth semi structured individual interviews were designed and conducted with program participants and stakeholders.

Attribution of change interviews were conducted with 93 children and young people of refugee background state-wide which focused on the following key indicators that provide feedback to STARTTS on different aspects of students' overall health and wellbeing: happiness (psychological indicator), increased social connections (social indicator), sense of belonging (perception of self as integrated within an interpersonal system/relationship) and sleep (health indicator). Interviews were also conducted with 15 state-wide teachers focusing on their observations of changes in children and young people of refugee background including the following indicators of wellbeing which were school-based and therefore identifiable by teachers: academic performance, concentration, respect and attendance.

Three of the wellbeing indicators: increased sense of belonging, the development of new friendships and increased respect, are not only indicators of wellbeing, but also of social capital which is an important framework for both project design and evaluation within the refugee settlement context, and the cultivation of such is a stated objective of STARTTS' community development projects and initiatives.

Semi-structured interviews were designed and conducted with 13 cluster and 3 Steering Committee members. They were asked about their overall experience of their involvement, achievements, systemic changes, challenges and future goals and expectations. Interviews were also conducted with 4 STARTTS staff from the School Liaison Program and STARTTS' CEO. Questions to the School Liaison Team aimed to gather information regarding clusters' purpose, background, activities, participation and partnerships. The interview with the SLP Team Leader and CEO aimed to gather more information about SIS background and structure.

Focus groups

Focus groups are widely used in qualitative research. A semi-structured discussion was held with four members of the Steering Committee to gather information about their overall experience of participating in the committee, what members believed to be the most significant achievements of the committee, the most significant changes that have occurred as a result of the Steering Committee, if members were offered the opportunity to provide feedback to STARTTS to ensure programs remained responsive and strategic, and finally how members envisioned the future of the Steering Committee.

Survey

A simple survey was applied to regional and rural cluster participants. The survey used a 3-point scale: "Disagree", "Somewhat Agree" and "Agree". It asked members about the effectiveness of the cluster to represent and listen to the needs of their school and to support them to address the issues. It also asked if members have increased their network and knowledge about services as a result of their participation in the cluster.

Literature review

A brief literature review was conducted to explore the context and the theoretical/conceptual framework that informs the program. Consequently, this literature review explores the Bio-Psycho- Social and the complex interaction models, the Whole School Approach, and the Wellbeing and Social Capital frameworks that guide STARTTS' interventions in schools. The literature review also provides further support to the rationale of the program and this evaluation.

Document review

Relevant documentation produced within the program was reviewed, including reports completed between 2017 and 2019, the contract with DoE, and other related documentation.

Direct Inquiry

Information was requested from Department of Home Affairs and received by email. It contains general information about humanitarian settlement in NSW

Limitations of the evaluation

SIS involves a wide range of activities which required different methodologies to gather data for the evaluation.

Selecting appropriate yet practical and culturally appropriate quantitative measures for various activities is challenging. There is no one-size fits all approach and it was not possible to measure every aspect of every program and intervention. Ensuring consistent and compatible approaches and adjustment of instruments also increased the complexity of the data analysis.

Gathering sufficient data required time within program sessions which was often limited. Collecting data for the evaluation required the administration of tools during sessions in a way that didn't take much time within the sessions and didn't distract participants from the core program activities.

Some evaluation participants may not always complete forms mindfully and honestly (ticking through items quickly) so special care was taken when administering the evaluation instruments and that a careful explanation be given that there were no right or wrong answers. Even so, there is significant room for inaccuracy.

Accessing data from program partners was also limited due to privacy and confidentiality issues. It limited the scope of the evaluation, consequently results are based primarily on data collected by STARTTS.



“ I used to get into trouble before like with teachers and with friends, now (sic) I am good. I don’t get into trouble anymore. Teachers suggested that I get into Capoeira, and it really helped calm me down, it helped me grow as a person ”

- STARTTS Participant





Chapter 2:

Literature Review

Introduction

The following literature review aims to provide a foundation of knowledge and existing evidence that supports and contextualises the SIS strategy and the School Liaison Program.

This section briefly explores the biopsychosocial framework, the complex interaction model in the context of the refugee experience with a focus on children and young people of refugee background, as well as challenges in the school context not only for children and young people of refugee background but also for school teachers and schools. It also explores experiences of psychosocial interventions for school aged children and young people of refugee background in the settlement and school context and the Whole School Approach which guides SIS interventions. As wellbeing is one of the core goals of STARTTS' work, this section also explores the approach to wellbeing in the school context and its relation to the social capital framework that guides all STARTTS community development interventions.

The Biopsychosocial Systemic Approach

STARTTS uses a biopsychosocial model that recognises that clients from refugee backgrounds can experience trauma signs and symptoms on the biological, psychological and social levels.

STARTTS' 'biopsychosocial' framework demonstrates STARTTS' unique range of interventions designed to treat these problems; interventions that should be targeted strategically to be most effective.

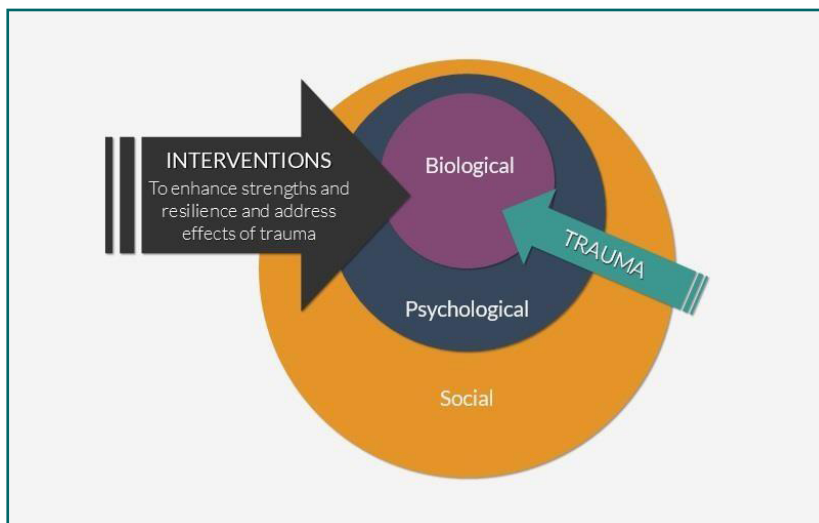


Figure 2.1:
STARTTS Service Provision Framework 2: The Biopsychosocial Approach
(Aroche & Coello, 2004)

This framework, like any, implies a gross simplification of reality. Any successful intervention at any level will result in changes, however subtle, in the brain, mind, body and the way a person behaves and interacts with the environment (as well as how the environment responds back). Therefore, any successful intervention at any level is likely to produce changes that cascade through every other level and affect the person's behaviour and interactions with the external world.

Interventions will, however, be more likely to be effective in facilitating these cascading changes if focused strategically, either at the particular level where the deficit is more evident, or where the opportunity to intervene is greater due to personal, interpersonal or environmental factors (Aroche & Coello, 2004).

There is value in looking at each of the levels and the implications for SIS.

Biological level – Clinical implications

This refers to the impact of traumatic experiences on the central nervous system and the rest of the body. Situations of extreme and chronic stress disrupt brain self-regulation and can mediate long-term changes in brain chemistry, functioning and structure. In cases when this impact is more pronounced, it can result in a highly dysregulated brain. This disruption can interfere with the efficacy of therapeutic approaches that rely on the effectiveness of particular neuronal networks and cortical functions (Aroche & Coello, 2012).

Different studies and reviews have also shown how traumatic experiences can impact children's brain development and functioning (Schore, 2001; Teicher, Anderson, Ohashi, & Polcari 2014; Imperatori et al., 2014; Hart & Rubia, 2012; Askovic & Gould, 2009) and alter their cognitive capabilities and performance. This is especially the case in children with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms.

A study with 17 people with PTSD, using an electroencephalogram (EEG), found that memory systems and emotional processing and regulation were altered. The frontal and parietal lobes had an increase of functional connectivity in comparison with control groups. Such activity is associated with psychopathologies such as depression, anxiety and PTSD symptoms (Imperatori et al., 2014).

Kaplan, Stolk, Valibhoy, Tucker and Baker (2015) also found that research available establishes that symptomatology presented by children and young people of refugee background is connected with the dysfunction of some areas of the brain related to different cognitive functions such as memory, regulation, concentration and language acquisition.

Interventions designed to help reverse the effects of trauma on the brain such as Biofeedback therapies (particularly Neurofeedback therapy), and various 'bottom up' interventions relying on rhythm, body movement and sensory activation can assist in regulating the brain to a level where it can more easily utilise information acquired through other types of interventions.

Trauma reactions can lodge in the body and manifest as headaches, body aches and pains, and muscle tension that don't have a medical diagnosis. Body-focused interventions such as relaxation training, physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture can be extremely helpful. In addition, clients from refugee backgrounds can suffer from a whole range of physical complaints related to all systems of the body as a result of injuries sustained from torture and other types of violence, and also due to a lack of access to proper mental and dental care. It is important that clients are assessed and treated for their medical issues as soon as possible after arrival in Australia, and receive ongoing care (Aroche & Coello, 2012).

Psychological level – Clinical implications

This refers to the impact of traumatic experiences on the way a person perceives themselves in relation to their internal and external world, and the constructs people utilise to make sense of the world. The impact of traumatic events can result in a variety of trauma related, PTSD-like symptoms, and affect psychological constructs about self and others. Interventions should aim to build the client's capacity to self-regulate and assist people to make sense of the world again, rebuild identity, and regain self-esteem and the capacity to trust (Aroche & Coello, 2012; Aroche & Coello, 1994; Aroche & Coello, 2004; Silove, 2013).

Social level – Clinical implications

This refers to the impact of traumatic experiences on how we communicate and relate to others, and to societal systems and structures. Traumatic events in the context of organised violence and the challenges of settlement can also affect the capacity to trust other people and society, resulting in social isolation and reduced opportunities, and restricted social support; in essence interacting with the world around them. Interventions to assist people feel more secure and connected, develop social support systems, increase work/school readiness, reduce isolation and promote positive social relations and positive place attachment are often the most appropriate and effective, and may sometimes suffice on their own to assist clients with their recovery (Aroche & Coello, 2012; Aroche & Coello, 1994; Aroche & Coello, 2004; Silove, 2013).

Children and the refugee experience: The complex interaction Model

In the context of the refugee experience, a complex interaction can be observed between problems associated with traumatic experiences in the country of origin, trauma related to resettlement, and difficulties of the normal life cycle (Aroche & Coello, 1994) that may impact children and young people of refugee background as they adjust to a new country and its systems.

Many children and young people of refugee background have been exposed to violence, have witnessed family and community fragmentation and have experienced deprivations and poor life conditions (Mehraby, 1999). During the transition period to a final country of resettlement, children can also be subjected to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2003) and may experience other types of traumatic events.

When resettling, refugees may experience a sense of relief, but this process may bring additional challenges. They must navigate their traumatic experiences and the demands of the new country, while also establishing a sense of normalcy (Aroche & Coello, 1994). Some common challenges that children and young people of refugee background may face are learning a new language, making new friends in a very different environment, discrimination and racism, adjusting to different cultural contexts, constant worrying about loved ones left behind, and the news of unrest back home (STARTTS, 2015).

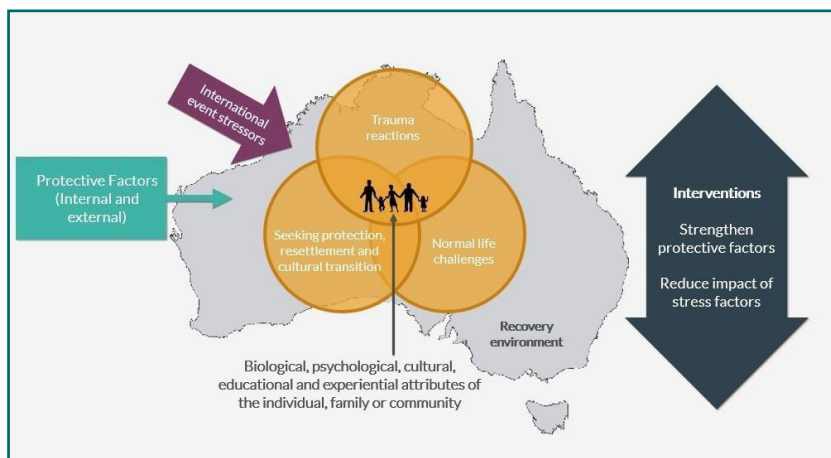


Figure 2.2: STARTTS Service Provision Framework, the Complex Interaction (Aroche & Coello, 2004)

Furthermore, children and young people of refugee background must adapt to a new school, manage the changes in roles and responsibilities within the family, and deal with the challenges associated with common developmental stages (Grant & Francis, 2011) such as puberty and defining their identity. During this time, “inter-generational conflicts [may] arise when children and adolescents, particularly adolescents, adapt much faster than their parents” (Earnest, 2005, p. 81). Vulnerability also increases for unaccompanied minors as they don’t have the protection and support of their family (Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, 2012).

As mentioned above, children and young people of refugee background endure different challenges before, during and after resettlement that may impact their adjustment to a new country. It is, however, also important to recognise that despite those adversities and traumatic experiences, many of them also show visible resilience during settlement processes (Mace, Mulheron, Jones, & Cherian, 2014).

Children and young people of refugee background in the school context: Challenges

When considering the school context, there are specific challenges faced by children and young people of refugee background which may impact their adjustment to school and the capacity of schools and teachers to provide appropriate support.

During the schooling experience, children and young people of refugee background may need to deal with significant new encounters. Many have experienced trauma (Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012; Roxas & Roy, 2012) which may contribute to low scholastic achievement (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010, as cited in Bal & Perzigian, 2013) and the ability to connect with others (Herman-Lewis, 1992). Some children and young people of refugee background suffer from PTSD and other psychological presentations such as anxiety and depression which may impact their adjustment to school.

Discrimination and bullying are additional challenges that children and young people of refugee background may face at school. In a study with twelve refugee students from three urban high schools in the United States of America, students reported bullying at schools including not only verbal but also physical assaults (Mthethwa – Sommers & Kisiara, 2015). This study also found that children and young people of refugee background were specifically targeted via bullying based on race, language, accent, type of clothes and religion.

In Australia, a literature review done by Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (2014), reveals that racism and discrimination impact significantly on the health and wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background. They also found that children and young people from Aboriginal and from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds such as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are more likely to experience a high level of racism and other forms of discrimination when compared to other young Australians (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2014). To illustrate, a study with 97 refugee youth from 11 to 19 years old in Melbourne, found that newly arrived children and young people of refugee background face racism during their first three years of settlement, impacting their wellbeing and health (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010, as cited in Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2014). Similarly, a study with 698 Aboriginal and CALD background students across Australia found that 70% experienced racism and young migrants reported over 80% compared with 54.6% of Australian born youth (Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010).

The most recent Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion Report (Markus, 2020) found that in July 2020, 18% of survey respondents experienced discrimination because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion. Analysis by age group finds that the reported experience of discrimination was highest among those aged 18-44. Analysis of July 2020 results by religious identification indicates that a relatively high proportion of those of Muslim (42%), Hindu (36%), and Buddhist (34%) faiths report experience of discrimination. Additionally, when respondents were asked about their attitude towards the Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Sikh faiths, the highest proportion indicated a negative view was towards Muslims, at 37%.

Scanlon Foundation survey results show that in July 2020, 38% of respondents indicated that the number of immigrants accepted into Australia in recent years was too high. Combined survey responses for July and November 2020 indicate that 17-18% of respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that it should be possible for individuals and families applying to migrate to Australia to be rejected on the basis of race or ethnicity, and 23-24% on the basis of religion (Markus, 2021).

Settlement and transition challenges for adolescents

The settlement process can pose a unique set of challenges to young people while also navigating adolescence (Orygen and CMY, 2020). On the family level, young people may have to navigate changing family roles/dynamics and the potential resultant inter-generational conflict. Young people may also be challenged by faster rates of acculturation within families and fears from family and community about loss of culture (MYAN, 2016).

Young people of refugee and asylum seeker background also need to adjust to a new education system while managing more complex transitions than their Australian-born peers. It is sometimes also necessary to manage parental expectations about academic performance which can be an additional cause of stress (MYAN, 2016). Further studies indicate that children and young people of refugee background may find the transition process to mainstream classrooms especially challenging (Naidoo, 2015; Pugh et al., 2012; Wiseman & O’Gorman, 2017; Watkins, Noble & Wong, 2019). Ferjolja & Vickers (2010, p. 149) state that “rarely do children and young people of refugee background entering Australian Schools possess the multiple forms of social, linguistic and cultural capital that are taken for granted in mainstream classrooms”.

According to the authors, the reasons for this may include the fact that many school aged children and young people of refugee background have experienced disrupted education, have not attended school before and might be illiterate in their own language (Ferjolja & Vickers, 2010). As a result of the mismatch between previous schooling experiences and the Australian mainstream education system, children and young people of refugee background might find the new school system strange and difficult which can lead to disengagement and frustration (Dumenden & English, 2013) and in many cases, this may increase their marginalisation (Bang, 2016).

In addition, young people from refugee and asylum seeker background may also face a unique set of challenges in building and maintaining peer social networks. Young people may need to manage individual, cultural, family and peer obligations which may be conflicting as many young people from refugee and asylum seeker background may have grown up in cultures that prioritise the needs of the community over individual aspirations (MYAN, 2016). Further, socio-economic disadvantage associated with forced displacement and resettlement may limit young people’s ability to participate in social activities which help to cultivate a sense of belonging but which also require resources that may not be available to them.

Limited resources may also limit access to IT equipment and internet connectivity which can result in limited digital inclusion and participation in community (MYAN, 2016).

Young people from refugee and asylum seeker background may also be at risk of increased exposure to risk factors for mental health problems that typically emerge during adolescence (MYAN, 2016). Factors that may shape a person’s mental health during resettlement can include discrimination, social isolation, trauma, the challenges of learning a new language and navigating new cultural and social norms. Uncertainty regarding applications for asylum and the impact of immigration detention also place young asylum seekers at risk of poorer mental health (Orygen & CMY, 2020).

Additionally, Australian psychiatrist Louise Newman’s research raises concerns over the impact of the asylum seeker experience and the further negative impact of immigration detention on children. Newman’s work highlights that children seeking asylum have experienced loss and disruption which add to the normal developmental challenges of attachment, relationship formation, emotion regulation, stress response and developing a basic sense of safety (Newman et al., 2019). Newman also highlights that Australia’s policies towards asylum seekers, which include mandatory detention for children, focus on deterring asylum seekers. These policies further negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of already vulnerable young people (Newman, 2019). Newman (2013) further cites that the negative impacts of mandatory immigration detention of children include documented attachment disorders, psychiatric disturbance, socially indiscriminate behaviour and developmental delays.

Challenges Faced by Schools and Teachers

A study by Watkins et al. (2019) for the NSW Teachers Federation in ten public schools in NSW, reveals that schools in NSW face challenges associated with the need for professional and specialist training, the increase of workload, lack of resources and funding, as well as the need for interagency coordination and liaison with community.

This study also found that despite the expertise of teachers and schools and the availability of some resources amongst schools, they are unequal i.e. some schools are less equipped than others. Likewise, the understanding of the complexity of the refugee experience is not the same among schools (Watkins et al., 2019).

It is clear that the needs of children and young people of refugee background are complex. Watkins et al. (2019, p.7) states that “[t]he needs of students of refugee backgrounds are not simply the pragmatic requirements of educational performance, but must address their complex linguistic, social, cultural, psychological and economic needs”. Consequently, there is a need for special support for children and young people of refugee background to navigate and stay in the educational system (Naidoo, 2015) and for schools and teachers to be able to support students through their specific learning needs and understanding of the refugee experience and trauma (Miles & Bailey- McKenna, 2016).

It is also paramount that children and young people of refugee background have access to specialist services that support them in dealing with the physical, psychological and social ramifications of past traumatic experiences and school engagement, such as when parents lack the capacity to support the educational process and emotional wellbeing of their children due to their own settlement challenges and trauma (Wiseman & O’Gorman, 2017).

The complexity of the needs of children and young people of refugee background require a holistic and comprehensive framework. According to the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST), the Whole School Approach is an important framework that responds effectively and appropriately to the complex needs of children and young people of refugee background in the school context (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2016). The VFST argues that schools are a safe environment for recovery where all members of the school community share responsibilities in the wellbeing and engagement of students. The Whole School Approach integrates policies, practices and curriculum in a congruent manner with strong partnership and collaboration between the whole school community to support the complex needs of children and young people of refugee background.

Psychosocial programming/interventions for children and young people of refugee background

A Psychosocial Approach “moves away from focusing on individual clinically based diagnoses to focusing on holistic, broad-based preventative programs that promote resilience and develop coping strategies across the entire affected group” (Mattingly, 2017, p. 3).

While there are different interventions, the goals of psychosocial support must revolve mainly on reducing suffering and improving people’s overall wellbeing (FCA, 2018). UNICEF (2011) suggests that psychosocial programming must be focused on three core aspects: skills and knowledge, emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing. From this rubric, the following major themes of psychosocial interventions gathered from experiences of schools in various conflict-affected countries across the globe are explored:

a. Child-friendly spaces

The provision of a safe, child-friendly space is often the first psychosocial support intervention given to children who have been exposed to trauma (Boothby & Melvin, 2007). In Afghanistan, the Christian Children’s Fund (CCF) implemented child protection and psychosocial support through the provision of child-centred spaces (CCS). The CCS program covered 21,000 children and young people of refugee background in a span of six months. Psychosocial support was provided through daily structured formal and non-formal educational activities. Upon evaluation, CCS’ impacts were found to be significant in reintroducing and re-socialising children to the norms and values of a peaceful Afghan society (Snider & Triplehorn, 2002).

b. Education-based interventions

In Greece, the Code and Create Project piloted by the Finn Church Aid from 2016 to 2017 combined psychosocial support with the provision of life skills to unaccompanied children and young people of refugee background. A total of 40 learners aged 6 to 17 were immersed in projects aimed at honing digital literacy while also building friendships with fellow refugees. The Project is reported to have successfully increased confidence among the participants (FCA, 2018).

c. Sports and recreational activities

Psychosocial interventions can be integrated in sports and other recreational activities. For example, the Qattan Centre for the Child in Gaza includes literature, music, drama, and cinema into its pedagogical approach. In this way, students can learn more about different cultures and take pride in their own cultural identity (World Bank, 2013). Another example is the use of art therapy among traumatised children in the former Yugoslavia, which was found to be crucial for their healing and recovery, as well as an improved sense of self (Barath, 2000).

d. Family and community involvement

In Palestine, the “Our Communities, Our Schools” project supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council implements psychosocial support with the help of the community. To illustrate, Parent Skills Clubs were established to improve parental engagement in children’s education in collaboration with local civil society actors. Another example is Nepal’s Schools as Zones of Peace (SZoP) program where community collaboration with local political groups ensured the safety of schools. Upon evaluation, the SZoP is revealed to have contributed to reduced incidence of corporal punishment and ethnic discrimination in participating schools (Burde, Guven, Kelcey, Lahmann, & Al-Abbadi, 2015).

In summary, the common denominator amongst all these examples is their advocacy for a coordinated, holistic and systemic approach in mainstreaming trauma-informed and trauma-centered care for children and young people of refugee background. This will be discussed further in the next chapter through the Whole of School Approach.

Psychosocial programs for children and young people of refugee background in the school context

Schools have increasingly evolved from being traditional places of learning to avenues for promoting good emotional and mental health among children and young adults.

This is particularly magnified in the case of children and young people of refugee background, as schools are regarded as a 'stabilising feature' and as a 'safe space' where they can build new connections and gain new learning opportunities (Matthews, 2008). That schools are crucial in ensuring the psychosocial wellbeing among children and young people of refugee background is widely recognised. To illustrate, the World Health Organization (2003) posits that a healthy and positive psychosocial environment in schools can reduce the incidence of bullying and harassment, diminish stereotyping and prejudice, improve student learning outcomes, and foster a climate of connectedness and individual sense of attachment.

While schools play an important role in providing psychosocial support for children and young people of refugee background, evidence suggests that there is a reported lack of school preparedness in resettlement countries when it comes to dealing with traumatised children and young people of refugee background. This poses a significant challenge as resettlement in a third country may offer a new chance at life for people from refugee backgrounds although, as mentioned previously, this is not without difficulty. The following paragraphs will discuss best practices and lessons learned in terms of the implementation of psychosocial programs in resettlement countries.

In her research on 40 children and young people of refugee background in Norway, Pastoor (2015) emphasises that teachers are crucial mediators in helping refugee students cope with their psychosocial transition in settlement, however teachers who were interviewed "neither have sufficient knowledge nor competence" in this area and schools have "no effective structures in the school system for facilitating identification, monitoring and referring students" (Pastoor, 2015, p. 252). To address this gap, it is recommended that teachers need to undergo training on the psychosocial effects war has on children and young people of refugee background wellbeing and development.

Gleaning from the experience of Syrian children and young people of refugee background resettled in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, RAND Corporation research suggests that there is a need to develop programs at the national scale to respond to psychosocial needs of children and young people of refugee background. Furthermore, they advise that psychosocial support could take the form of "shorter lessons, more physical activity, flexible schedules, additional strategies to address bullying and treating classes as a multi-grade environment" (Culbertson & Constant, 2015, p.64).

In a seminal study of 76 Somali adolescents resettled in Massachusetts and Maine in the United States, it was found that those who feel a greater sense of school belonging had lower levels of depression (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Consequently, the authors recommend that school-based mental health programs for children and young people of refugee background be introduced to aid children and young people of refugee background in settlement. These findings on school belongingness and its contribution to psychosocial transition in settlement are echoed in two studies conducted in Australia.

For one, a research on 93 children and young people of refugee background resettled in Brisbane, Australia shows that lower levels of psychological distress are highly associated with higher levels of school connectedness, acculturation, and visa certainty (Tozer, Khawaja & Schweitzer, 2018).

For another, in a study of 97 resettled children and young people of refugee background in Melbourne, Australia, it was revealed that young people exhibiting high levels of wellbeing in their first three years of settlement possess a high degree of social inclusion. These include maintaining relationships with their parents at home, with their friends in school, and with their broader community (Correa-Velez, et al., 2010). From these results, it is recommended that there should be a broader psychosocial reform aimed at reducing social exclusion and combating racism, discrimination and bullying.

Whole of School Approach and programs

A Whole of School Approach involves all members of the school community – school staff, students, parents and carers, agencies that engage with the school, and other community members.

It addresses five areas of action:

- **policies and practices**
- **school organisation, ethos and environment**
- **curriculum, teaching and learning**
- **partnerships with parents and carers**
- **partnerships with agencies**

(The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2016).

These multiple areas of action mean that the Whole of School Approach can be applied in various aspects of schooling such as “physical health and fitness, social skills and friendship, empathy and resilience, peer support and mentoring, student leadership, citizenship and community engagement contribute to the growth of individual and collective wellbeing” (NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2015, p.8).

The Whole of School Approach encompasses numerous benefits on both individual and institutional (school) levels. On an individual level, a Whole of School Approach focuses on positive mental health, teaches social and emotional competence, as well as promotes inclusivity among children in schools (“INEE Background Paper on Psychosocial Support and Social & Emotional Learning for Children & Youth”, 2016). On an institutional level, a Whole of School Approach is found to be crucial in building connectedness and cultivating a health-promoting culture in schools (Rowe, Stewart & Patterson, 2007). Extensive literature points to the importance of a Whole of School Approach, especially in schools with a large population of students from refugee or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. For one, the UNHCR (2012) affirms the centrality of a Whole of School Approach in peace education and conflict resolution. For another, a whole-school approach in refugee education is important in order to address post-displacement conditions and issues of racialisation, acculturation and resilience (Matthews, 2008).

There are two programs in the United Kingdom and Canada that attest to these points. In the UK, a partnership between Citizens UK (a national community organizing charity) and NASUWT (a teachers’ union) promote ‘Refugee Welcome Schools’ where schools educate all their students and staff about refugee protection over the course of a year (Cerna, 2019). In Canada, the New Brunswick Association for Community Living implements ‘Creating an Inclusive School: Indicators of Success’. The program focuses on achieving nine outcomes: diversity and inclusion are embraced, creating a sense of belonging, student learning experiences are inclusive, supports are available and properly utilised, fostering appropriate behaviour, inclusion and students with exceptionalities, proactive school management and leadership, and an innovative creative environment (Cerna, 2019).

The following examples show examples of how the Whole of School Approach is implemented across Australia.

In New South Wales (NSW), the Department of Education has identified two effective models of whole-school approaches: Positive Behaviour for Learning as well as Restorative Practices.

Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL) is a school-wide systemic approach to promoting both positive behaviors and student learning. Yeung et al. (2013) conducted a study on 2,129 students from 18 public schools implementing PBL in the Western Sydney Region and found that PBL schools were perceived to have higher behavioral management input and their students had higher effort goal orientation and value of schooling.

In their study of United Primary School in South Australia, where 80% of the student population is from a non-English-speaking background, Pugh et al. (2012) found that a whole of school technique is instrumental in approaching refugee schooling holistically by embedding the school in the local community through community-led cultural awareness and community outreach as well as making localized changes to set curriculums which address the needs of a diverse student body.

The Whole of School Approach also emphasises the importance of professional learning. To illustrate, Woodville High School in Adelaide provides workshops in Middle Eastern or Muslim, Vietnamese, Aboriginal and African cultures for their teachers. Moreover, the school's counsellors regularly coordinate with community liaison officers (CLOs) who help bridge the gap between families, community organisations, parent groups, and school leaders and teachers (NSW Government- Education, 2020).

The School Support Program in Victoria, led by VFST, is another relevant case of successful implementation of the whole school approach in schools (Block, Cross, Riggs & Gibbs, 2014). The program supported schools in four metropolitan areas and one rural area. The program helped schools to review and adjust practices and action plans to implement appropriate whole school approaches. The program also supported the professional development of school staff and strengthened the collaboration between schools and agencies.

Overall, the above case studies show that adopting a Whole of School Approach in the Australian context demands not only a reform on educational policies, but more importantly a broader "commitment to social justice" (Miller, Ziaian & Esterman, 2018).

Approach to wellbeing in the school context

Wellbeing or wellness refers to an individual or group's condition.

A high level of wellbeing means that in some sense the individual's or group's condition is positive and functional on a daily basis. It can include diverse interconnected dimensions of physical, mental, and social wellbeing that extend beyond the traditional definition of physical or general health. It could also comprise of choices and activities aimed at achieving physical vitality, mental stability, social satisfaction and daily functionality (Naci & Ioannidis, 2015).

There are numerous theories of what constitutes child/adolescent health and wellbeing. Sometimes, it is easier to consider what wellbeing is not; risky adolescent behaviour, unhealthy lifestyle, drug addiction, disrupted parent–child relationships and so forth. The exposure to high levels of cumulative trauma such as war, traumatic loss, deprivation and gross human rights violations results in children and young people with refugee-like experience being at a significant risk of developing psychological complexities and challenging behaviours (Aroche & Coello, 2012; Fazel & Stein, 2002). During this vulnerable period, if there are no support systems in place, children and young people can be further destabilised, resulting in long-lasting complications including low confidence, antisocial behaviour, depression and truancy. Given the past of extensive trauma, this period could be improved by shifting negative perspectives and offering alternatives to cultivate personal resources such as resilience for growth and recovery. For example, STARTTS provides various clinical and community programs that focus on needs and strengths of children and young people of refugee background, their families and communities.

Indicators of general wellbeing

Although indicators are often collected within specific institutions such as education only or health only, it is widely recognised that wellbeing incorporates numerous domains. STARTTS in Schools strategy focuses on a few principal indicators which research has shown to be vital for overall physical and psychological prosperity (Naci & Ioannidis, 2015):

- **Sense of Belonging**
Sense of belonging is a vital indicator of wellbeing for children as they learn about and explore the world around them. In the first years of life, children develop increasing mastery over their bodies and daily routines, supporting health and wellbeing over their lifespan and providing them with a sense of place – a feeling of being grounded in their immediate environment, their communities, their culture, and the wider world. A feeling of belonging has been found to provide children and young people with a sense of security, self-respect and self-regulation, consequently providing them with the confidence to explore their creative capacities as family members, friends, thinkers, and citizens. This is especially true for children and young people of refugee background who have lost their communities, friends, homes and all that they knew as familiar (Fazel & Stein, 2002).
- **Sleep**
Health Foundation Australia's largest survey of children's wellbeing indicators has found that kids are happiest when they get a reasonable night's sleep and that sleep is a key indicator of a child's wellbeing. The Foundation recommends 11 hours sleep a night for children aged 6-13 years-old and 8-10 hours for those aged 14-17 (Trounson, 2017). Children who regularly have therecommended hours of sleep reported significantly higher levels of both happiness and feelings of stability.

- ***Friends/Making New Friends***

The journal *Child Development* has emphasised on numerous occasions the importance of having friends, the ability to make new friends and the desire to maintain friendships for socialisation purposes. Research has found that those who have strong attachments to their friends when they were in their teens tended to feel better about themselves as adults (Holecko, 2018). They also showed less depression and social anxiety and felt more supported within their peers. Friendships become more important as an aid to social and emotional growth as children reach adolescence, emphasising the need to be in safe environments which foster friendships and camaraderie (Waldrup, Malcome & Jenson-Campbell, 2008).

- ***Happiness***

Child and youth health journals emphasise on numerous occasions the importance of happiness for children as a psychological wellbeing indicator, describing it as 'simply the state of being happy'. It reiterates that happiness in children, as in adults, can be interpreted differently but in general it is about feeling content within family and friends (Women's and Children's Health Network | SA Health, 2018). Research recognises the relevance of happiness and wellbeing as universal goals and aspirations and the importance of their recognition in public policy objectives which will translate into children's services and programs. More than possessing objects, children need to feel supported, loved, held and safe, which are vital when developing clinical/community programs. In order to fulfil the happiness factor as a wellbeing indicator, we need to measure it by asking children about their understanding, interpretation and perception of feeling happy and satisfied with services being provided to them (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2015).

Indicators of wellbeing at school

The time spent by young people at school is significant and the way they interact and respond to the school environment including relationships and academic performance are highly related with their level of wellbeing (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2015). Consequently, school-based indicators are important factors to explore in order to identify impact and changes as a result of psychosocial interventions.

- ***Academic Performance and Concentration***

Academic performance is one of the most important components of students' wellbeing as it is a predictor of future success. While the most reliable predictor has historically been attributed to intelligence, it is important to mention that there are various internal and external factors influencing academic performance, such as lifestyle, stress levels, family structure, trauma background and other factors influencing the students' lives (Irma, 2014).

Poor attention, poor concentration, reduced motivation and reduced school engagement are all probable factors through which psychological problems may affect students' academic performance. This can result in emotional problems, low-self-confidence and ultimately reduced wellbeing. Academic performance, therefore, has been highlighted as a key wellbeing indicator within existing literature; an increase in academic performance indicates the indirect effects of higher levels of participation and higher levels of engagement. In addition to this, academic performance is positively associated with self-efficacy which increases a student's perseverance, persistence and positive judgments about their own capabilities (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2012). This indicator has also been linked to other key wellbeing indicators such as attendance; as improvements in school attendance are very strongly linked to improvements in academic outcomes (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

It is true that individual difference in academic performance is a combination of intelligence and personality traits, although students with higher cognitive ability and lower stress levels are more likely to perform better. Von Stumm, Hell and Chamorro-Premuzic (2011) advocate the importance of the ability to have intellectual curiosity and the necessity for children to be mentally stimulated and nurtured in order for their academic performance to be further enhanced.

Another important factor to consider is that academic performance of children and young people of refugee background and their ability to concentrate in class may be related to the adaptation style they developed. A student's ability to concentrate in the classroom is a reflection of their behavioural engagement and refers to active involvement in the classroom or schooling environment. For young people who have experienced trauma, a number of factors can help them become happier, concentrate on their academic performance and consequently have a higher score on wellbeing measures. These include having more social and peer support, levels of educational support, positive peer relations (McCormick, Kuo & Masten, 2011), as well as the societal level of influence, such as tolerance for diversity (Motti-Stefanidi, 2015). These factors act as protective factors which can increase resilience and overall psychological wellbeing for traumatized adolescents.

- **Attendance**

The long-standing issues of truancy from school and more recent concerns about the extent of psychological wellbeing have been evaluated and researched. Research has shown that regular school attendance is fundamental to student success and wellbeing and has therefore been cited amongst current literature as a key wellbeing indicator. Students who are often absent from school, and by default miss out on valuable learning time, are at the greatest risk of becoming disconnected with peers and teachers and subsequently dropping out of school early (Goddard, 2015). This then puts these students at further long-term risk of experiencing complications in the future. Various aspects of truancy have been found, such as dislike of aspects of school, having no peers, support, unfamiliarity and feelings of loneliness. Data on psychological wellbeing has shown the extent of feelings of distress and inability to cope with everyday life affect one in five of the young people, including those with trauma backgrounds, stress, post-trauma symptoms and depression. Young women were more likely to report problems of psychological wellbeing than young men and truancy was strongly associated with poorer levels of wellbeing (Owen, 2019). The fact that most young people who truant said that it was important to them to do well at school, even though their dislike of school was given as a reason for truancy, suggests the possibility of school interventions (Attwood & Croll, 2014).

- **Respect**

Research studies illustrate that the prosocial value of respect is a key wellbeing indicator. Developing students' respectful conduct discourages anti-social behaviour and encourages harmony, care and concern for positive interactions with teachers and peers (Eckersley, 2009). In addition to this, if a student is able to develop respectful behaviours, they are more likely to share resources, more likely to cooperate and more likely to respectfully disagree, all of which are conducive to a supportive and caring school environment. Respectful relationships with teachers who likewise show respect to their students will also encourage school attendance and when students have these experiences at school they are more likely to have higher levels of wellbeing (Goddard, Goddard & Kim, 2015).

Social Capital and Wellbeing

Social capital refers to social relationships, connections, networks and resources that exist within a community, as well as the 'norms' or formal and informal rules found in these relationships, such as trust and cooperation (Rostila, 2010).

Social capital assists cooperation within and between communities. It is sometimes understood as a collective resource which can increase a community's capacity to address problems together and enhance community wellbeing (Putnam, 2000).

There are three main types of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to social connections to people within one's own social group or community. Bridging social capital refers to horizontal connections to people in the wider community, for example through professional networks or from other ethnic communities. Linking social capital refers to vertical connections to people in positions of authority or working in government or relevant social institutions (Pittaway, Bartolomei & Doney, 2013).

High levels of social capital can help individuals and communities to navigate the negative impacts of trauma and resettlement. Systemic state terrorism and organised violence, to which people of refugee background may have been subjected, act intentionally to destroy bonds, connections and relationships between individuals and within families and communities. This is achieved through the deliberate cultivation of distrust and fear between individuals which results in the fragmentation of communities (Martín - Baró, 1989). This mistrust can long survive the circumstances under which it was cultivated, making the process of building new connections and networks in the host country intimidating and challenging (Aroche & Coello, 1994).

Further, social capital is potentially negatively impacted by the interaction between three key stressors that characterise the refugee experience:

- Trauma-related stressors that include the sequela of experiences that can interrupt a person's ability to access their internal

resources and negotiate the complex demands of resettlement including forming new social connections.

- Settlement-related stressors including the demands associated with navigating an entirely new cultural context and physical environment.
- The stressors of the normal life cycle to which children and young people of refugee background are not exempt and are more vulnerable to due to the negative impacts of trauma and relocation.

These stressors do not operate in isolation. Rather, the refugee experience is largely characterised by a complex interaction of the negative impacts of trauma, settlement and stressors of the normal life cycle (Aroche & Coello, 1994). This interaction of stressors can negatively impact one's ability to form new social connections and to build social capital in the host country. As such, initiatives that cultivate social capital are particularly valuable in the context of refugee settlement.

Social Capital is strongly linked to subjective wellbeing. In a study that explored the associations between subjective wellbeing and social capital in 142 countries spanning low-, middle- and high-income countries, evidence was found of significant associations between measures of social support, social capital and better subjective wellbeing (Calvo et al., 2012). It has also been well documented that ties to friends and neighbours, workplace ties, civic engagement (individual and collective), family, trust and trustworthiness have all been found to relate to happiness and overall life satisfaction (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Reliable social connections characterised by trust and trustworthiness have been strongly linked to happiness on the family, community and national levels (Helliwell, Akin, Shiplett, Huang, & Wang, 2018). A study published by the Australian Association for Research in Education not only confirmed a positive correlation between children's social capital and self-reported wellbeing, but also between high levels of social capital and positive academic outcomes (Tennent, Farrell, & Tayler, 2006). This study found that strong social networks, feelings of trust and safety and community participation afford children access to supports, information, resources and role models that can contribute to school success (Tennent et al., 2006).

As mentioned earlier, Social Capital is an important framework for both project design and evaluation within the resettlement context. With this recognition, *The Glue that Binds: The Social Capital Evaluation Tool* was developed in partnership between STARTTS and UNSW (Pittaway et al., 2013). The tool was developed out of a participatory research process with input from over 100 people from refugee backgrounds and aimed to provide a refugee perspective on which aspects of social capital are important during settlement. The tool contributed to theoretical understandings of social capital and developed a number of practical project design and evaluation tools. Included in the tool is a list of possible social capital objectives for community development projects with refugee communities, as well as indicators relevant for evaluating social capital objectives. For example, social capital objectives and indicators included are increased sense of belonging, increased number of friends or contacts within one's own community (bonding social capital), increased number of friends or contacts outside one's own community or locality (bridging social capital) and increased respect for and acceptance of diverse cultures. As such, an increased sense of belonging, increased number of friends and increased respect are indicators of both improved wellbeing and increased social capital.



Chapter 3: Findings: Referrals to STARTTS, acceptance rate and type of Interventions with School-aged children and young people of refugee background

Introduction

This section documents referrals of school aged children and young people of refugee background to STARTTS services from 2017 to 2019 calendar years, rate of acceptance of those referrals and information regarding individual counselling and trauma-informed group-work interventions with children and young people of refugee background aged 6 to 18. The data required for this section was extracted from STARTTS' Clinical Audit Research Electronic Health Record, CAreHR.

School aged children and young people of refugee background referred to STARTTS and accepted for services between 2017 and 2019.

The number of referrals of school aged children and young people of refugee background to STARTTS' specialist services increased considerably after 2017 when SIS commenced (See Figure 3.1).

In 2017, STARTTS referrals increased by 78% compared with the number of referrals in 2016.

Between 2017 and 2019, STARTTS received a total of 4816 referrals, 56% males and 44% females. Of those, 4,743 were accepted in STARTTS' services.

This is equivalent to 98% of the total of referrals received during this period.



Figure 3.1: Referrals and percentage of acceptance to STARTTS services by year. CAREHR – STARTTS

STARTTS receives referrals from different sources. Between 2017 and 2019, education and health service providers referred 51% of the total of referrals in this period.

Self-referrals and those referred by a friend or family member amounted to 18% and STARTTS' internal referrals were 16% of the total of referrals (See Table 3.1).

The number of entrants reduced in 2019 so the slightly lower number of referrals is not necessarily a reflection of diminishing interest in or success of the program but rather a smaller pool from which referrals were made.

Referral Source		
Accommodation services	3	0.06%
Asylum Seeker Support Services	35	0.73%
Client, family or friend	841	17.46%
Community Welfare organisations	3	0.06%
Department of Home Affairs	2	0.04%
Disability support service	30	0.62%
Education sector	2026	42.07%
Family Violence services	1	0.02%
Health Services	422	8.76%
Internal	770	15.99%
Legal Services	5	0.10%
Settlement Support	13	0.27%
Other services	665	13.81%
Grant Total	4816	100%

Source: CAREHR – STARTTS

Table 3.1: Referral Sources of School Aged children and young people of refugee background to STARTTS Services Between 2017 and 2019

Referrals from schools and level of acceptance

The number of referrals from schools in NSW to STARTTS services increased significantly.

In 2017, STARTTS referrals from primary and secondary schools increased by 116% compared with 2016 and in subsequent years, referrals and acceptance rates increased each year (see Figure 3.2). Between 2017 and 2019, STARTTS has received a total of 2,024 referrals from primary and high schools. Of those referrals, 1,997 (99%) were accepted.

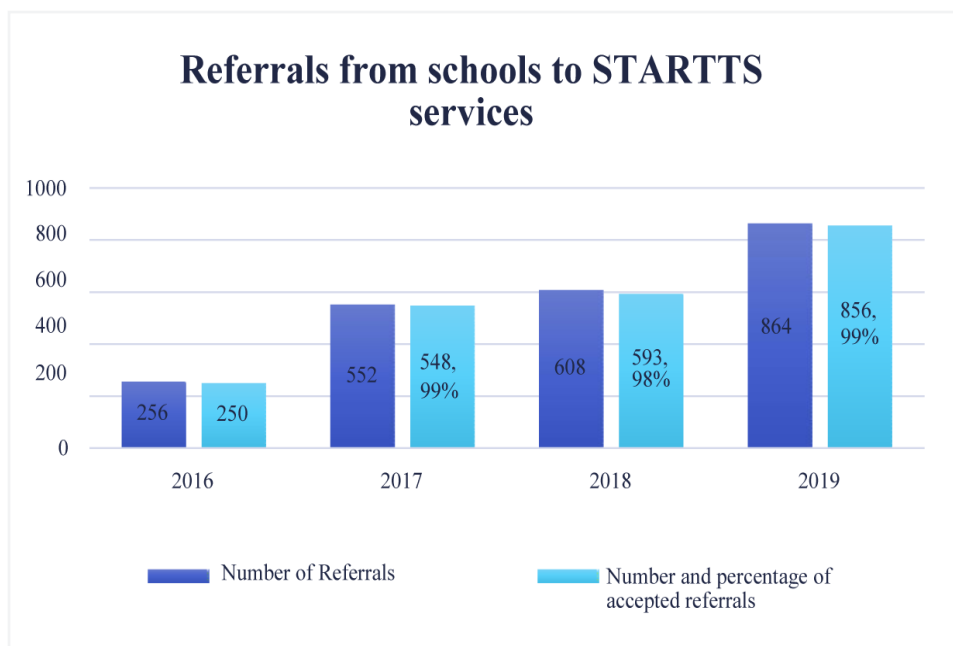


Figure 3.2: Referrals from schools to STARTTS services and percentage of acceptance by year. CAREHR –STARTTS

STARTTS individual counselling for school aged children and young people of refugee background

Individual counselling delivered to school aged children and young people of refugee background increased significantly after 2016 (see Table 3.2).

In total, 1,466 children and young people of refugee background received counselling between 2017 and 2019 (see Figure 3.3). In 2017 the number of clients seen by counsellors increased by 44% compared with the previous year. Although number of clients and sessions reduced in 2019, the figures still indicate an increase of 32% compared with 2016 (see Figure 3.3).

Year	Number of clients	Number of sessions	Duration/Hrs
2016	340	2208	2165
2017	489	4637	4542
2018	529	5425	5306
2019	448	4730	4623
Grand Total	1806	17000	16635

Source: CArEHR – STARTTS

Table 3.2: Individual Counselling of School Aged children and young people of refugee background between 2016 and 2019

Counselling sessions

In total, school aged children and young people of refugee background benefited from 14,792 counselling sessions between 2017 and 2019. In 2017 the number of sessions delivered by counsellors increased by 110% compared with the previous year (See Figure 3.4).

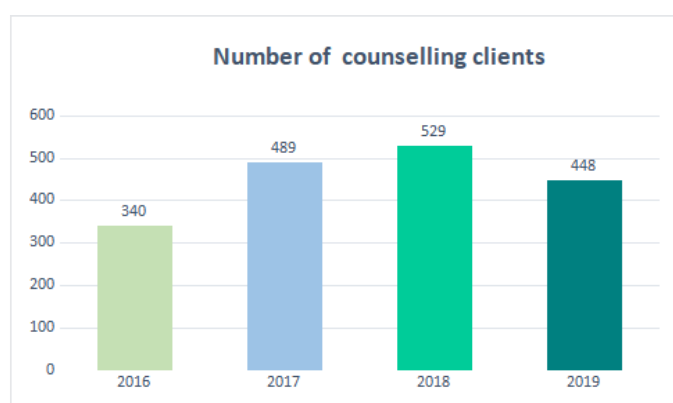


Figure 3.3: Number of individual counselling clients of school aged children and young people of refugee background between 2016 – 2019 CY CArEHR– STARTTS

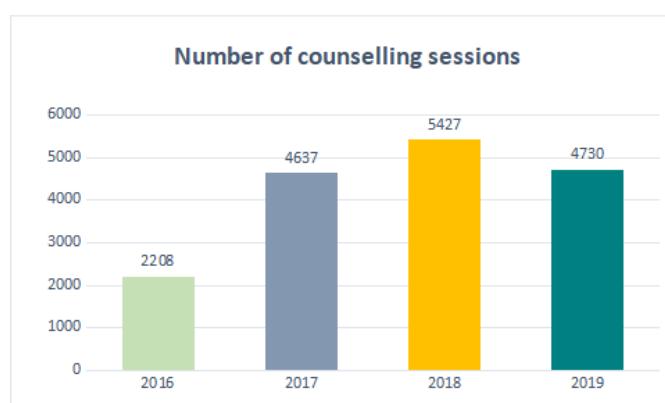


Figure 3.4: Number of individual counselling sessions of school aged children and young people of refugee background between 2016 – 2019 CY CArEHR – STARTTS

STARTTS Trauma-informed Group-Work interventions in schools

Trauma-informed group-work interventions increased significantly between 2017 and 2019.

In total, STARTTS has delivered 2958 trauma-informed group-work sessions to 275 different groups of school- aged children and young people of refugee background (see Table 3.3).

Year	Number of groups	Number of group sessions	Duration/Hrs
2016	30	180	270.87
2017	91	776	1,849.32
2018	96	912	2,113.49
2019	88	1,270	2,967.76
Grand Total	305	3,138	7,201.44

Source: CArEHR – STARTTS

Table 3.3: Trauma-informed Group-Work Sessions

STARTTS TEAM	NUMBER OF GROUPS DELIVERED ¹
Youth Team	126
School Liason Team	34
Direct Services/Child and Adolescent Counsellors	71
Community Development Team	13
Rural and Regional	48
Clinical Team	9

Table 3.4: Number of groups delivered by STARTTS teams

¹ Please note, some groups were delivered by staff from more than one team to encourage collaboration and expertise exchange.

Group sessions and duration

Although the number of trauma-informed group-work interventions increased each year and then reduced marginally in 2019, the number of group sessions has increased considerably each year (see **Figure 3.5**).

To illustrate, during 2019 a total of 1270 sessions were delivered, 358 more than the previous year. Given that the STARTTS in Schools strategy aims to support the particular needs of each school and its students, student numbers per group, sessions and duration may differ among groups.

The number of hours dedicated to trauma-informed group-work intervention also increased between 2017 and 2019 (see **Figure 3.6**).

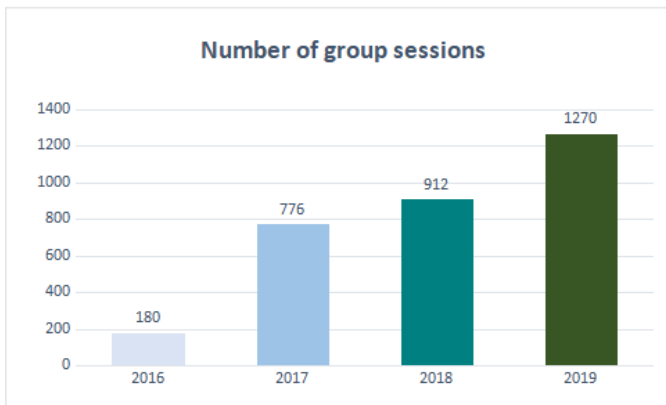


Figure 3.5: Group sessions held with school aged children and young people of refugee background between 2016 - 2019 CAReHR – STARTTS

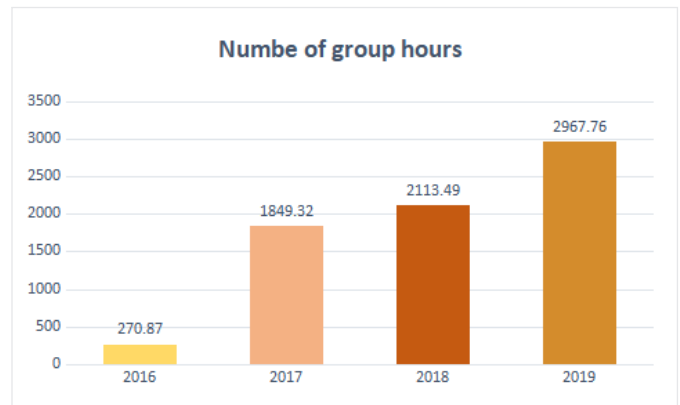


Figure 3.6: Number of group hours held with school aged children and young people of refugee background between 2016 – 2019 CAReHR – STARTTS

Conclusion

The evaluation results indicate that referrals to STARTTS' services and level of acceptance increased significantly after 2017.

Analysis of data extracted from CAREHR shows that 98% of children and young people of refugee background referred to STARTTS were able to access specialist support and help. Findings also reveal that schools have increased their referral numbers every year after 2016. This may indicate that schools are more aware of referral pathways and services available to their students.

The implementation of STARTTS in Schools and the interface provided by the School Liaison Program has increased access to tailored services for children and young people of refugee background. Analysis of individual counselling and trauma-informed group-work interventions shows that STARTTS has applied varied approaches to its interventions which may indicate the use of a client-centred approach when designing and implementing programs for school aged children and young people of refugee background. Although the number of trauma-informed group-work interventions increased every year and reduced marginally in 2019, the increase in the number of group sessions and hours of dedication to trauma-informed group work interventions is notable. This can be attributed to STARTTS' strategy of creating and adjusting programs to clients' needs and strengths which involves flexibility in sessions and hours of each intervention.



Chapter 4: Findings - Training delivered to school staff

Overview

The School Liaison Program (SLP) lead professional learning and support for school staff within STARTTS in Schools.

In total, 191 training sessions were delivered to 6,054 school staff between 2017 and 2019. Some of these were delivered with the support of other teams within STARTTS.

This chapter summarizes evaluation results from 48 training sessions provided to 1,118 school staff across NSW schools between 2017 and 2019. These training sessions encompassed a broad range of topics, with some sessions designed to cater to the specific needs of school communities or groups of school staff (see **Table 4.1**). The sessions also varied in duration based on the needs of each school, ranging from one hour through to whole-day training events.

Broadly speaking, the training provided to school staff had three objectives:

1. To develop an understanding of the impact of the refugee experience on children and families
2. To identify school-based strategies for supporting children and young people of refugee background; and
3. To increase awareness of the support offered by STARTTS to children and young people of refugee background and their families.

A *pre and post questionnaire* was used to evaluate training sessions of approximately three or more hours in duration. It included items about participants' knowledge which were preceded by the statement "How much do you know about" and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (I know nothing) to 5 (I know a lot). Confidence items were preceded by the statement "How confident do you feel about", and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident). Composite scores were used to compare ratings before and after the training, created by summing participants' responses to each of the domains examined.

Items about participants' satisfaction with training were preceded by the question "*How much do you agree with these statements about the training?*" and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). A section of the questionnaire contains close and open-ended questions about participant demographics and general training feedback.

A post questionnaire (short form) was also used when training sessions were less than three hours in duration. The training evaluation forms were completed by asking trainees "*To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements*" to report on their knowledge, confidence and level of satisfaction in relation to the training. Answers were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). In addition, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the training duration on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Far too short) to 5 (Far too long). Close and open-ended questions about participant demographics and general training feedback were also included in the form.

Type of training	
Capoeira: Bottom Up therapeutic Interventions	0.4%
Classroom and teaching strategies	6.6%
Connecting Families with Community and Disability Services Day	0.4%
Core concepts in working with people from refugee backgrounds	23.7%
Cultural safety	4.8%
Enhancing handwriting and fine motor skills for children and young people of refugee background	0.4%
Enhancing Trauma Awareness In Schools Through Referral Processes And Parent Teacher Interviews	0.4%
Fears and hopes about Kids starting school	0.4%
Harmony Day refugee experience presentation	0.4%
How to empower ourselves for future employment	0.4%
Incidental counselling	11.4%
Introduction to STARTTS In Schools	20.6%
Jungle Tracks and trauma and the cultural brain	0.4%
Leadership Training for school based leaders	0.4%
Professional development: Enrolment process	0.4%
Refugee Readiness Audit	0.9%
Resilience, Strengths and Goal Setting	1.8%
Settling in	0.9%
Supporting Transition for Refugee Students in school	0.4%
Syrian Crisis & Working with Refugee Young People	0.4%
Trauma and the nervous system	0.9%
Trauma and Wellbeing	0.4%
Vicarious Trauma and self-care	17.1%
Visa Categories, Recovery Goals & Progressive Brainstorm of Future Learning & Professional Needs	0.4%
Whole school approaches	0.9%
Working with parents and carers	3.1%
Working with Rohingya students	0.4%
Working with Syrian Refugee Students	0.4%
Youth Leadership and Sports	0.4%
Total	100%

Source: School Liaison Program

Table 4.1: Type of Topics Covered in Training Between 2017 and 2019 by STARTTS

Pre-Post Questionnaire Findings

Participants

Participants included 402 school staff who attended 13 STARTTS' training sessions between April 2017 and December 2019. The average age of participants was 41.82 years (SD=12.54). Majority of the participants were female with 76%, while males comprised 14% of participants, and 10% did not report gender. Staff from 13 schools participated in the training, including principals and executive staff, coordinators, classroom teachers and support teachers. Classroom and support teachers represented 67% of the total attendance (see table 4.2).

Participants had between <1 to 43 years of teaching experience, with an average of 13.14 years, while the average number of years of experience in teaching to children and young people of refugee background ranged between 1 and 5 years (Mdn= 3, M=2.67, SD= 1.11).

POSITION	N (%)
Principal and executive staff	29 (7.21%)
Teacher- coordinators	34 (8.46%)
Classroom teachers	191 (47.51%)
Support teachers	77 (19.15%)
Other/unknown	71 (17.67%)

Table 4.2: Participating Staff in Pre and Post Evaluation of Training Sessions

Participants' Knowledge Before and After Training

Participants self-reported a significant increase in knowledge after completing the training (see Table 4.3). Scores indicate that after the training sessions, participants "know many things" about all knowledge items. The greatest improvement in knowledge was of services offered by STARTTS (see Figure 4.1).

ITEM	PRE		POST	
	MDN	M (SD)	MDN	M (SD)
a) The common challenges and traumas experienced by refugees and asylum seekers before they arrive in Australia	3	2.64 (0.76)	4	3.74 (0.68)
b) The stressors experienced by children and young people of refugee background once they have arrived in Australia	2	2.51 (0.86)	4	3.77 (0.67)
c) The biological, psychological and social impacts of trauma on refugee students	2	2.39 (0.81)	4	3.74 (0.74)
d) The impact of trauma on refugee parents and families	2	2.44 (0.86)	4	3.81 (0.70)
e) Steps you can take to support children and young people of refugee background in the classroom	2	2.34 (0.84)	4	3.76 (0.75)
f) The services that STARTTS offers to schools	1	1.55 (0.86)	4	3.84 (0.80)

Table 4.3: Participants' self-report of knowledge before and after training sessions

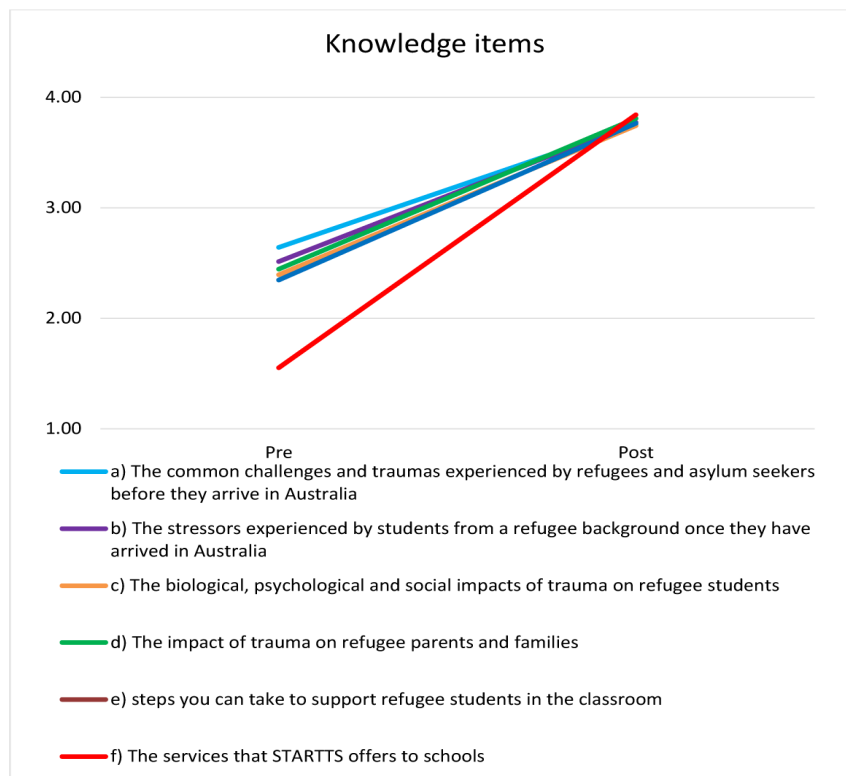


Figure 4.1: Mean scores for knowledge items before and after training session in 2017, 2018 and 2019

Participants' Confidence Before and After Training session

Participants also self-reported a significant increase in confidence after completing the training (See figure 4.2). Before the training, participants felt “a little bit confident” (Mdn=2). After the training, their confidence increased to become moderately confident (Mdn=4) (See table 4.4).

ITEM	PRE		POST	
	MDN	M (SD)	MDN	M (SD)
a) Applying a “whole school” approach to supporting children and young people of refugee background	2	2.28 (1.11)	4	3.59 (0.85)
b) Identifying and managing possible triggers of distress for a traumatised student	2	2.36 (0.97)	4	3.63 (0.83)
c) Recognising when children and young people of refugee background require individual counselling	2	2.39 (0.81)	4	3.66 (0.84)
d) Placing limits around your own involvement to ensure that both you and the student are safe	2	2.43 (1.03)	4	3.67 (0.83)
e) Referring children and young people of refugee background and families to STARTTS	2	1.89 (1.10)	4	3.68 (0.85)
f) Finding help and support for yourself when you need it	2	2.42 (1.13)	4	3.76 (0.85)

Table 4.4: Participants' Self-Reported Confidence Before and After Training in 2019

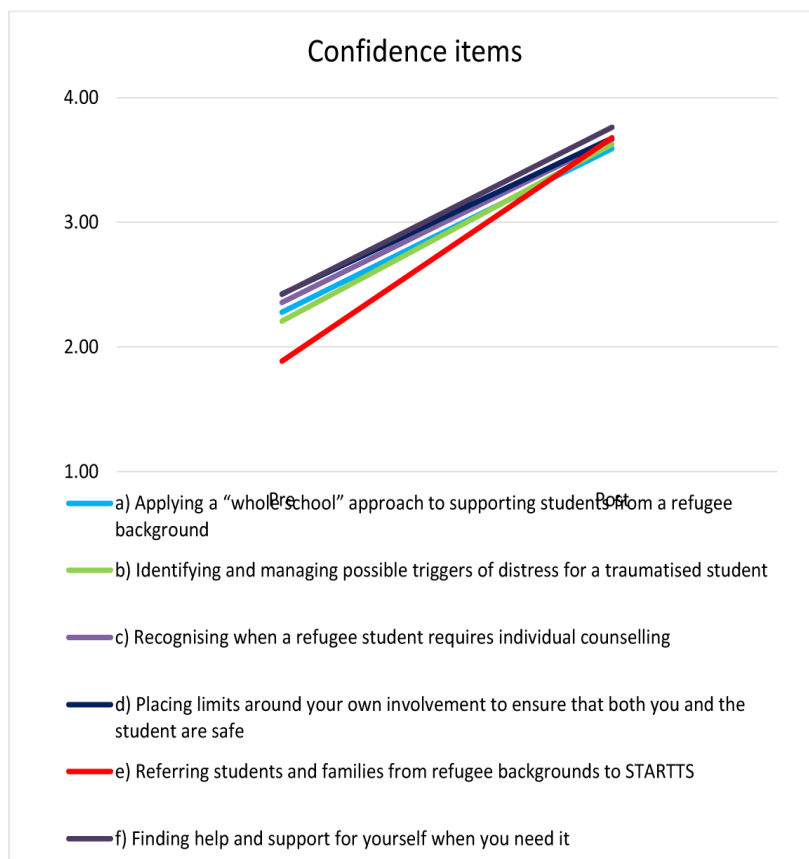


Figure 4.2: Mean scores for confidence items before and after training sessions

Participants' Satisfaction with training

Participants self-reported a high level of satisfaction with training (see Table 4.5). The items which received the highest rating of satisfaction related to those delivering the training (agree and strongly agree) are “the trainer was well prepared” (83%), “the trainer was helpful” (82 %) and “the trainer spoke clearly” (82%) (see Figure 4.3).

Although still indicating a positive level of satisfaction, the item which received the lowest ratings included “my attitude has changed as a result of this training” (47% agreed, 8% strongly agreed). Given that participants' attitudes towards working with children and young people of refugee background were not measured before the training, it is possible that such attitudes were initially positive. Additionally, we note that attitudinal changes may take place over a greater period of time.

ITEM	MDN	M	SD
a) The training content was the right level for me.	4	3.81	(0.69)
b) The content was relevant to my work.	4	3.87	(0.67)
c) I learned what I wanted from this training.	4	3.77	(0.71)
d) My attitude towards working with refugee students has changed as a result of this training.	4	3.50	(0.84)
e) The aims of the training were clearly communicated.	4	3.89	(0.67)
f) The trainer was well-prepared.	4	3.97	(0.64)
g) The trainer was helpful.	4	3.97	(0.64)
h) The trainer spoke clearly.	4	3.96	(0.64)

Table 4.5: Level of Satisfaction With Training

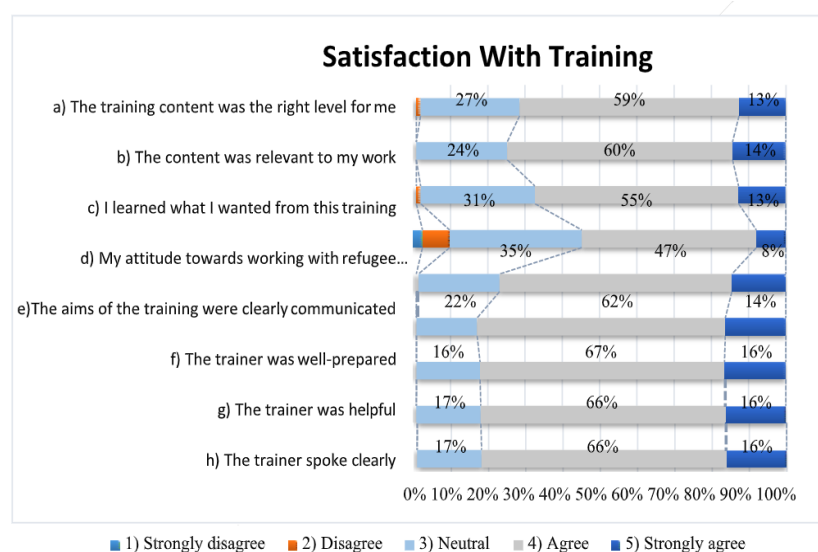


Figure 4.3: Satisfaction with training by items

Post Questionnaire (short form) Findings

Participants demographic- characteristics

716 school staff attended 35 short form STARTTS' training sessions between July 2018 and December 2019. The majority of the participants were female (74%). Males made up 18% of the participants and 9% did not report gender. The average age of participants was 41 years (SD=12.2). These participants included principals and executive staff, coordinators, school counsellors, classroom teachers and support teachers from twenty-six government and non-government schools. Classroom and support teachers represented 74% of the total attendance (see Table 4.6).

POSITION	N (%)
Principal and executive staff	38 (5%)
Teacher- coordinators	52 (7%)
Classroom teachers	357 (50%)
Support teachers	174 (24%)
Other/unknown	95 (13%)

Table 4.6: Participating Staff in Pre and Post Evaluation of Training Sessions

Participants had an average of 12.92 years' experience of teaching (SD= 10.66), while the average of experience teaching children and young people of refugee background ranges between 3 and 5 years (Mdn= 4, M=3.05, SD= 1.10).

Participants' Knowledge and confidence after training

Participants' responses by item suggest that the training sessions had positive effects on their knowledge and confidence. Participants' ratings also suggest that they were satisfied with the training sessions (see table 4.7).

A total of 88% of participants self-reported that the training sessions helped them to enhance their knowledge about the refugee experience and trauma (Agree= 58%, Strongly agree =30%) and 86% reported that the training sessions helped them learn more about STARTTS services and referral processes (Agree= 53%, Strongly agree =33%). Similarly, 85% of participants felt more confidence to offer support to children and young people of refugee background (Agree= 56%, Strongly agree =29%) (see Figure 4.4).

ITEM	MDN	M	SD
a) Because of this training, I know more about refugee experiences and trauma.	4	4.15	(0.71)
b) Because of this training, I know more about the services STARTTS provides, and referral processes.	4	4.14	(0.79)
c) Because of this training, I feel more confident to support people from refugee backgrounds in my work.	4	4.11	(0.73)
d) The activity/ies in this training were appropriate for the content.	4	4.21	(0.70)
e) There were sufficient opportunities for all staff to participate in this training.	4	4.26	(0.76)
f) This training helped me to reflect on my experiences and professional practice.	4	4.28	(0.71)
g) The content of this training was useful for my professional practice.	4	4.34	(0.67)
h) Overall, I am satisfied with this training.	4	4.36	(0.67)

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics for Each Item 2018-2019 Training (Short Evaluation)

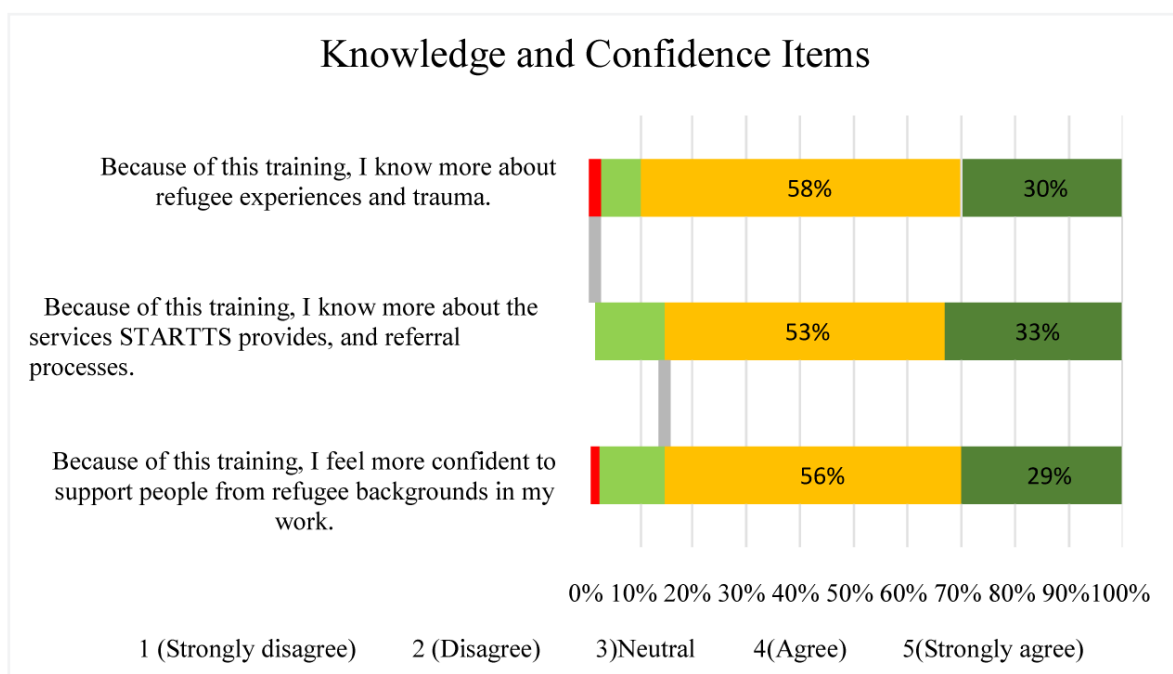


Figure 4.4: Knowledge and confidence items responses

Participants' Satisfaction with training

Overall, participants self-reported 94% satisfaction with the training sessions (see Figure 4.5).

Participants' responses indicate that the training sessions included appropriate activities (Agree= 57%, Strongly agree =33%), sufficient opportunities to participate (Agree= 49%, Strongly agree =40%), helped participants to reflect on their experiences(Agree= 51%, Strongly agree =40%), and were useful for their professional practice (Agree= 51%, Strongly agree =43%).

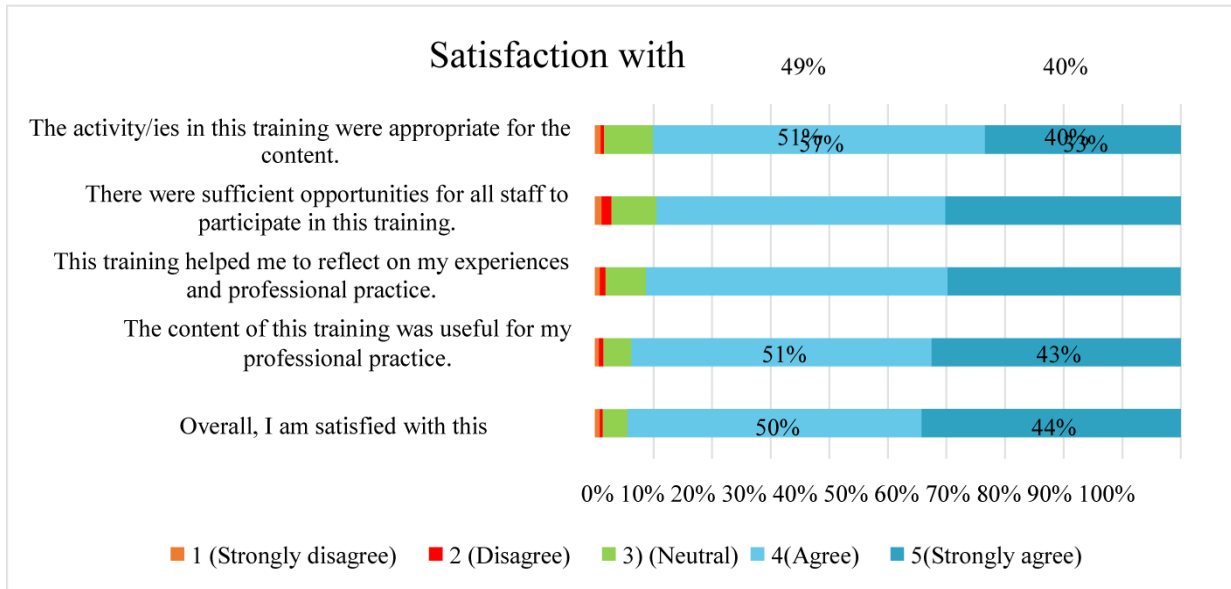


Figure 4.5: Participant responses of satisfaction with training items

Participants' Perception of Duration

Participants were also asked to rate the duration of training sessions from 1 (Far too short) to 5 (Far too long). Participants' responses indicated that 83.2% of them felt that the training sessions were appropriate in duration (see Figure 4.6).

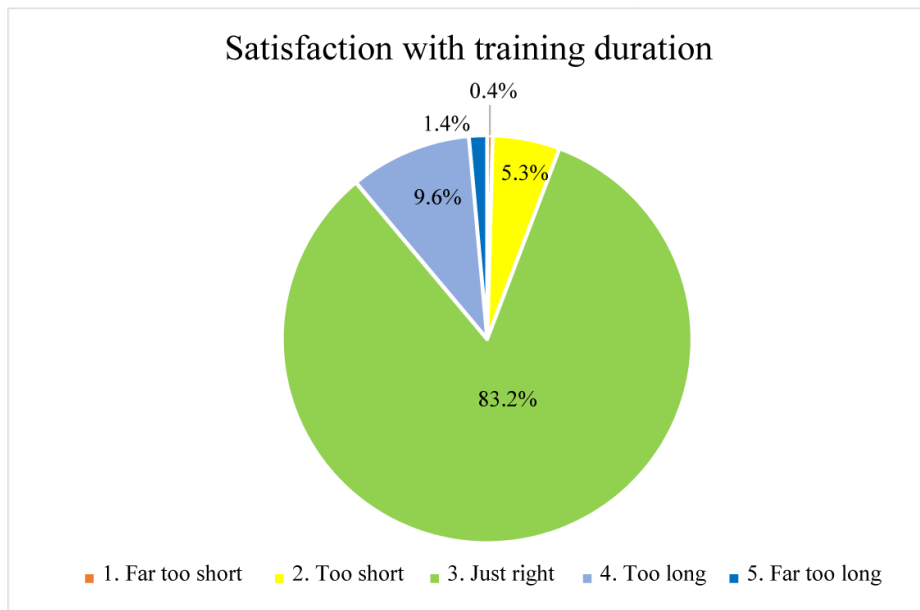


Figure 4.6: Participants' perception of duration

Qualitative feedback from training

Participants provided open-ended feedback about the training they received.

They were asked for the most and least valuable aspects of the training and what can be done to improve it. Participant responses included feedback regarding training content, methodology and trainers.

Most valuable aspects of training

- **Increased understanding of the impact of trauma**

Participants identified that learning about trauma and its impact on children and families from refugee backgrounds and the recovery process was very relevant for their work in schools, especially with children and young people of refugee background.

Participants commented that the most valuable aspects of the training were:

“Learning and being made aware of the trauma that children and their families suffer and how some children react to different triggers.” - Participant in 2017 training

“The clear explanation of the trauma and experiences of refugees that I had no insight prior to this training. It made me realise so much more I could be doing to help refugee students in my classroom.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Knowing the triggers that may affect the students in the school setting. What areas we will need to restore to help them cope.” - Participant in 2017 training

“The specific information regarding triggers, impacts and recovery tactics for students who are refugees.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Listening and learning about refugee students in particular the triggers for trauma.”
- Participant in 2019 training

“This training was engaging and [it was] insightful to hear about personal trauma experiences. It was great to identify the triggers to allow us to become aware with our own students.”
- Participant in 2019 training

Some participants commented on the importance of learning and understanding the bio-psychosocial model which explains the multiple levels of refugee trauma, especially the impact on children and young people of refugee background and their learning:

“Understanding what refugee children in our school are going through physically, emotionally and biologically.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Recognising the impact (both externally and internally) of the traumatic experiences and the intervention required on all the levels in order to help the refugee students.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“Understanding students’ feelings from their experiences and how it effects their learning/interaction.” - Participant in 2018 training

“The explanation of how trauma can affect a student emotionally, socially and academically.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“I enjoyed hearing the personal experiences of the presenters. I found it much easier to understand the real life issues associated with refugee trauma.” - Participant in 2019 training

- **Increased awareness and understanding of the refugee experience**

Many participants’ answers highlighted the relevance of learning about the refugee experience. The training increased understanding and awareness of the challenging experiences that people from refugee backgrounds may face in their country of origin and during the transition and resettlement processes:

“Insight into experiences of refugees and the ongoing source of stress and anxiety settling in a new country.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Understanding and knowing what refugees have experienced and may still be experiencing.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“Developing a greater understanding of the challenges faced by refugee students and families.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Putting the refugee experience into context. Talking through real situations. Finding out what STARTTS offers us.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I liked this training and it was useful to understand more about refugees. Thanks!”
- Participant in 2018 training

“I like it because it is really good to understand about the refugee and the survivors and how much hardship they went through and what help we can provide.” - Participant in 2019 training

“Provided me with knowledge and insight as how vulnerable these people/children are and the extent of support they require for survival and to adjust in any community.”
- Participant in 2019 training

Learning about the specific challenges that children and young people of refugee background may face and its impact on teaching and learning were also recognised as an important aspect of training for participants:

“Having a deeper knowledge and understanding about the challenges refugee kids face.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“Understanding the common challenges that refugee students go through.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“Building an understanding of the refugee story and how this impacts on my classroom.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“This training provided me with information about refugee experiences which will empower me to help students.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Developing a better understanding of the experiences of refugees and the trauma they may display in class.” - Participant in 2019 training

“Learning about the challenges faced by children and families who are refugees and how to support as a teacher.” - Participant in 2019 training

“It was very informative; Gave me a better understanding of our refugee students and how to manage them.” - Participant in 2019 training

- **Learning about strategies to support children and young people of refugee background at school**

School staff reported that the inclusion of practical strategies to support students in the classroom and in general at school was one of the most valuable aspects of the training:

“New ideas and strategies for working with children and their parents”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Learning about all the different strategies and support available.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“The information provided about supporting the recovery of refugee students, eg. Acknowledging feelings.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Clear strategies provided for supporting refugee students.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Learning how to help refugees in the classroom.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Being able to understand the different strategies to implement in my classroom to assist students from a refugee background.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“I really liked this course. It was useful and I learned a lot of new strategies for dealing with refugee students’ issues.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Very informative about challenges faced by refugees and strategies for supporting refugees, very engaging material.”

- Participant in 2019 training

- **Increased understanding of Whole School Approach**

Training also supported school staff to increase their understanding about the Whole School Approach, and indicated this as the most useful aspect of the training:

“[The] whole school approach-steps to support refugee students and their families and triggers.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Coming up with whole school approaches.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Whole school approach to trauma.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Understanding whole school approaches.” - Participant in 2018 training

“The need to ensure we have a whole school approach.” - Participant in 2019 training

- **Increased understanding and awareness about self-care and boundaries**

A few participants reported that the training they participated in, mainly in 2018 and 2019, increased their awareness about self-care and boundaries:

“Thank you to all staff for providing me with the skills I need to work in these environments and in self-reflection in setting my boundaries.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Loved the workshop! Reaffirmed that most of the strategies I’m doing are positive and reminded me about my boundaries.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Thank you very much! Very appropriate end of year training and self-care refresh and reminders!”

- Participant in 2019 training

- **Increased awareness of STARTTS’ services and referral process**

Participant feedback showed that one of the most valuable aspects of the training was the opportunity to learn about and understand the different services offered by STARTTS to schools and children and young people of refugee background and their families. Many school staff reported increased confidence to offer support to children and young people of refugee background:

“It was very informative and reassuring to know of the types of services offered by STARTTS.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Being aware of how STARTTS support student individually, groups including counselling and coming in to schools.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Finding out about what STARTTS can offer our school community.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I was not aware of this organisation, it was good to learn about the services they provide”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Learning about STARTTS programs and how they can help individual students and families”

- Participant in 2017 training

“How to refer students to STARTTS and what they do.” - Participant in 2017 training

“How to get help for refugees and resources available to help them.”

- Participant in 2017 training

“Learning about the opportunities STARTTS provide & the possibility to refer students.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Finding out about STARTTS” - Participant in 2018 training

“Learning that STARTTS exists to provide assistance to our students.”

- Participant in 2018 training

“Knowing that there is support for students and families.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Training was appropriate to introduce classroom teachers to the services provided [by STARTTS].”

- Participant in 2019 training

General feedback about the training content, methodology and trainers

- **Training was relevant, appropriate and informative**

Many participants were satisfied with the training content and delivery. A considerable number of comments reflected that the training they participated in was appropriate and informative:

“It was informative and helped me discover things I was unaware of regarding students.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“A very informative and practical presentation.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Thank you and it was excellent and informative.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I found the whole presentation very informative and valuable.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I feel it was very well thought out and appropriate for a first contact with your organisation”.
- Participant in 2017 training

“The training was adequate for this session.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Great insights and information shared.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Good course. Content was just right. Nice to have the opportunity to provide feedback.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“Very informative, learned a lot.” - Participant in 2019 training

“A very engaging course! Well-pitched, clear and informative. Thank you!”
- Participant in 2019 training

“Great presentation and provided useful information.” - Participant in 2019 training

“Very informative.” - Participant in 2019 training

Many participants also highlighted that the information provided was relevant and well contextualised and adapted to the reality of the school environment and the everyday work of the school staff with children and young people of refugee background and their families:

“It was informative and relevant to my work place.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Great information, will help in work place.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I found it was very helpful and eye opening.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Well presented and relevant to our teaching situation.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Paced really well. Relevant information. Good portrayal of background context. Great resources provided.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Thank you for tailoring a training session to our school’s needs and priorities. Very well presented, succinct and informative.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Relevant content to our school context.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Great overview/ well contextualised to our school community.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Thank you so much for the training that you provide. It’s very useful and much needed in our community.” - Participant in 2019 training

“Very useful and relevant.” - Participant in 2019 training

- **Training included appropriate methodologies**

Training was practical and engaging and provided opportunities to interact, discuss and provide feedback. Many participants commented that they enjoyed the group dynamics, the discussions, and in general the interactive activities included in the training, as well as the way the content was communicated:

“The whole training was relevant to our needs. I really like the dynamics and discussions in this training session.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Thank You. Well organized, practical. Great discussions.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Loved the content and allowing chat and feedback from us + discussion on various topics.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“The case studies were appropriate and the role play opened my mind. I liked the training.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“Loved the fluidity of the workshop. Thanks ladies.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Thank you very much for this great session. The interactive element was great.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“I liked how interactive it was & how open everyone was to your facilitation. Thank you.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Timing was perfect. The information on the slides was precise with great presenters.”
- Participant in 2019 training

“I have done a lot of leaning about trauma but this provided fresh perspectives.”
- Participant in 2019 training

“Very clear communication and well-paced.”
- Participant in 2019 training

- **Trainers were well prepared and knowledgeable**

Some responses also indicated that training participants perceived trainers to be passionate and have a deep knowledge about the topics delivered:

"[I liked] the passion and knowledge of both presenters information package given at end."
- Participant in 2017 training

"Very compassionate. Culturally sensitive & non-judgmental. Very genuine. Great examples."
- Participant in 2018 training

"It was a thoroughly prepared session and the facilitators demonstrated extensive knowledge on the topic." - Participant in 2019 training

"The knowledge and passion of the presenters is appreciated. Great energy level."
- Participant in 2019 training

"[The] instructors [are] very knowledgeable. [The instructors] made the presentation relatable."
- Participant in 2019 training

Trainers also used appropriate communication skills and created a comfortable and engaging environment:

"The presenters were fantastic. They were very insightful and engaging. I really enjoyed both sessions." - Participant in 2018 training

"Great presentation, very clear and engaging." - Participant in 2018 training

"...[the presenters] have empathy, patience and a good sense of humour."
- Participant in 2018 training

[The trainer] was a great presenter, giving real life experiences."
- Participant in 2019 training

"Amazing presentation. [The trainer] helped me to reflect and build on my practice and self-care; Amazing, friendly presenters. You were both fantastic. Thanks so much!"
- Participant in 2019 training

"Great presenters- well communicated." - Participant in 2019 training

"Well presented with empathy toward the people we are trying to support. Great strategies."
- Participant in 2019 training

What was the least valuable aspects about this training?

In general, participants felt highly satisfied with the training. When asked about the least valuable aspects of the training, common answers among all participants were positive. Some of the common responses included "Nothing", "All valuable", "Not-applicable", "Nil", "All relevant and valuable", "It was great", "Very insightful!", "Great presentation" "Great in all aspects. Thank you!", "Everything discussed was useful", "Excellent!", "All was fantastic", "All good", etc.

However, a few participants reported that the training they attended was "Too long" or "Too short". Others would prefer to access more specific information and practical strategies to work with students in the classroom.

How would you improve this training?

Although the majority of comments were positive, some participants provided feedback about how to improve future training. The aspects for improvement were mainly related to training methodology, duration and content. Some school staff suggested that the training should have more time for discussion, questions and group work:

“Small group discussions about refugee students in [our] own classes - how they are operating in class and general strategies for specific students.” - Participant in 2017 training

“More interactive/discussion groups, being able to share specific scenarios.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“Opportunity for discussion and questioning.” - Participant in 2017 training

“More opportunities to ask questions along the way rather than at the end.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“A little more question time.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Increased participation and interactive activities.” - Participant in 2018 training

“More time for group discussions.” - Participant in 2018 training

Other participants would have liked to have been provided with more cases studies and practical or illustrative videos, as well as with examples of strategies to work with children and young people of refugee background and families:

“More examples of stories of children experiencing trauma and how they were helped.”
- Participant in 2017 training

“Include more real life stories of the children or families to relate or have more insight in their lives.” - Participant in 2017 training

“I would suggest including more visual prompts and videos.” - Participant in 2017 training

“[I] would have liked further practical strategies to assist these students in my classroom (maybe future presentations).” - Participant in 2018 training

“Case studies of students and examples of how they were supported and assisted.”
- Participant in 2018 training

“[I] would love to see more videos of refugees + experiences and what they have found valuable.” - Participant in 2019 training

A few participants provided feedback related to the training content and what they would like to learn in future training. Topics such as aggression in the classroom, strategies for engaging students, successful stories and more statistics about the refugee context were some of them:

“Training on how to reduce aggression in the classroom.” - Participant in 2017 training

“More example of specific interventions and classroom practices addressing disengaged students.” - Participant in 2017 training

“A focus for mainstream classroom teachers to share experiences, what works, things to try, share.” - Participant in 2017 training

“Presenting statistics relevant to the current area.” - Participant in 2018 training

“Maybe videos examples of counselling techniques, visual examples of concepts, love the agency, maybe a whole workshop of this.” - Participant in 2019 training

Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation results provide a positive picture of STARTTS training with school staff between 2017 and 2019.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses show that school staff were satisfied with the training and felt more skilled and/or confident engaging with school aged children and young people of refugee background.

The training sessions produced immediate and significant improvements in participants' self-reported knowledge of, and confidence toward, working with children and young people of refugee background, as well as understanding of vicarious trauma and the importance of self-care. Notably, the greatest increase in knowledge and confidence related to the services STARTTS provides and the referral process. This may indicate an overall increase in understanding of the organisation as a result of the training and may have contributed to the steady increase of referrals from schools.

Participants also reported high levels of satisfaction with the training provided. Overall > 80% of participants are Highly/Very Highly satisfied with training delivered by the School Liaison Team.

Analysis of qualitative feedback also showed that participants increased their knowledge and confidence to work with children and young people of refugee background and were satisfied with the training provided by STARTTS. Many school staff reported that the training was relevant, appropriate and informative, used appropriate methodologies and trainers were well prepared and knowledgeable. The majority of participants highlighted that they learned and increased understanding of the impact of trauma and increased awareness and understanding of the refugee experience, the whole school approach and STARTTS services. They also reported an increased understanding and awareness about self-care and boundaries when working with people affected by trauma. The training also helped them to identify strategies to support children and young people of refugee background at school.

Feedback also opened the door for participants to express the need for more training in the future. Topics such as aggression in the classroom, engaging student strategies and practical activities that they could implement with students were included in the feedback. School staff also recommended that training sessions should include more cases studies, practical or illustrative videos and strategies to work with children and young people of refugee background and their families.





Chapter 5: Findings - Improvements in Student Wellbeing

Overview

A total sample of 239 students and 15 teachers² across schools in New South Wales (NSW) participated in evaluation activities which measured the improvement in psychological wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background after receiving trauma-informed group work interventions from STARTTS.

Of those, 123 students responded to self-reported measures of mental wellbeing using the World Health Organisation-Five Wellbeing index (WHO-5). Scores were calculated and averaged for 14 trauma-informed group-work interventions conducted in high schools across NSW catering to 123 participants (N=123) between the ages of 12 and 18. Scores range from 0 – 25, 0 representing the worst possible quality of life and 25 representing the best possible quality of life.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) were also used with 23 students from four different groups who were assessed by their teachers. Scores were calculated and averaged for 4 trauma-informed group-work intervention participants (N=23) assessed by their teachers. The measure is rated on a 3 point scale 0 = “not true”, 1 = “somewhat true” and 2 = “certainly true”.

Similarly, of the total of participants, 93 students and 15 teachers also participated in attribution of change interviews using wellbeing indicators established by STARTTS.

The sample of students for the evaluation of this section was taken from the following programs:

- A Musical Odyssey (3 groups)
- Capoeira Angola (6 groups)
- Capoeira Angola Youth encounter
- Hour of Power
- Learning to Play
- MoMENTum
- Mosaic group
- Paws4Trauma (4 groups)
- Drumming
- Rock and Water (2 groups)
- Settling In (4 groups)
- Sporting Linx
- Tree of Life

² See **Attribution of change interviews** section

World Health Organisation- Five Wellbeing Index (WHO-5) Overall

WHO-5 Pre and Post findings

As can be seen in **Figure 5.1**, an analysis of pre and post data indicated an increase of 12% in scores of wellbeing, measured on the WHO-5. This suggests that upon completing the interventions, the participants had some overall improvement in their mood, stress levels, sleep and felt more active and more interested in everyday life activities.

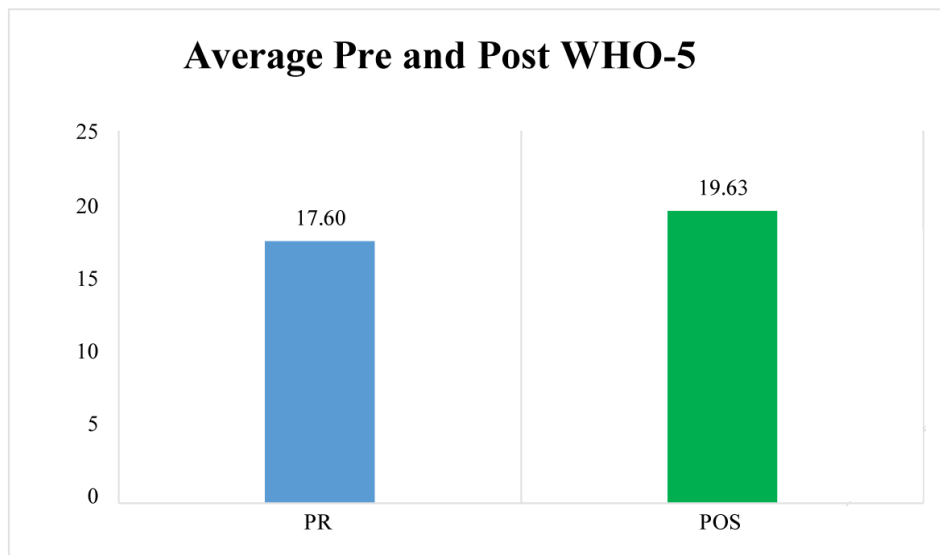


Figure 5.1: Overall WHO-5 Pre and Post Average finding (n=123)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Overall

SDQ Finding

Figure 5.2 illustrates the pre and post average scores as indicated by teachers concerning their students who have engaged in STARTTS trauma sensitive activities. Results show that there was a decrease of 20% in assessed overall average stress scores after the students participated in STARTTS trauma-informed activities.

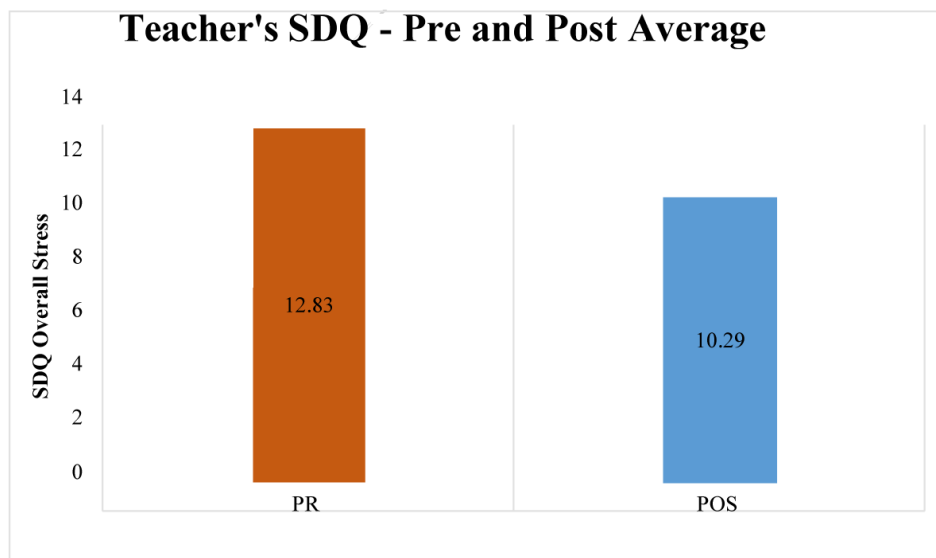


Figure 5.2: Overall SDQ Pre and Post Average finding (n=23)

Findings from attribution of change Interviews with students³

Increased sense of happiness

97% of students reported that they felt happier as a result of participating in STARTTS programs. Participants attributed this change to a variety of factors further discussed below, including an increase in friendship and sense of belonging, and increase in their sense of being accepted by others, improved physical and mental health, improved confidence, feeling calmer, having learnt new skills and having been exposed to new experiences.

- ***Increase in Friendship and Sense of Belonging***

Participants attributed their increased sense of happiness to an increase in friendship and sense of belonging that students attributed to their participation in STARTTS' trauma-informed group work interventions. Student responses indicate that STARTTS' programs provided opportunities that they may not have otherwise had for young people to meet and interact with their peers. As is further discussed below, students shared that although their peers may be in the same class, strong social relationships between peers are not necessarily shared. Activities within STARTTS' programs offer participants the opportunity to meet, interact and foster positive social connections between peers, thereby cultivating a sense of belonging. As discussed earlier, a sense of belonging is both an indicator of wellbeing and of social capital. Student responses affirm the strong ties between social capital and subjective wellbeing/happiness.

"It makes everyone closer. We are so close now as a group"

"Yeah I like it, yeah like, I meet new people"

"I feel more social, I feel happier and I am enjoying it"

"I got closer with people. I wasn't close within this group"

"Because like I had someone to talk to"

"We know each other, we are friends. That's why we feel alright"

"Brings us all together"

In addition to an increased sense of belonging through the fostering of positive peer relations, students reported that some activities offer an opportunity to connect to their own culture, thereby also fostering a sense of belonging. This reflects the importance of culturally appropriate psychosocial support and its impact on participant wellbeing.

"Yes I am happier because it reminds me of traditional African music and dance. I feel home when I listen to music. I remember home and familiar stuff"

"When I do capoeira I feel like I am home"

³ For detailed description of evaluation instruments please see **Methodology** section

Happiness is generally interpreted as feeling content with family and friends. Participant comments reflect that STARTTS' programs have contributed to feelings of contentment amongst peers, contributing to an increased sense of happiness

- **Increased Acceptance of Others**

The increase in positive peer relations discussed above has had positive implications which extend beyond the group program/school. One participant shared that as a result of his participation in a STARTTS program, he grew more accepting of the perspectives of others which has helped him navigate social relationships within and outside of school, which in turn has contributed to an increased sense of happiness. Another participant commented that, as a result of participating in a STARTTS program, he was less judgmental of himself and others which also contributed to an increased sense of happiness.

"Yes it has helped me deal with situations inside and outside of school. It gives me an open mindset about different perspectives within my head and of others"

"Yeah I'm not so judgy or down on myself"

Happiness is generally interpreted as feeling content with family and friends. Participant comments reflect that STARTTS' programs have contributed to feelings of contentment amongst peers, contributing to an increased sense of happiness.

- **Improved Confidence**

Participants also attributed their increased sense of happiness to an increased sense of confidence resulting from their participation in STARTTS' programs. A participant comment below reflected that STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions invited participants to step out of their comfort zones which, while at first may have felt uncomfortable, ultimately resulted in an increased sense of confidence.

"I'm happier because I feel more confident"

"First time I did it, I feel kind of shy, and after I get used to it and yeah"

One participant commented that being selected to participate in a STARTTS' program made them feel special, which also contributed to an increased sense of happiness.

"I feel lucky to be part of this. I feel special. I got this opportunity to be picked for this group and I'm happy"

- **Improvement in Mental/Physical Health**

Participants reported that programs involving sport/physical activity improved both their mental and physical health, which in turn contributed to an increased sense of happiness. Commenting on the relationship between physical activity and happiness, participants specified that the physical activities offered through STARTTS' programs reduced stress and provided fun and engaging ways to keep healthy and feel happier.

"It's also another way to reduce stress"

*"It [happiness] has improved a lot. Especially my health. Being happy is good for mental health"
"Yeah I feel like I'm really fit. It's fun and lots of exercise, I like the movements" "I thought it was just like dance movements, it's more of mental and physical work"*

- **Feeling Calmer**

One participant commented that his participation in Capoeira helped him to feel calmer and change behaviour that previously got him “into trouble”. Research suggests that the highly structured environment offered by Capoeira within its defined boundaries and strong physical, moral and ethical codes can help promote adaptive prosocial behaviours and help prevent antisocial behaviour, consequently enhancing social adaptation avoiding certain predicaments (Momartin et al., 2019). The participant reported that this ability to remain calm and adapt his behaviour has increased his sense of happiness.

“Yeah, I used to get into trouble before like with teachers and with friends, now no, I am good. I don’t get into trouble anymore. Teachers suggested that I get into Capoeira, and it really helped calm me down, it helped me grow as a person”

- **Developed New Skills and Learned from New Experiences**

Lastly, participants attributed their increased sense of happiness to the new skills development and new experiences that participation in STARTTS’ programs offered. Participants specifically mentioned the development of leadership skills, sporting skills and mosaic skills. In addition, participants commented on new experiences that outings offer, for example visits to an animal farm.

“Yeah you get to learn a lot of stuff. How to be true leaders”

“Our group we worked for 3 terms. Makes you feel good that you didn’t make any mistakes since we practiced [sport]”

“We learn new things”

“Actually happier because you get to experience the animals and the farm and how they live”

“You have fun, you learn a lot, you get a new experience”

- **No Significant Change**

Only 3% of participants reported that they experienced no significant changes in their sense of happiness as a result of participating in STARTTS’ programs.

“I feel the same”

“Not really”

Increased number of friends or contacts within or outside one's own community or locality: bonding and bringing social capital

77% of participants reported that they made new friends as a result of participating in STARTTS programs which, as demonstrated above, contributed to an increased sense of belonging. Participant comments reflect that participation in STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions allowed for the formation of social connections within the groups, including the formation of social connections between people from different cultural backgrounds within the group, and provided participants with the confidence to form social connections outside of participants' school or immediate community (both indicative of Bridging Social Capital).

- **Made new Friends within the Group**

Participant comments indicated that while those who took part in group programs were all from the same school, and even sometimes the same class, strong social connections or friendships had not necessarily evolved organically between peers. As discussed above, comments reflected that participation in STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions provided the opportunity for interaction that led to positive peer connections and friendships. This, in turn, fosters a sense of belonging amongst peers.

Comments further indicate that friendships cultivated during participation in the group programs extended to the broader school context, with participants greeting and interacting more frequently with their peers outside of the group.

"Yeah but I never actually spoken to them a lot [previously], after the program we will have a conversation around the school"

"Yeah I did make a few [friends], when I see them I can say 'hi', the people that I worked with"

"Yeah because we play games, and play together and you make friends"

"Yeah before I was uncomfortable with everyone only my group and me, but now everyone is friends"

"Yeah I met a couple of people in the group who I wasn't friends with or didn't like to start with. We are better now"

"Yeah I think it's a really good experience for people who don't usually get along with other people 'cause there's a lot of cooperation in it"

Fostering new friendships within the school community and the resultant sense of belonging are both indicators of improved wellbeing and increased bonding social capital. As mentioned above, an increased sense of belonging can contribute to participants feeling less depressed, less socially anxious and more socially supported.

- **Formation of Friendship with People from Different Cultural Backgrounds**

Participant comments indicated that STARTTS' programs provided participants with the opportunity to form friendships with people from different cultural backgrounds. This is indicative of increased Bridging Social Capital which can help participants re-establish new circles of support outside of their immediate communities, aiding in successful resettlement.

"So, in my group it's mostly Sudanese people, but then we all from different places. We don't really talk but I think capoeira made us all closer. We can talk to year sevens like they are my little sisters".

"Yeah I have met lots of new people"

- **More Confident to Form Connections Outside of Class/School**

Participant comments indicate that the fostering of positive peer connections during participation in trauma-informed group-work interventions provided participants with the confidence to initiate social interactions outside of class/school. This is also indicative of bridging social capital and the establishment of new circles of support essential for successful resettlement.

“Yeah, I have lots of friends, in group and outside. I feel like I am more confident and social”

“Yeah I’m definitely more social now, I have friends and it is easier to meet new people and friends. Communication has become easier too, like I feel more easy and comfortable to talk to people and just walk up to people and say ‘hey, how are you?’, you know... I like can talk to other people easily now, like before I couldn’t, I had to think what to say, but now I’m like, ‘hey let’s talk’, you know”.

- **Events provide opportunities to make friends outside of immediate community**

STARTTS’ programs often culminate in events and/or camps that involve the participation of different schools from different regions. Participant comments indicated that events such as these provide opportunities for participants to connect with people outside of their locality, thereby also increasing bridging social capital.

“In school all of them are my friends but in these type of events I did make a couple of good friends”

“Most of them are from my class so they’re my friends, I became closer to these people”

“Yes, people from different schools and I have been to the capoeira camp so people from there as well”.

“The camp was nice. I made friends outside of my school and I met them here [at an event] today as well”

- **No Significant Change**

23% of participants did not make new friends though participation in STARTTS’ programs. Some participants indicated that this was because they were already friends with their fellow group participants prior to the commencement of the various trauma-informed group-work interventions. Others commented that connections did not extend beyond pre-existing friendships, while one participant shared that friendships formed within the group were confined to the group and did not extend to the broader school context.

“No, I knew everyone there”

“No, I stayed with my friendship group”

“We only talk in class, not outside”

Improvement in sleep

50% of participants reported having better sleep as a result of their participation in STARTTS' programs. Participants attributed improved sleep to feeling more relaxed/less stressed and to feeling tired after engaging in physical group activities. As mentioned previously, sufficient, good-quality sleep contributes to the happiness and stability of young people.

"It really clears my mind from the outside world, like from stress is class. I feel more relaxed and yeah, I guess I sleep better"

"Yeah I sleep good, I feel relaxed I guess."

"The stress is lower so I sleep better"

"I sleep better because I guess Capoeira is demanding and tires you out so I sleep better. Also, it makes me more relaxed so I can sleep better"

One participant attributed their better sleep to having better dreams since participating in a STARTTS' program.

"It's way better. It's more deep sleep. I never used to have dreams, it was so weird, but now I have good dreams. I think it's because capoeira makes you think about life."

11% of participants were unsure if participation in STARTTS programs impacted the quality of their sleep.

"Don't know about sleep"

"Sleep is good I guess yeah, don't know, I sleep ok"

39% of participants reported experiencing no changes to their quality of sleep.

"Kind of same"

"Not really"

"Nah it's just the same, I don't know if I have noticed, maybe something has changed but I am not sure, not been obvious."

Attribution of change Interviews with teachers findings

Teachers' responses indicated significant changes in their students who participated in STARTTS' programs:

- **Improvement in Students' Academic Performance**

87% of teacher responses indicated an improvement in their students' academic performance as a result of their participation in STARTTS' programs. Recognising that academic performance is not limited to improvements in grades alone, teachers' comments reflected improvements in classroom engagement and confidence to engage in class as well as participants being more attentive and focused in the classroom. One teacher expressly linked improvements in students' academic performance to improved student wellbeing.

- **Improvement in Grades**

One teacher, after comparing students' academic reports from before and after they began participating in a STARTTS' program, observed that the grades of "lower achieving students" improved.

"Most have been moved from limited to basic so they have improved. Lower achieving students (E,D or C) improved. B and A students maintained grades"

Another teacher attributed improvements in academic performance to the improvement in wellbeing experienced by students as a result of participating in STARTTS' programs. As previously discussed, wellbeing shares close links to social capital, which too impacts academic performance. Strong social networks, feelings of trust and community participation (all shown from student responses above to have been cultivated through participation in STARTTS' programs) afford students access to supports, information, resources, and role models that can contribute to school success (Tennent et al., 2006). As such, both student and teacher responses indicate that improved wellbeing cultivated through the formation of peer social capital has positively impacted students' academic performance.

"I think academic performance stems from wellbeing, and the kids that do capoeira certainly are excited about capoeira, like the inclusion of capoeira, we know from research, wellbeing supports academic learning. So I haven't been tracking them academically, I would say yes. Academics are definitely improved through capoeira via wellbeing."

- **Increase of Students' Self-confidence and Classroom Engagement**

Teachers commented that participants were more engaged in classroom activities. This can be attributed to the increase in self-confidence that teachers also observed in participants. As a result of participating in STARTTS' activities, students were more confident to actively participate in class, and to challenge themselves by engaging in more difficult tasks. This can further be linked to the increased sense of belonging demonstrably cultivated through participation in STARTTS' programs. As mentioned above, a sense of belonging can positively impact on students' confidence to creatively explore their capacities as thinkers.

“Some students have definitely become more engaged in learning and more focused”

“Their self-confidence has really increased, I can feel it, and then it has transferred to the classroom performance which is very noticeable, yeah definitely confidence kids now”.

“They are more willing to challenge themselves when tasks require greater effort”

When one teacher was asked about changes to academic performance, she too expressly commented on the improvements in self-confidence she observed in the students. She was however unsure if this translated into improved classroom engagement and academic performance.

“Do I think their confidence has improved, yes I do. So I think that would probably help with their concentration and engagement and participation in the classroom. Particularly with the ones who are a lot quieter, we have a boy in year 9 who has been with us since year 7, who is very quiet and very isolated, even on the excursion yesterday, kept very much to himself. But yesterday, during the excursion was probably the most he has ever spoken to any of us, he doesn't speak to many people, even teachers, he keeps to himself a lot. So, confidence it has increased, in terms of engagement is hard for me to say.”

- **Increase of Students' Focus and Responsiveness**

In addition to increased classroom engagement and participation, teachers found students to be more focused and attentive in class since participating in STARTTS' programs. Congruent with teachers' responses below that reflected increased student concentration, and participant responses that reflected an increased sense of calm, increased focus/attentiveness in class can be attributed to participants feeling calmer and better able to self-regulate as a result of participating in STARTTS programs. As mentioned above, a sense of belonging can also contribute to students' ability to self-regulate.

“I think for sure there has been a difference in the kids' performance academically. They do seem to learn and listen more, yes, it's true they are more attentive now”

“Capoeira has assisted the students to be more focused on their learning and remain on task without being distracted”

“Students have worked well in my class and seem a little calmer”

- **Teachers not able to Comment**

13% of teachers interviewed were not able to comment on differences in students' academic performance as, while the teachers oversaw the running of STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions in schools, they were not the students' class teacher.

- **Improvement in Students' Concentration**

86% of teacher responses indicated that teachers observed an improvement in participants' concentration. Teachers attributed the improved concentration to the improved self-regulation and control that participants experienced as a result of participating in STARTTS' programs.

One teacher commented that the improvement in concentration has resulted in a better use of class time, and that concentration improves with more regular attendance of STARTTS' programs. Increased concentration can also be attributed to the increased peer social capital demonstrated above. As previously discussed, positive peer support, peer relations and tolerance for diversity can positively impacts student' concentration on academic performance (McCormick et al., 2011; Motti-Stefanidi, 2015).

“Let me think about it, I think the control it does teach is transferred, yes because it does teach body control and self-control and I think that definitely transfers across, it's a slower process for some children than others, and it's not obvious, it's a really slower process. But I am sure that it impacts on the ability for them to control themselves”

“There is general response from some teachers that the students are displaying better emotional regulation which is helping to improve attention”

“I guess yes, they are concentrating better because they say capoeira is teaching them how to concentrate better. Some, yes, but not all. I think yes, concentration better in class”

“Anecdotally, there has certainly been a significant shift in the concentration of the students in capoeira class itself. The last term, especially, saw the students come promptly to class and engage straight away with the session. There were fewer interruptions and more efficient use of class time. Most of the female students who attend have improved their behaviour and concentration in class. Some students who opted out of capoeira continue to have issues in class and it is very telling. This is also similar for the boys. The ones who attend regularly seem to have had a better year at school than those who have stopped coming”

The remaining 14% of teachers interviewed were not able to comment on differences in student concentration in class as, while the teachers oversaw the running of STARTTS’ trauma-informed group-work interventions in schools, they were not the students’ class teachers.

- **Increase in Students’ Attendance**

53% of teacher responses indicated an increase in attendance and/or a reduction in truancy which teachers attributed to participants engagement in STARTTS’ programs. Teachers reported that attendance at school was stronger on the days that STARTTS’ programs ran at their schools. One teacher attributed strong attendance at STARTTS’ trauma-informed group-work sessions to the improved wellbeing that participants experienced as a result of their engagement with STARTTS’ programs.

“I think there is at least one boy in the program, I didn’t realise has quite poor attendance, he never missed a Tuesday for the drumming group, he did miss a few, but apparently he has an overall bad attendance score but didn’t realise that so he must come more often on a Tuesday”

“It [improved attendance] probably stems from wellbeing, because the wellbeing is supported then the students are happier, therefore may come to school more”

“Attendance is one thing I’m very impressed, even for some reason it got cancelled they’re always asking for it. Always in class, always asking for this program, it makes them feel like it is a safe place to be, it has encouraged them along”

“Attendance of the students is strong”

“Yes, with attendance they are really good. They always run to school, to be with their friends do different things because most of them don’t get to get out a lot”

“Yeah actually there is improvement in class, a lot of them used to arrive late, there is a little bit of improvement. Firstly, they came a little bit more responsible, and when they see me in the corridor ‘Oh miss, we are just filling up the water’ [before going to class].”

“Attendance in the program was good even from disengaged students. There has been a reduction in truancy”

As mentioned previously, strong attendance at school places students at lower risk of dropping out of school and subsequent long-term complications and helps students to remain engaged with peers and teachers which positively impacts student wellbeing.

- **No Significant Change - Attendance was already strong**

46% of teacher responses indicated no significant changes to attendance or to a reduction in truancy as teachers reported that attendance at school was already strong. Teachers responses did, however, reflect (congruent with above responses) that attendance of STARTTS’ programs was particularly strong with participants making every effort not to miss group sessions. As previously mentioned, one teacher attributes this to the improved wellbeing that participants experience as a result of participating in STARTTS programs.

“Most of our kids come to school regularly, so not sure if capoeira affects that or not. I do know that they get really excited when it’s lunch time that capoeira is on, they love it. It probably stems from wellbeing, because the wellbeing is supported then the students are happier, therefore may come to school more”

“Truancy was not a big problem anyway, no, it was never a big problem for our school. But yeah, I guess I can answer and say yes their attendance is good because they don’t want to miss any of the capoeira groups.”

“All students’ participation is good, so no I don’t think any real change”

“I don’t think so much but I do think they like to attend the capoeira classes, so they do try more to be here, not sure about school itself”

- **Increased Respect Towards Themselves and Others**

80% of teacher responses indicated that they observed a significant positive change in the respect that participants showed towards themselves and others.

“This dimension has been the one where it has been most obvious to see widespread improvement in the majority of students”

“They respect teachers but also themselves more now”

“In the case of our 3 senior female students, they have shown a considerable improvement in their respect toward others. One student in particular has thrived in capoeira and is completely different to two years ago”

Teachers noticed positive changes in the respect participants show to others in three key areas: between people from different backgrounds, between genders and between participants and teachers.

- **Increased Respect between People from Different Backgrounds**

Teachers observed positive changes shown between participants from different cultural backgrounds as a result of participating in STARTTS’ programs. As discussed above, increased respect between people from different backgrounds are both indicators of increased wellbeing and increased bridging social capital. As also previously mentioned, STARTTS’ programs provided an opportunity for participants to interact and form connections with people they may not have otherwise. These interactions, including with people from different backgrounds, impacted on the level of respect participants held and displayed for their peers from different backgrounds.

“That’s one thing I keep talking to [name of facilitator] about, they have a huge respect for everyone and it’s not just about them, it’s about other cultures as well. If you have a look at that group we have, it’s a mix of people from Fiji, people from different cultures, they are friends. They are not just friends over here they are friends in the playground as well, and that’s the whole wellbeing we are worried about, especially these ones because what they do, they are more isolated, they don’t get out. But by doing this they are helping each other out”

- **Increased respect between males and females**

One teacher observed a positive change in respect shown between genders. The respectful nature of participation and cooperation modelled during STARTTS’ programs translated to respectful relationships between genders outside of the group as well.

“And we’ve seen more male to female respect as well. There is significantly improved participation and co-operation in all sorts of things, like class work or sport or anything, they just want to do it”

- **Increased respect for teachers**

Similarly, respectful relationships between participants and STARTTS facilitators modelled during the delivery of STARTTS’ programs has also translated to positive changes in the ways in the respect shown for school teachers.

“The students listen more to teachers and each other”

“I have certainly seen an increase in the respect shown to the capoeira teachers. In addition, most of the students have developed more positive relationships with staff and are respectful towards each other”

- **No significant change**

20% of teacher responses indicated that they observed no significant changes in the respect, participants show towards themselves and/or others.

“Not to a great extent but they are learning”

“I can tell you honestly in capoeira I hear stories about them not being very nice to each other. Because they’re in a situation where they have a different instructor, it’s not teacher, and I completely support it. They need to be more self-led in their behaviour in there”.

Conclusion

Overall, the attribution of change interviews, the WHO–5 index and SDQ indicate improvement in participants' wellbeing as a result of their participation in STARTTS' interventions.

Students who participated in the attribution of change interviews reported feeling happier (97%) as STARTTS' programs supported their sense of belonging, confidence and connections with peers both from within and outside participants' own communities and immediate localities. STARTTS' programs also improved participants' mental and physical health through participation in physical activities and structured programs which also increased self-regulation and reduced stress levels. Similarly, the WHO-5 index results show that participants reported having better sleep as they felt more relaxed and engaged in the programs' physical activities (50%).

Results also demonstrate STARTTS programs capacity to support the formation of social connections as 77% of student' participants reported new social connections within the groups, including social connections between people from different cultural backgrounds within the groups and outside of participants' school or immediate community.

WHO- 5 Index and SDQ results confirm the findings above indicating an increase in scores of wellbeing. WHO-5 suggests that students experienced improvements in their mood, stress levels and sleep as a result of their participation in STARTTS' programs. Similarly, results show an increase in their energy and interest for everyday general activities. SDQ also shows an improvement of students in emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity/inattention, social difficulties such as peer relationship problems and prosocial behaviours.

The Attribution of Change interviews with teachers also indicate improvements in students' wellbeing. 87% of teachers interviewed reported that students who participated in STARTTS' programs improved their academic performance including grades, confidence and engagement in classroom activities. Similarly, 86% of teachers' responses indicated that students' concentration and focus in class also improved. Although students' attendance was strong in some schools, 54% of teachers interviewed attributed the increase of students' school attendance to STARTTS' programs.

Another significant change reported by teachers was the increase of respect showed by students who participated in STARTTS' programs. 80% of teachers observed that students started to show more respect towards themselves, other peers from different cultural backgrounds, between genders and towards teachers as a result of their participation in STARTTS' programs.



Chapter 6: Findings - Clusters/Networks of Schools

Overview

To measure the impact of the clusters, also referred to as networks of schools, in-depth Individual interviews were conducted with 13 active members, representative of all clusters implemented.

They were asked about their overall experience of their involvement with the cluster, systemic changes and increase of awareness/connection to non-school based services as a result of the cluster. Questions about the increase of capacity to better support students from refugee backgrounds and cluster improvements were also included in the interviews. In addition, a survey of rural and regional cluster participants was administered to assess its efficacy.

In-depth individual semi structured interviews were also conducted with four STARTTS staff from the School Liaison Team. Questions aimed to gather information about the clusters' purpose, background, main activities, participation and partnerships.

This section also includes the evaluation results of seven training sessions delivered in 2019 to members of four clusters. Evaluation results measuring the level of implementation of the Whole of School approach in schools with members of one cluster are also included in this section. As STARTTS is dedicated to co-design processes with clusters, instruments used were designed and adapted according to the specific needs and circumstances of each cluster. As training evaluation findings were routinely reported on within the clusters, the analysis presents a combination of those reports.

Cluster Background

The School Liaison Program supports the development and implementation of clusters or networks of schools within a particular geographical area.

The purpose of the clusters is to bring schools together to work collaboratively and grow in their capacity to effectively support students from refugee backgrounds and families in their schools.

Throughout 2017-18, STARTTS School Liaison Officers (SLOs) worked in close partnership with key representatives from the Department of Education (namely its Refugee Support Leaders – RSLs - and the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team -RSCST) to support the development of local networks (clusters) of schools across regions of North Western, Western and South Western Sydney and in a rural and regional area. Similarly, STARTTS worked with Sydney Catholic Schools (SCSs) to establish clusters that support the specific needs of SCSs and their students from refugee backgrounds.

Between 2017 and 2019, STARTTS' School Liaison Program supported or established six clusters in the Sydney metropolitan area and one in a regional and rural area of NSW. Clusters were advertised via STARTTS staff, Department of Education staff and Catholic Education Office staff, and interested schools opted to join the clusters. In the metropolitan area, the clusters are located in Liverpool and Glenfield, a Catholic cluster largely focused on Bankstown area, one cluster that covers the North-West Sydney region, another covering the Bankstown and Canterbury area with participation of some schools from Strathfield area, one cluster in Fairfield area and another in the Blacktown LGA which wound up in mid-2018 as it has achieved its stated objectives. In rural and regional NSW, there is a network in the Albury area. The Albury network received additional support from STARTTS Rural and Regional team.

Although clusters took on slightly different forms and catered specifically to the needs and strengths of schools and students within each geographic area, all clusters focused on:

- developing a whole-school approach to addressing the specific needs of children and young people of refugee background
- increasing the capacity of school staff to provide appropriate support for students from refugee backgrounds
- creating and maintaining supportive links with organisations in the wider community in relation to supporting children and young people of refugee background and providing a community of practice to enable mutual learning for schools attending the cluster meetings.

Schools participating in the clusters were provided with support to plan, implement and monitor strategies for working with children and young people of refugee background and with professional learning support, funding to participate in professional learning and access to expert advice and consultations. The clusters also provided support for schools' students and their parents.

The clusters incorporated both government and non-government schools to create a collegial network where good practice examples were shared, based on the expertise or the needs of each individual school. They also provided a space for reflection through the Refugee Readiness Audit (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc., 2004), or the Refugee Readiness Survey.

This is a survey that looks at school policies, environment and the adoption of the Whole School Approach within the school community to provide and increase appropriate support to students from refugee backgrounds. Based on the Refugee Readiness Audit, each school is encouraged to develop an action plan that meets their individual needs and tracks their progress within the cluster. Cluster participants include refugee support EAL/D (English as an Additional Language or Dialect) and classroom teachers, executive members (including directors), welfare and learning support teams, counsellors, career advisors and transition advisors.

Below there is a brief description of each cluster:

Clusters in the Sydney Metropolitan Area

Bankstown and Canterbury Schools Refugee Network

This cluster was formed in early 2018 and met once a term in different schools. It was mainly led by the Department of Education staff, specifically the RSLs, and since 2018 STARTTS has been invited to the planning meetings to have input into the content of sessions. Relevant staff from the school hosting the network meeting also attended the planning meetings and had input into the content. Topics STARTTS supported include the impact of trauma on learning and how to mitigate these effects, engaging parents and carers, understanding the importance of self-care and incidental counselling skills.

The cluster is open to government school staff only and employs a lecture delivery style. The participation in the cluster is extensive and ranges between 25 and 50 people, with the majority of attendees being EAL/D teachers. A total of 108 DoE staff (not including facilitators), have attended at least one of these network sessions. Participants from schools in other areas such as Strathfield also attend this network.

CORE (Community of Refugee Educators) North-West Sydney Cluster

The CORE North-West Sydney Cluster aims to create a community of educators in the North- West Sydney region who are interested in sharing expertise and resources to assist in the resettlement and education of students and families from refugee backgrounds. This cluster was initially established in the Parramatta region and later, in 2018 was expanded to North-West Sydney to support school communities in the North-West Sydney region due to participation of schools beyond the Parramatta and Greater Parramatta regions.

CORE is a collaboration between NSW Department of Education (DoE) and STARTTS and is specifically led by a joint team made up of the NSW DoE Refugee Support Leader (covering Carlingford, Girraween, Parramatta, The Beaches and The Forest regions), STARTTS' Auburn School Liaison Officers, STARTTS' specialist FICT Project Officers, and DoE's School Counsellor from the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team (RSCST). In 2019, an EAL/D Teacher (a regular participant of CORE from inception) joined the team to co-lead and co-facilitate the Cluster.

The network met regularly once a term in a venue in North Parramatta and sessions provided practical professional learning activities, coupled with rich discussions. Approximately sixteen to twenty-five people participated in the cluster. Participants work in groups and through those activities share expertise and knowledge. In addition to the cluster meetings, there are planning meetings, especially between STARTTS and the Refugee Support Leaders from NSW DoE who use participants' feedback after each session to inform the content of future meetings.

CORE North-West Sydney Cluster is open to both government and non-government schools. Since its inception, there has been a diverse representation from educators and student wellbeing staff across school education sectors within a large geographical region. The cluster participants included classroom teaching, EAL/D, refugee support, pastoral, learning enrichment and school counselling staff and leadership from 35 schools across NSW DoE, the Catholic Education and the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, including the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta.

Fairfield Cowpasture Refugee Support Network

The combined Fairfield Cowpasture Refugee Support Network came together in Term 2, 2019 and is a collaborative partnership between the Department of Education's Refugee Support Leaders (RSLs) and Refugee Student Counselling Support Team and STARTTS' School Liaison Program.

Participants included a range of school staff from the Fairfield and Cowpasture Principal Networks as well as classroom teachers, EAL/D teachers, Executive staff and wellbeing staff.

During 2019 the meeting focused on:

- understanding refugee experiences to inform whole school approaches
- using the Refugee Readiness Survey to inform whole school approaches and planning strategies for action
- understanding of vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience as part of our work with refugees
- identifying personal, professional and organisational strategies for self-care;
- participating in personal self-care strategies.

The Liverpool Refugee Support Network

This cluster was created as a platform for schools in the Liverpool LGA. Meetings were held once a term and routinely included elements of professional learning, networking, schools showcasing their work, guest speakers from external agencies or DoE, completing relevant sections of the refugee readiness audit/survey, developing of action plans and feeding back on successes and challenges.

The cluster came into effect in 2018, but planning began in the middle of 2017 with a team coming together including the NSW Department of Education's RSLs and RSCST and Liverpool STARTTS' School Liaison officer. The Refugee School Programs Coordinator from NSW Refugee Health also joined the team in 2018. Since then, this lead team has met regularly to discuss, plan and steer the network meetings.

The cluster sought to involve both primary and secondary schools to allow for increased collaboration between local feeder schools. It also sought to engage staff from a wider variety of roles and backgrounds, with a specific intention to engage executive staff in order for whole school approaches to be driven from senior levels within schools.

An average of 40 participants attend each meeting. In 2018, 110 primary school staff and 57 high school staff attended cluster meetings and in 2019, the attendance rate was similar. Staff who attended were from a variety of roles including wellbeing, EAL/D, School Liaison Support Officers, Community Liaison Officers(CLO), classroom teachers, and executive staff. The cluster also engaged schools who had never partaken in a refugee support network before, nor had accessed the specialised support available from the specialist teams.

In 2019, 35 staff, the majority being executive staff, attended a full day session and expressed a desire to support their staff in working with students from refugee backgrounds and to adopt whole school approach strategies.

Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) Refugee Support Network

Since 2016, Catholic schools in the South West region have seen an increase in enrolments of children and young people of refugee background. STARTTS have been actively involved in a number of these schools and the SCS Refugee and Community Liaison Officers have been working to ensure that students and families are well supported. With this increase in numbers of children and young people of refugee background, and the active role played by the Catholic Intensive English Centres (CIEC) there has also been an increase in staff to cater for this change.

The Sydney Catholic Schools Refugee Support Network came together in 2019. It is a collaborative partnership between School staff from Sydney Catholic Schools (SCS) that have children and young people of refugee background, SCS Refugee and Community Liaison Officers and STARTTS' School Liaison Officers.

In 2019, a total of 12 schools participated, including EAL/D teachers, executive staff and wellbeing personnel from primary schools and colleges from the Bankstown, Fairfield and Liverpool areas.

The focus of the cluster meetings during 2019 was on:

- increasing awareness of the roles of STARTTS School Liaison Officers and Sydney Catholic Schools Refugee and Community Liaison Officers
- introducing the Whole School Approach to supporting children and young people of refugee background and their families
- examining and creating Refugee Readiness Audits, adapted for use by Sydney Catholic Schools
- fostering a trauma-aware school environment
- responding to trauma exhibited in the classroom or playground.

Colyton Refugee Support Network - Blacktown

Colyton Refugee Support Network was created in early 2017 in the Blacktown LGA, drawing together around 20 representatives from 7 local schools including school staff such as EAL/D teachers, welfare/wellbeing officers and school executives. This cluster was facilitated by the Blacktown STARTTS School Liaison Officer (SLO) and Department of Education Refugee Support Leader overseeing the Colyton area.

The cluster meetings focused on working collaboratively to implement the Whole School Approach to support children and young people of refugee background. The network met intermittently throughout the year with a series of 1-2-hour meetings and one all day professional learning day. At the meetings, school participants received training and support to reflect on areas for improvement identified by the auditing tool of the framework and developed their own strategic or action plans to take back to their schools.

School representatives had meetings with the STARTTS SLO and DoE RSL individually between network meetings to access support in implementing and reviewing their action plans. At the end of the year, school representatives shared progress based on their individual school action plans and reflected upon the progress in embedding Whole School strategies within their respective schools. Based on the specific context and issues within each school relevant to the needs of children and young people of refugee background, interventions were initiated by each school with the support of STARTTS.

Activities included:

- examining and actioning relevant items pertinent to the Refugee Readiness Audit
- fostering Trauma-Aware School Environments
- responding to trauma in the classroom or playground
- creating opportunities for the respect and expression of culture from children and young people of refugee background.

Colyton Refugee Support Network came to a conclusion in mid-2018 as it had achieved its original objectives.

Cluster in regional New South Wales

Albury Cluster of Schools (ACOS)

The Albury Cluster of Schools (ACOS) started in 2018. It was a regular gathering of school representatives from schools with enrolments of children and young people of refugee background in a regional schools location with the intention of promoting:

- professional practice exchange between teachers, school staff and specialist services on strategies, innovations, and shared resources relevant to practice across schools in supporting children and young people of refugee background, their families and communities
- providing professional advice, consultation and learning relevant to working with children and young people of refugee background as identified by Cluster members
- identifying and responding to identified challenges and gaps in learning ecologies reported by members
- facilitating access to external agencies for support including STARTTS, Settlement Services, Mental Health organisations and other stakeholders as needed by members.

The Albury Cluster of Schools was sponsored by STARTTS. It met each term in week 3 and was composed of approximately 30 members from a range of schools in Albury. Other agencies attended the meetings as guests. The cluster was facilitated by a working party comprising STARTTS' School Liaison Officer, STARTTS' Counsellor/Project Officer, DoE Refugee Support Leader, EAL/D network mentor-Coordinator, DoE DGO/ SP, or School Counsellor, STARTTS' Community Development Officer and a representative of the NSW Refugee Student Counselling Support Team.

The ACOS is focused on achieving the following:

1. Identifying and sharing current strategies and approaches developed by teachers in schools supporting children and young people of refugee background.
2. Mobilising expertise in supporting children and young people of refugee background in a professional exchange and professional conversations via the Cluster.
3. Identifying and responding to service gaps and available supports for children and young people of refugee background in schools.
4. Mobilising inter-agency collaborations to support teachers supporting children and young people of refugee background, their families and communities.
5. Identifying professional learning that would support teachers supporting children and young people of refugee background.

Training and other forms of learning for cluster members – evaluation findings

CORE North-West Sydney Cluster

A total of 39 post-questionnaires, designed by STARTTS and the DoE, were completed by CORE Cluster participants following 3 training sessions delivered during 2019. Rating scale scores ranged from 0 – 5, 0 representing minimal understanding and knowledge and 5 representing comprehensive understanding and knowledge. Topics evaluated included understanding the impact of trauma on learning, school strategies to assist recovery, trauma aware strategies for the classroom and enhancing trauma awareness in schools through referral processes and parent-teacher interviews. Other topics included playground and whole school strategies to restore safety and enhance control.

After training, participants self-reported an increase in knowledge and understanding of different concepts relevant to working with children and young people of refugee background and their families in the school context. The participants were asked to rate their knowledge and understanding before and after the training (See **Table 6.1**).

ITEM	M	SD
a) My understanding of the link between trauma and the brain is now:	4.23	0.44
b) The neural template activity enhanced my understanding of brain neuroplasticity	4.38	0.51
c) My understanding of the window of tolerance is now:	4.31	0.48
d) The Parent Teacher interview activity deepened my understanding of how to build trauma- aware parental engagement strategies at school	4.31	0.82
e) The Student Case Study activity extended my ability to properly refer students and their families	4.54	0.64
f) The pathway to Safety activity with the start deepened my understanding of safety	4.54	0.52
g) The Domains of Safety activity deepened my understanding of how to restore safety at school	4.31	0.63
h) The Student Case Studies activity extended my knowledge and ability to restore safety and enhance control for my refugee students	4.23	0.60

Table 6.1: Descriptive Statistics for Self-Reported Knowledge and Understanding

The items which received the highest score included “The Student Case Study activity extended my ability to properly refer students and their families” (M=4.54, SD= 0.64) and “The pathway to Safety activity with the start deepened my understanding of safety” (M=4.54, SD= 0.52) followed by “The neural template activity enhanced my understanding of brain neuroplasticity”

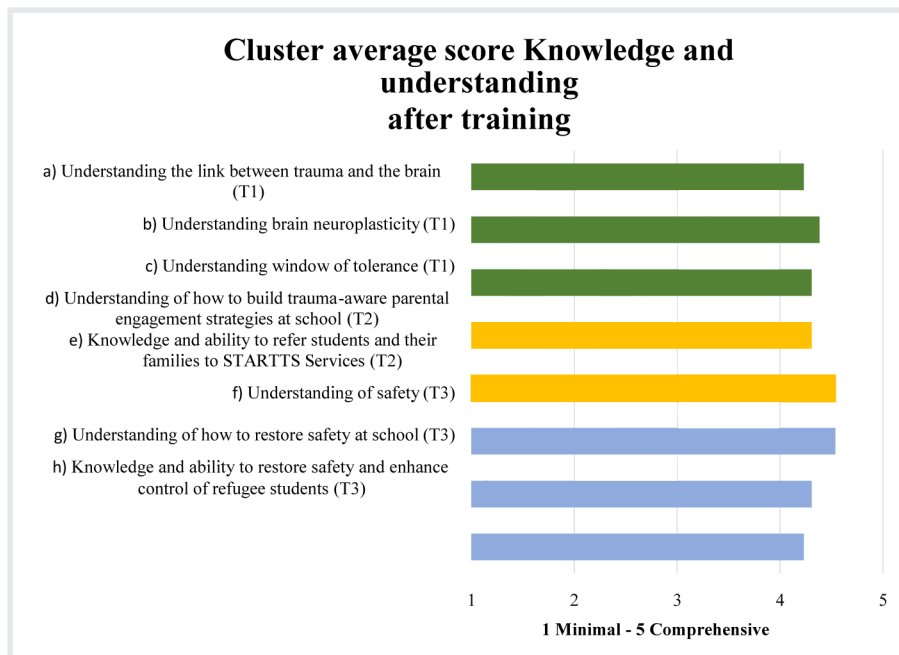


Figure 6.1: Cluster average score knowledge and understanding after training

Fairfield Cowpasture Refugee Support

Two pre and post questionnaires were used in 2019 to measure the effectiveness of the training in this cluster. They measured cluster participants’ knowledge of, perceived capability, and confidence towards vicarious trauma, resilience and self-care and toward building effective whole school processes and practices to work effectively with children and young people of refugee background and their families.

The questionnaires included items about participants’ knowledge which were preceded by the statement “How much do you know about” and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (I know nothing) to 5 (I know a lot). Confidence items were preceded by the statement “How confident do you feel about”, and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident). Capability items were preceded by the statement “How capable do you feel – ” and rated on a five- point Likert scale from 1 (certainly not capable) to 5 (very capable).

19 school staff from Fairfield Cowpasture Refugee Support Network completed the evaluation. As shown in **Table 6.2**, this indicated significant gains in participants’ self-reported knowledge.

	PRE		POST	
How much do you know about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) The stressors experienced by students from a refugee background once they have arrived in Australia?	3.47	0.96	4.11	0.74
b) The biological, psychological and social impacts of trauma on refugee students?	3.37	0.68	4.11	0.66
c) The impact of trauma on refugee students?	3.37	0.90	4.32	0.75
d) The roles of various personnel that support students and families from refugee backgrounds(e.g. RSLs, RSCST, STARTTS)	3.21	0.85	3.95	0.71
e) The Refugee Readiness Survey?	2.68	1.25	3.58	0.96
How confident do you feel about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) Identifying whole school approaches to support refugee students?	3.47	1.07	3.95	0.85
b) Implementing the whole school approaches to support refugee students	3.37	1.07	3.76	0.95
c) Finding help and support for yourself when you need it?	3.37	0.96	3.97	0.98
How capable do you feel -	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) To apply a 'whole school' approach to supporting students and families from refugee backgrounds	3.05	0.91	3.99	0.71
b) Developing an action plan in your school	3.05	0.91	3.76	0.75
c) Implementing an action plan in your school	3.21	0.85	3.61	0.86

Table 6.2: Descriptive statistics for self-reported knowledge, confidence, and capability

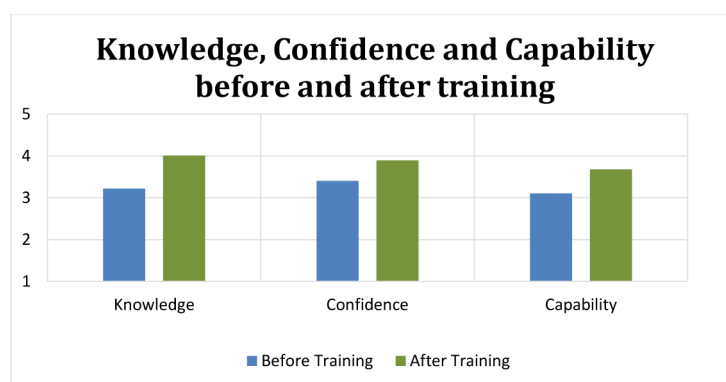


Figure 6.2: Average score participants' knowledge of trauma and refugee experiences to inform whole school approaches, confidence level and capability to identify and implement whole school approaches.

Positive feedback about the value of this workshop included having a range of points of view, allocation of time to work on a plan for schools and primary teachers being able to meet high school teachers. One participant said that the most useful aspect of the workshop was **“being able to share with other schools approaches that are taken by each school in regard to refugee students, programs that implemented into schools that are successful.”**

Supporting each other: School Communities valuing staff wellbeing – training results

The evaluation of this specific workshop included 21 school staff who participated in the Cluster meetings. Results indicated significant gains in participants' self-reported knowledge, confidence, and capability (see **Figure 6.3**). Descriptive statistics for individual items are provided in **Table 6.3**.

	PRE		POST	
How much do you know about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) The concept of vicarious trauma	3.19	0.80	4.14	0.59
b) The concept of vicarious resilience	2.71	1.16	4.10	0.53
c) The concept of self-care	3.24	0.99	4.24	0.68
How confident do you feel about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) Recognising symptoms of vicarious traumatisation in yourself	2.57	1.10	4.19	0.74
b) Identifying strategies for reducing the effects of vicarious trauma	2.71	1.25	4.24	0.77
c) Identifying and implementing self-care strategies	2.90	1.06	4.33	0.70
How capable do you feel -	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries	4.19	0.91	4.38	0.64
b) Applying a “whole school” approach to support children and young people of refugee background and their families	3.62	0.91	4.14	0.74
c) Finding help and support for your school	3.57	0.85	4.24	0.70

Table 6.3: Descriptive statistics for self-reported knowledge, confidence, and capability

As a result of training there were increases in all areas. Although participants knew something about vicarious trauma, resilience and self-care, their level of confidence before the training was much less. It indicates that after the training, participants were able to identify vicarious trauma and implement self-care strategies with more confidence.

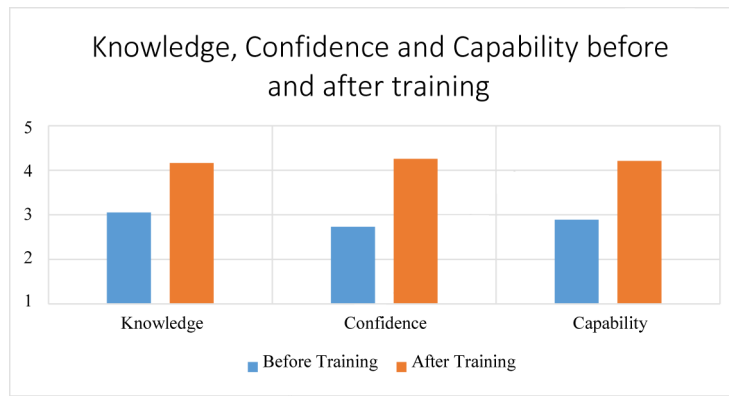


Figure 6.3: Average score participants' knowledge of trauma and refugee experiences to inform a whole school approach, confidence level and capability to identify and implement a whole school approach.

Many participants liked the practical nature of the session, with many ideas about relaxing activities, particularly the Capoeira, the Laughter Yoga and the Teacher Wellness Kit. Participants summed this up with: **“I learnt to love myself and to take time for myself”** and **“Understanding how to take care of myself to better support my refugee students”**. This suggests that participants increased their capacity for self-care, ultimately making them better equipped to support their students from refugee backgrounds.

Sydney Catholic schools Refugee Support Network

The findings presented are derived from a questionnaire conducted after a Network meeting in 2019. The questionnaires included items about participants' knowledge or perceived capability which were preceded by the statement “to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement” and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Participants' responses by item suggest that the training sessions had positive effects on their knowledge, confidence and capability on different aspects relevant to working with children and young people of refugee background and their families in the school context including trauma and whole school approaches (see Table 6.4).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	MDN	SD
a) Because of this session, I know more about refugee experiences and trauma	3.83	0.58
b) Because of this session, I know more about the roles of various personnel that support children and young people of refugee background and their families in schools	4.25	0.51
c) Because of this session, I feel more capable of applying a whole school approach to supporting children and young people of refugee background	4.08	0.51
c) Because of this session, I feel more capable of developing an action plan in my school	3.82	0.75
c) I feel capable of implementing an action plan in my school	3.82	0.75

Table 6.4: Descriptive statistics for self-reported knowledge, confidence, and capability

The items which received the highest rating (agree and strongly agree) were those related to support available and implementing whole school approaches and action plan to support the specific needs of students from refugee background. To illustrate, 91% of participants self-reported that as a result of the training, they were more knowledgeable about refugee support roles in schools such as STARTTS School Liaison Officers, SCS Refugee and Community Liaison Officers and 90% feel more capable of applying a ‘whole school’ approach.

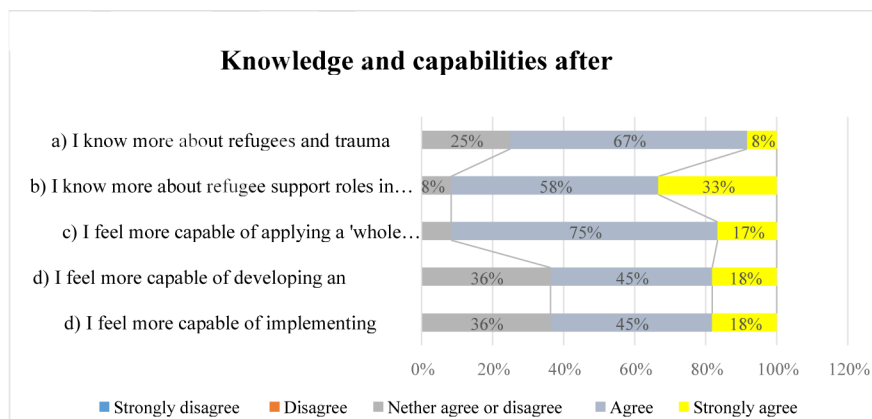


Figure 6.4: Participants' knowledge of trauma, refugee support and capabilities in applying action plans whole school approach and action plans following the training

Participants in the Network reported that they enjoyed hearing about what other schools were doing and what services and external supports are available. They indicated that they would like to be able to collaborate more with other schools and improve the communication between schools. The sharing of common struggles and celebrations around schools was also seen as important. Another participant indicated that more people need to be part of this network as it was informative learning and hearing from others.

Discussion about the use of the Refugee Readiness Audit to inform action plans was also seen as valuable as it could inform processes and policies in place for refugee students. One participant stated that it covered *“ideas for a whole school plan”* and another commented: *“We need to develop an action plan to address some of the gaps we have at the College. The idea of a team to steer implementation is great.”*

Liverpool Refugee Support Network

Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to measure the effectiveness of 2 training sessions delivered and identify the overall impacts of the cluster meetings during 2019.

Training Session 1:

Working with children and young people of refugee background - Training results

The evaluation questionnaire included three items about participants' knowledge which were preceded by the statement “How much do you know about” and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (I know nothing) to 5 (I know a lot). Confidence items were preceded by the statement “How confident do you feel about”, and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not confident) to 5 (very confident). Capability items were preceded by the statement “How capable do you feel –” and rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (certainly not capable) to 5 (very capable). Composite scores were used to compare ratings before and after the training, created by summing participants' responses to each of the three domains examined.

Participants included 24 school staff from the Liverpool area. School staff were predominantly executive staff and EAL/D teachers and were aged between 24 and 68 years of age ($M = 44.71$, $SD = 10.48$). Most of the participating staff were female (87.5%). Participating school staff had between <1 and >30 years of teaching experience ($M = 16.35$, $SD = 10.09$), and most (41.6%) had more than 5 years of experience working with children and young people of refugee background.

Results indicated significant gains in participants' self-reported knowledge, confidence and capability (see Figure 6.5). Descriptive statistics for individual items are provided in Table 6.5.

	PRE		POST	
How much do you know about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) The stressors experienced by children and young people of refugee background once they have arrived in Australia?	3.29	0.95	4.33	0.72
b) The biological, psychological and social impacts of trauma on children and young people of refugee background?	3.13	0.90	4.33	0.66
c) The impact of trauma on refugee parents and families?	3.25	0.94	4.39	0.67
How confident do you feel about:	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) Identifying and managing possible triggers of distress for a traumatised student?	3.08	0.88	4.33	0.59
b) Placing limits around your own involvement to ensure that both you and the student are safe?	3.08	0.97	4.56	0.74
c) Finding help and support for yourself when you need it?	3.17	0.82	4.50	0.74
How capable do you feel -	MDN	SD	MDN	SD
a) To apply a 'whole school' approach to supporting children and young people of refugee background and their families.	3.04	0.71	4.44	0.61
b) To respond to someone who discloses traumatic experiences	3.38	0.71	4.44	0.61
c) To respond to someone who appears angry or hostile.	3.42	0.58	4.28	0.65
d) To respond to someone who is anxious.	3.63	0.71	4.39	0.60

Table 6.5: Descriptive statistics for self-reported knowledge, confidence, and capability

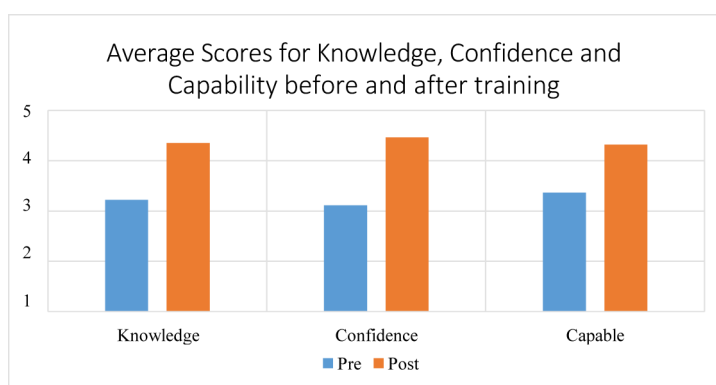


Figure 6.5: Participants' knowledge of, perceived capability, and confidence toward working with children and young people of refugee background

Training Session 2: Implementation level of whole school practices

The evaluation aimed to identify the impact of the cluster on supporting “Whole School” practices for working with children and young people of refugee background and their families by the end of 2019. The questionnaire included 5 items rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Very low) to 5 (Very high). Results are from 36 cluster participants including wellbeing staff, EAL/D teachers, SLSO, CLO, Classroom Teachers, and Executive staff.

Participants self-reported a significant increase in the implementation of appropriate Whole School approaches to support children and young people of refugee background in their schools.

Results from the pre- and post-questionnaire shows that by the end of 2019, 86% of participants used appropriate pedagogy and trauma-informed practices to support children and young people of refugee background in schools compared with 44% from the beginning of 2019, a 94% increase (see Figure 6.6).

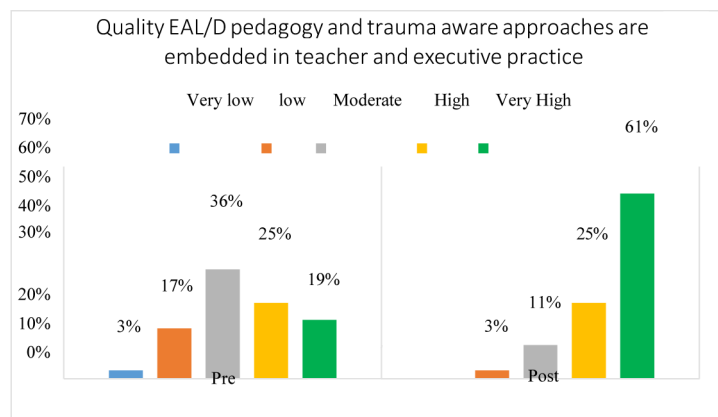


Figure 6.6: Quality EAL/D pedagogy and trauma aware approaches are embedded in teacher and executive practice

The second highest increase in percentage (75%) was “the school has partnerships with families from refugee backgrounds” and the third highest increase was “personalised approaches are used to plan support for children and young people of refugee background” (60%) (see Figure 6.7).

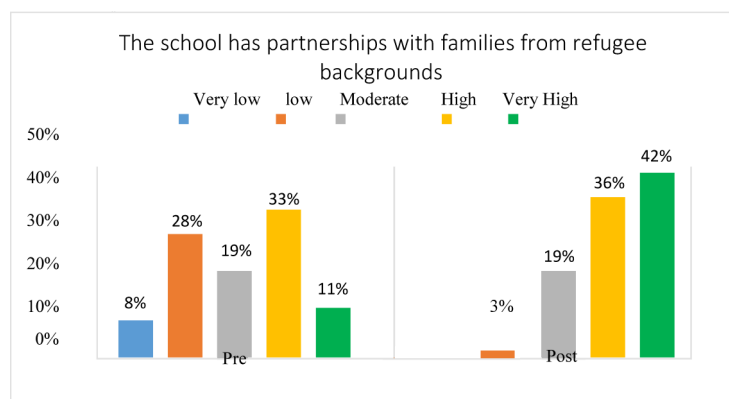


Figure 6.7: The school has partnerships with families from refugee backgrounds

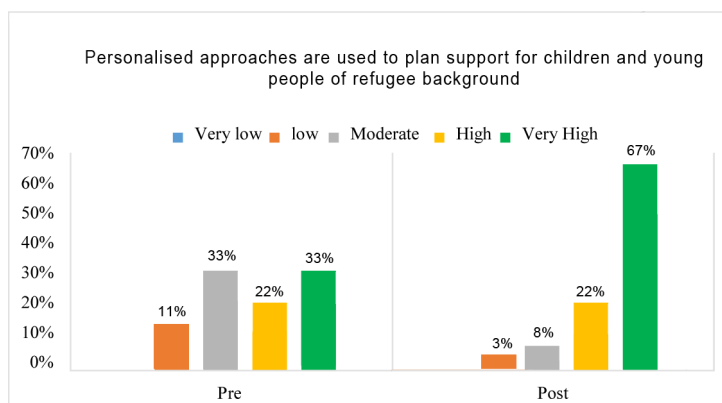


Figure 6.8: Personalised approaches are used to plan support for children and young people of refugee background

Similarly, 92% of participants self-reported that their schools offered a safe and inclusive learning environment compared with 58% before 2019 cluster meetings, a 58% increase (see Figure 6.9).

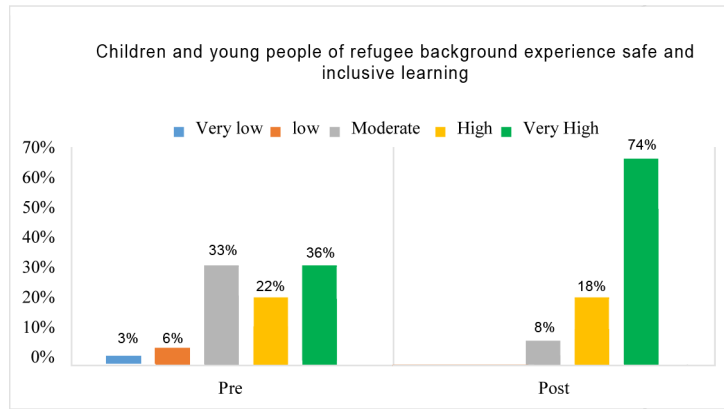


Figure 6.9: Children and young people of refugee background experience safe and inclusive learning environments

Although schools self-reported an increase, the item which received the lowest percentage of increase was the one referring to implementation of processes and practices to support children and young people of refugee background in aspects such as enrolment, transition and Teaching Professional Learning (TPL) (30%). 89% of participants self-reported High/Very High level of implementation compared with 64% before 2019 cluster meetings (See Figure 6.10).

Given that some schools were already implementing processes and practices to support students from refugee backgrounds, it may indicate that the cluster had strengthened school efforts to support staff and students from refugee backgrounds and their families during 2019.

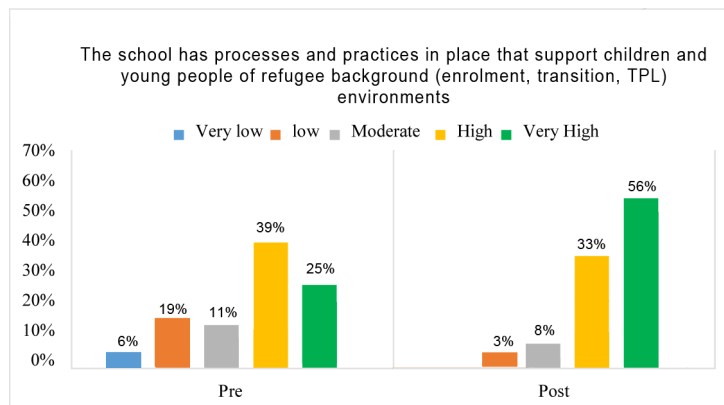


Figure 6.10: The school has processes and practices in place that support children and young people of refugee background (enrolment, transition, TPL)

Members overall experience of participating in clusters

Cluster members' comments reflected that their overall experience of engaging with their cluster was extremely positive.

Comments reflected that the establishment of the clusters first and foremost provided a platform for staff representing different schools to connect to each other around the shared interest of better supporting children and young people of refugee background in their schools and communities. These platforms and resultant strengthened professional networks enabled open discussions of support needs and challenges and the identification of those common across all participating schools. Cluster members found the opportunity to collectively explore solutions to common support needs and challenges particularly beneficial.

Members commented that they looked forward to attending cluster meetings as they provided an opportunity for an exchange of knowledge of practices and services between members with diverse ranges of experience, including members from the Department of Education and teachers from across school sectors with vastly different numbers of refugee students enrolled. Comments reflected that the cluster afforded members the opportunity to be part of a community of practice that enabled access to resources and knowledge members might not have had otherwise. Members commented on the benefit of receiving direct support from experts and specialised services and on the benefit of being able to feedback the same to their schools for implementation.

Comments further indicated that belonging to such a network resulted in an increased sense of confidence for members to provide support to children and young people of refugee background.

“For me it’s been a very positive experience both being on the working party and being a member of the cluster, a very positive experience indeed actually. It is really broadened my knowledge, and networking with a lot of people involved including people from Sydney, [School Liaison Officer]. That’s been really positive as well”

“I think it has been a positive experience because we got some action and change happening, and I think one of the biggest things has been able to raise awareness of issues that perhaps, schools can think, “What can I do about this?”. But then when we get together and collate those sorts of things, they come up as common needs, and yes mainly common need I suppose, or common frustrations, so I think that’s been the biggest benefit of it”

“Umm very positive, it’s been helpful for me in my role to be able to have a team around me that’s developed as a result of a cluster, in addressing needs in schools and solutions we can work on together”

“I looked forward to attending each meeting. We do have a number of refugee students who do enroll in our school and being a part of this community was really, we looked forward to being there and speaking to both [names] and meeting teachers it was really good”

“It has multiple aspects for me, one of the aspects is the planning sessions with [names of School Liaison Officers]. They were always fantastic, very productive, really lots of bouncing off ideas. And we all professionally developed one another, so that’s a real benefit from it. Running with the sessions with [School Liaison Officer], was similar, really rich experience for me and I think all the participants. What I also enjoyed was the diverse experiences of the participants and because we had people from across school sectors, mainly department of education staff, that facilitated some really rich discussion in terms of first of all breaking down pre-conceptions that refugee kids don’t attend private schools, but also in terms of discussions around different processes, practices and experiences”

“I really liked it. It was helpful for expanding knowledge and meeting other people from schools in similar situations and even people who have more refugees... Because we don’t have a lot, the way they were able to deal with issues, and also finding out different services that are available and people we can contact, which we have actually used”

“It’s been amazing, sometimes as an EAL/D teacher, you are the only one in the whole school and it’s hard to be able to bounce ideas off each other when you are the only person. So having a network of people helps with confidence and gives me extra ideas”

“It’s been great, it’s been fantastic. I’ve also had another teacher come along. She’s a teacher that’s participated in the network meetings as well so it’s been good. For our school we have been given lots of knowledge that we come back to the school here and give more information and able to implement some of the strategies that either STARTTS or other specialist EAL/D leadership team has given us”

“It’s been a great opportunity definitely being part of the network and to have access and also to be told about things that may not be obvious in a school setting, and the direct support from some of those services, without having to be at school. So it’s been great”

“We had a refugee support leader based at our school. I think for us at [name of school], we do have a large refugee population. We did have a lot of initiatives already in place but I think we were not utilising them in the same way”

- **Increased knowledge of and improved engagement with available non-school based support services**

Cluster members are acutely aware that learning does not occur in a vacuum, and that what occurs outside of the school gates often directly impacts students’ learning. As such, it is important for cluster members to be aware of non-school based services through which children and young people of refugee background can receive support. Members reported that their participation in the cluster expanded their knowledge of, and strengthened their connections to, non-school based support agencies. Members cited an expo of support services in 2018, as a well as an activity that mapped all available support services, to be particularly useful in expanding their awareness of available services and in-depth knowledge of the kind of support each service offers. As a result of participating in the clusters, members became more aware of services providing mental health support to students of refugee background. In particular, members found connections to STARTTS (and better understanding the breadth of STARTTS services that students and families could access), New South Wales Refugee Health and the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team particularly useful.

A member commented that her school has compiled and circulated a list of available support services for children and young people of refugee background in their area. One member commented that the professional connections made through the network with people from various support agencies made the process of referring students and families to these services easier than it would have been for individual teachers to identify and cold call services. Another member commented that establishing relationships with STARTTS staff through the network enabled a deeper understanding of student behaviour, as well as teaching strategies and techniques (further discussed below).

Members of the regional cluster provided an example of how increased knowledge of available non-school based services translated into increased direct, tangible support for learners. Members cited challenges relating to transportation that affect students’ attendance as one of the concerns that cluster members raised. Students were sometimes required to, for example, cross busy roads without intersections, potentially activating existing trauma. Through participation in the cluster, members became aware of transportation assistance provided by a local community organisation as well as other services such as local Council youth programs and local community groups.

Another member commented that children and young people of refugee background at her school were now receiving financial support for essentials such as school uniforms, school excursions and for bilingual support.

“For the first year, they’re given their uniforms, also their excursions in that first year are fully funded. We also take them on an excursion which is also fully funded and using bilingual LSOs is another thing that they’re supported in and ... oh there’s lots really ... yeah”

“Yeah, I think what I feel better equipped with is knowing some of the local service providers and sort of maybe we’ve identified gaps, we know there is some gaps in some areas and we are more aware, what’s around that’s external to schools and therefore supporting their needs in a non-school based situation, I can probably identify services and groups that could meet those needs. [...]. We’ve identified some transportation assistance through a local community organisation, we’ve got better links with the council youth programs, some local community groups such as [name of group], better ties with linking to programs and activities that they’re running and they can more friendly approach schools with the services and activities they like, or if we approach them with this family could do with assistance on such and such, the local community group can fill some of those needs. [...]. Some teachers and some people knew of some community things, but now we are all on the same page now”

“At every cluster meeting for part of the meeting we have included service providers, for example [service provider] came and gave a presentation about a new model of service, which really increased the understanding of school staff around what the provider was able to do and not able to do. It also included the volunteer resource who have the contract for the [name of program], so they’ve been able to share information about what’s available through their service. We have had mental health providers come, so the schools have increase their ability to know where to access support when they need it when it’s outside of school. And also, I mean really, I would say at the beginning a lot of staff didn’t know about STARTTS counselling process and how to make a referral to STARTTS. I mean I guess that was the base line, that understanding is now very widely understood, but also for other local service provision”

“The reason I got this role was that I had already had strong links with a range of support agencies, but I think, I got to know new ones, like abstract knowing they’re out there, because one of the core sessions we ran was all about agencies. So one of the planning sessions then was doing a mapping activity which involved looking through all the brochures [School Liaison Officer] had ever collected and scanning websites and picking peoples knowledge and that sort of stuff, and we compiled a list of agencies in the [...] region, I have a better idea of the scope that’s out there. It’s when teachers did different activities, so the extent of the agencies out there broadened, and I also think for teachers they realised STARTTS is a much more multifaceted organisation, think of it as trauma counselling, the multiple aspects like the FICT program, the school program and other things [services] became apparent to the participants”

“Yes we have used, I don’t know if we used agencies other than STARTTS, but I have been made aware of a few things in the department as well, that we didn’t know about”

“We learnt about a number of services in our areas. I guess we just need a little bit of support in putting that into practice and we’ve listed it as one of those things to do. We look forward to getting in touch with a service which gives support to our refugee families with groceries and such. We hope that some of our teachers can make a monthly donation of a packet of spaghetti or something that we can take to the service and can distribute how they believe is necessary”

“Most definitely. The expo in 2018 was a good experience because majority of providers were there and I was able to find out about external services that I did not know about”

“It was a real collaboration between especially in 2018 with New South Wales Refugee Health... outside agency definitely and working with [School Liaison Officer] directly with STARTTS and also the Refugee Support Counselling to build the network”

“There’s about four or five different external agencies that we’ve used that have helped us with families or even transitions particularly with refugee students and those who are newly arrived students to the country”

“It’s just having like bits of like cards you know like “here’s our number” they’ll do a spiel about themselves. It’s really nice to come away and reflect. And now we’ve got a little, like a little word document with different services you know, like just like a ‘go to’ with the services we can get based on families who need support for various things”

“Yes so through the Refugee Liaison Officers, I was able to get a little bit of information and I made some phone calls and I got connected through Refugee Student Counselling services as well as STARTTS. But I was working with them beforehand before starting with the network, however, to be able to see how they help across different settings and to actually put a name to the face and to have that personal connection and see them on a regular basis was definitely a lot easier because there is something that is quite time consuming as well as a little bit vague when you have to recruit new services and make referrals without having those prior connections. That was really good to get to know the people so that I know that when I pass on a message, or do make a referral that there is someone there that I know, and that has definitely been great”

“Yes, so there were a couple of external agencies that we hadn’t touched base... we didn’t know. STARTTS has been very [...] helpful. It was really nice just to listen to some of them [STARTTS staff] first hand just giving them a few ideas around students’ behaviours and getting to know the student because sometimes with teachers, when students behave in a particular way, what happens is they just assume something is not right. So just asking those certain questions, what we picked up on was really good... some really different question techniques to really get a deeper understanding of where they’re from and with the specialist teachers that we’re presenting”

Members of the regional cluster also provided an example of how engagement with the cluster improved communication with a settlement provider. At the time the cluster was first established, cluster members were concerned about what they perceived to be an insufficient communication with a settlement provider.

In response, the School Liaison Officer organised a meeting between the settlement provider and cluster members for an open discussion to voice needs and concerns. As a result, communication between schools and the settlement provider significantly improved, with settlement service staff conducting visits to schools to meet with key EAL/D teachers and better understand their needs and the needs of the students.

“Yes definitely. Definitely has improved the links and networking. Much more open connection and communication between [settlement provider] and well as certainly as to me as a school rep and representative cluster which I can then disseminate to other teachers, but also, I think all schools would find it easier to approach and get information, to and from [settlement provider] now than this time last year”

- **Systemic changes resulting from participation in clusters**

When asked if schools are better equipped to support students as result of the establishment of the clusters, members’ comments reflected several positive systemic changes within schools that support the teaching and learning of children and young people of refugee background.

- **Greater systemic collaboration between schools to address common needs and challenges**

Cluster members recognised that cluster activities were designed to foster collaboration between members with diverse experience and from across school sectors. Members’ comments reflected that the clusters were highly successful in fostering this collaboration, with one member citing an example of collaboration between a school teacher, a member of STARTTS staff and a member from the Department of Education. Comments further indicated that the collaboration and inherent exchange of knowledge fostered an increased sense of confidence for members to provide support to children and young people of refugee background, particularly for teachers from schools with fewer numbers of refugee students enrolled. Members appreciated the opportunity to identify effective strategies for addressing common challenges and felt supported by the cluster to do so.

“Most definitely. We made sure that our refugee support coordinators and other key staff were attending those meetings on a regular basis. It was good to see what other schools are doing and implementing”

“What became really helpful for schools is that they have each other’s contact details, so they are establishing a little bit of a helpful network internally within themselves as well. Another thing they are also trying in that way, instead of working independently, isolation, they combine the resources so they compare the issues across the area, and take some of those issues combined together. Whether that’s engaging with external services, identifying services that are there or not there, gaps or just engaging with a service that have not been previously engaged with the school”

“It was good to see and discuss a lot of the experiences that I was having at school with a lot of other teachers and it was reassuring to know that a lot of teachers are struggling and experiencing the same things that I was experiencing so it just made it a little bit easier and it was a great opportunity to discuss strategies that they tried that I hadn’t tried without having to go through the formal network. Just that one on one conversation was really good”

“Loads of it [professional networking], everything was based on that, that was the key design principle, so I mean it was set up as the collaboration between STARTTS and the School Liaison Team and myself and we worked with, the last one we had the Department of Education Refugee Student Counselling Support Team come along, so there was another collaboration going on between the three of us. It was designed as a collaboration and all the activities were designed for the teachers to do things collaboratively, so they shared their stories and their knowledge”

“Yes. When we came back from meetings we got to speaking with our supervisor and it just built our confidence in understanding where our refugee students have come from and were able to sort of share what we are experiencing at our schools with other schools who probably don’t have as many refugee students as we do so it was nice to share that with other teachers. We kept looking forward to the next meeting because we would see the same people at the meetings”

“Well because I’m the only ESL teacher at this school, and EAL/D teacher. Occasionally we get some new arrival funding, but basically it’s just me. So it’s really helpful to have a network where I connect with other EAL/D teachers, and just particularly schools with larger refugee communities, where they can share what they are doing. It’s helpful”

- **Increased systemic awareness and understanding of the refugee experience and needs of children and young people of refugee background**

Members commented that one of the most significant systemic changes that occurred as a result of the establishment of the clusters was in increase in systemic awareness of the needs of children and young people of refugee background. The establishment of the clusters enabled the consolidation and an understanding particularly of mental health resources not only for children and young people of refugee background, but for all students who require support. This also increased the confidence of school counsellors to provide support to children and young people of refugee background.

Members better understood the need for a welcoming school environment in which children and young people of refugee background can feel safe, and the impact that such an environment can have on students’ academic engagement. One member also better understood the need to implement a strengths-based model in supporting students from refugee background.

One member shared how, through professional learning accessed through the cluster professional learning delivered at her school by a School Liaison Officer, the school increasingly adopted more trauma-informed approaches necessary for providing adequate support to the growing number of children and young people of refugee background enrolling in that school.

While all cluster members found their experience of engaging with the cluster to be beneficial, some cluster members brought with them a wealth of knowledge of the refugee experience. Consequently, not all members reported an increased understanding of the refugee experience. These members were able to share their knowledge and expertise with other cluster members. This being said, the more experienced members of the clusters reported having benefitted from the greater collective knowledge within their schools about the refugee experience, which is useful for identifying the needs of particular schools.

"I think, in my personal point of view I am much more aware of the needs and complexities involved in the working with students from refugee background. I am much more aware of the support services that are available, the counselling service. Of course there is still challenges, if you like limitations, I think systemically we are much more aware of the needs of students coming from a refugee background"

"It's re-enforcing that need for, it's all about the relationship and making them feel safer and secure before you try and look at their skills and identifying their strengths and working from that not a deficit model"

"[...] I have a fairly good knowledge, that's why I am in this job. Probably for me it was my understanding of schools' understanding of the refugee experience. It was a step above, that understanding is much more un-even than you would hope for. [...] The people who come along are the people who want to expand their knowledge. Everyone's got what they know and what they don't know. Because I have worked with refugee kids for a long time and I have seen them across, they are as diverse as everyone else, and their families are so I don't think it has for me"

"Context of myself, I am actually involved in an organisation outside of the department, organisation that also works with refugees. In a sense no, I also have family members who were refugees. So just to put my own context, I am not saying that going along to meetings didn't extend my knowledge of the refugee experience or situation. It probably would've done, but in my own situation, I knew a fair bit"

"Before, not that I didn't know that it was tough. I always knew the refugee experience would've been tough because my grandma, being in the migrant experience was tough for her, so I knew it was going to be tough. But I had a disconnect, not that I didn't have empathy for them but I didn't understand enough to have enough empathy for them. I saw it at a surface level but now the empathy has changed so now my teaching and my approach to the children and even the approach I have when the teachers ask me for advice, the teachers are now coming to me and asking, "oh is that the right thing for me to do?" So now I am able to give them feedback, go to help them, as opposed to not being sure exactly"

"Yeah, definitely. Through [the cluster] I have been able to keep tabs on all of the professional learning that we do and through that I was able to get another person in my area, [name of School Liaison Officer] to come to our school and do professional learning through STARTTS, our school has become more trauma aware which is something we need to move towards because of our growing number of refugee students here, and just in general but it's doing that, it's just. I don't think I am doing the right thing; I know I am doing the right thing now"

- **Implementation of Refugee Readiness Surveys**

Another significant systemic change identified by cluster members was the adoption by schools of the Refugee Readiness Audit. The audit is integral to supporting the teaching and learning of students from refugee background. It assisted schools to assess their current readiness to support children and young people of refugee background and served as a starting point for the development of strategies to ensure that schools are equipped to provide support in all five areas. Members described the use of the survey as "impactful".

"They were given time to work and share ideas together yeah, and they also had to look at the refugee readiness survey which was reflecting on school current situation with each of the five areas as linked to the school, linked to leading, teaching and learning in all five areas and how to support refugee students with safe and inclusive environment, personalized learning approaches, quality of the pedagogy and then the fourth area was how they looked at developing partnerships with families and also the fifth area looking at developing processes and practices across the schools to support refugee students"

"Professional learnings delivered to the staff in order to not only attend to the needs of the EAL/D needs of the refugees, but as well as the trauma. The Refugee Readiness Survey was a great survey to take and to have that open discussion. And also the guidance to complete that and it gave us a great snapshot of where we were and it helped us to set targets that we could measure, as well as working with the wellbeing team to upskill the advisors and to assist the advisors on any other teachers that work closely with students in terms of interactive counselling. So yeah there has definitely been a great impact"

- **Improved enrolment and school transition processes**

Another systemic change reported by members was improved enrolment and school transition processes, particularly from primary school to high school. A member commented that having members representing primary schools, high schools and IECs within the clusters, and the exchange of learning between them, was particularly useful for establishing smoother transitions between each. The cluster was useful for identifying what knowledge needs to be shared between schools when students transition and for establishing effective pathways for this information to be shared.

Changes to the enrolment process included ensuring the availability of interpreters for family members and providing detailed and relevant information to both the student and family members about the enrolment process in a culturally appropriate manner.

“Yes there’s been improvements in the enrolment processes, across all schools and the transition programs to school and from primary school to high school. One of the things that schools identified before we started the cluster, was that for example the transition to [high] school for new arrivals, was not necessarily well supported because there wasn’t sort of a structure around making sure that the best support was put in place in the moment the family presented to enrol in the school. So for example, we were able to collect data and share best practice information to schools around how to have a very supportive enrolment process for families and students. A check list was shared amongst the group, making sure enrolment everything is covered including the interpreters, staff around the school who could put support in place immediately like the school counsellors, making sure they’re informed, it’s an enrolment process that is looked at in detail, that was supported, trauma-informed, and met the cultural need of the families”

“Yes definitely. We were able to link not just people from their primary context, we were able to draw in people from high school context and IEC, so across all different contexts, together and looking at their needs. We did a workshop on transition so what the high school people needed to know about the refugee students, how to get that information across so it was a smoother transition from a primary setting into a high school setting”

“Oh hundred percent! They focus using like welcoming students into our school, making them feel at home. And I must admit we as a school, we do that really well ‘cause we have a high percentage of refugee students and EAL/D are in 80+. But there were definitely processes that we do need to tighten and that was good for us”

“I think one definite part was the enrolment process and a lot to do around transition. It was just great to go “oh see this is what my primary school’s concerns were”. And definitely I think with the change of enrolment numbers as well as the student’s needs it was good to experience that with everyone else”

- **More effective use of school’s Sentral System**

One member shared that as a result of participating in the cluster, her school has better maximised the use of some features of the schools’ Sentral System, used widely across schools in NSW, to inform teachers better about the particular needs of children and young people of refugee background. For example, teachers now make better use of the system’s features including the feature that allows teachers to indicate on the system if a student’s parent requires an interpreter to ensure effective communication.

“So we’re setting up our Sentral System. When a teacher goes to login [...] there wasn’t anything to say [...] like a flag to say this child’s parents don’t speak any English and where they come from and they need a translator. Now we’ve put that into place. So we use Sentral now to do that. Because they [teachers] have to go to Sentral to do their roll, the child’s photo it tells just under there’s a purple mark whether that child, their parents needs a translator. So that’s what we’ve put in place. It’s one of the things we’ve put in place which has been excellent”

- **Adapted teaching strategies**

Several cluster members shared how they adapted their teaching strategies as a result of their participation in the clusters. One member expressed that her involvement in the cluster allowed her to implement new strategies with confidence, with opportunities to discuss the strategies with other members providing her with assurance that the strategy would be effective.

Another member shared that increased understanding of the refugee experience and the needs of children and young people of refugee background fostered a greater sense of empathy for children and young people of refugee background, which in turn influenced her teaching strategies and ability to be able to provide support to children and young people of refugee background as well as to other teachers.

Recognising the importance of trusting relationships within the school environment in effective teaching, one member shared that as result of participating in the cluster, she was more aware of the value of investing time into building trusting relationships with students and their families. The member shared that as a result of participating in the cluster, she was able to identify and implement strategies for effectively communicating with parents. Similarly, as mentioned above, other cluster members commented on how changes to school transition and enrolment processes and changes to the ways in which the Sentral system is utilised served to improve communication with parents through the use of interpreters.

Members comments reflected that not only did their teaching strategies change as a result of participating in the cluster, but that members were able to share what they had learn with other teachers at their school so that they too could adapt their teaching strategies in support of children and young people of refugee background. Some members identified and implemented formalised channels for the dissemination of knowledge and insights gained through their participation in the network, for example through the establishment of an EAL/D team who work together to refine and implement new strategies.

“At the moment we have [name] who attends with me and she’s running a language enrichment program. And she spends most time with our refugee students in teaching and learning. And we work together and [...] we are sort of more sensitive. And when our students go back to the classroom, the classroom teachers seek our advice as to how to go about putting some strategies in place or differentiating for those students. So it’s been mostly about being able to support those classroom teachers for those students who not only have the language barrier to learning but the refugee experience as well”

“Yes definitely. As I said before I used to think I was doing the right thing and now I know I am doing the right thing. As I said being the only AEL/D teacher makes it hard to stay new and fresh and be able to have different types of strategies and things like that. But when I go here, I can say, “I don’t know what I am doing here what do I do with this child?”, and someone will just, another teacher will say, “hey this is what we’re doing, why don’t you try this”, and it’s absolutely opened up so many opportunities for me so it’s great”

“I suppose not hugely, but in terms of occasionally there will be an activity or strategy I will think, “oh, hang on, I can use this with small groups”. Yeah, not every meeting has resulted in that, but there have been a few strategies I’ve never come across”

“Yeah, definitely. Being more aware of the time it takes to settle in and building those relationships and forming that trust, not just with the students but trying to talk to the parent and having interpreters so they understand what’s going on and explaining things visually so they can comprehend. And having more informal meetings too so they feel comfortable”

“Look strategies are definitely improved mostly in relation to the empathy and understanding and a lot of that, I myself am a part of a member of the learning and support team and the EAL/D, so a lot of that resonates with the teachers with one on one and the teaching support that we do so it reaches quite far with different schools”

“It did give me new ideas that I was able to pass on to our staff but I am not in the classroom as much anymore as much I would like to be. I did find a few of the suggestions useful and passed this on to teachers”

“Yes absolutely and not just my involvement but the implementation to the school right across”

“After we have our network meeting the EAL/D teacher and myself will get together and we’ll write down some notes and then we will, at the communication meeting that we have every Tuesday, well we have over a hundred and one staff at this school, about 80 on ground per day pretty much and on a Tuesday the majority of our staff are here. And during that communication meeting we would summarize some of the things that came up in the meeting what worked out now is an EAL/D team actually we’ve all got together with the EAL/D teachers and now we’re just refining some of the strategies and some of the processes that need to take place to make to be a bit more effective when dealing with our refugee and newly arrived students”

Additional Feedback

Additional feedback from cluster members reiterated the value of access to professional learning and knowledge exchange between cluster members, as well as the value of having direct contact with people within various support agencies. Members also expressed their appreciation for the level of expertise held by presenters, and for the work of the School Liaison Officers who convened and supported the clusters, particularly for their professionalism and provision of practical strategies.

Further, members expressed that, particularly for teachers from schools with lower numbers of students from refugee background enrolled, teaching and providing support to children and young people of refugee background can be an isolating experience, further substantiating the need to belong to a network of this nature.

Finally, members expressed the need for the clusters to remain active in order for education professionals to become better equipped with both teaching and wellbeing strategies that contribute to a safe and supportive learning environment for children and young people of refugee background.

“I found those meetings very beneficial. I found them a good professional learning and to have that time to see what other schools are doing and implementing. That contact person to direct you was beneficial. It was easier to start conversations than me now having to call if the initial contact is not there. I am sad that they are probably not going to continue in the same format. I wish they would continue”

“I’ve just really enjoyed collaborating and working with [School Liaison Officer] from STARTTS in her role and [name] from the counselling team and the other refugee support leaders and also learning from other participants who have attended our network meetings... sharing some of their great ideas of what they’re doing in school”

“The presenters, they were really good. Absolutely fantastic. [...School Liaison Officer] she was fantastic [...]. Really good strategies you can pick up and run with”

“[SLO] was so professional in her role with a big smile and talking to us about how it’s going in our schools. Being part of that community is kind of special and we continue to enjoy being part of it”

“Teaching can be a very isolating job, but being able to have these meetings makes you not feel isolated anymore and kind of revitalises the role and revitalises your teaching as well”

“I think even though it’s not a huge network, I think it is a really important network. As I said before, schools have small numbers, have different needs, and often refugee education is not seen as a whole school priority, it is seen as a priority of the teacher so that’s really important. So I am basically putting a plug in for it to continue next year, and my understanding is it will, that STARTTS are going to continue to support it next year, I think those teachers feel better equipped in terms of wellbeing strategies and thinking about how they can create a safe and supportive environment and use teaching strategies to do that”

Additional Feedback Specific to the Regional Context

1. **Greater knowledge of local needs, challenges and stakeholders**

A member of the Sydney-based yet state-wide servicing Refugee Counselling Support Team stated that as she is not based in the area in which the cluster operates, her participation in the cluster greatly enhanced her understanding and knowledge of local needs, challenges and stakeholders. The member articulated the difficulties of delivering services in an area one is not based in, describing the experience as potentially “isolating”. The member’s comments reflected that participation in the cluster enabled the fostering of relationships with local stakeholders, and effective communication and understanding of local needs and challenges. These professional relationships also increased the Refugee Counselling Support Team’s access to schools and vice versa.

“For our team [Refugee Counselling Support Team] has been a great impact, as I am covering [...] area by myself. It is very isolating to go into an area where you don’t have the contacts, and you don’t know the ground rules and the lay of the land, you don’t know which schools have needs and they don’t know how to communicate their needs to you, so the cluster creating a platform where we meet each other and talk about the service [...]. I was able to meet more schools, and opens the door to a lot more schools, and I was aware of the issues the schools were having, but I wouldn’t have been made aware [otherwise...]. And made relationships a little bit more possible and stronger, even now it is a different type of conversation than a stranger coming from Sydney to a school because they will think what do you know about our area. It is true you don’t know a lot this is why the cluster is good, so you can learn about the area the issues and challenges they are voicing as well”

2. **Appreciation of STARTTS’ investment in regional schools and communities**

One regional cluster member expressed the appreciation that schools feel for when workers based in metropolitan areas visit schools in regional areas, rather than relying on remote communication. The schools recognised and appreciated the investment in delivering STARTTS’ services in person to regional areas.

“Regional teachers, regional schools really appreciate when people in more city-based or metropolitan-based positions, can get up on the ground in a regional place. The fact that [School Liaison Officer] and other STARTTS people have given [support] to the capoeira program that has run at [name of School], STARTTS have committed a lot of money to travel this year, and I believe people down here really appreciate that. Even the schools I support when I drive for an hour or two, they are very appreciative of the time it takes to do it and that’s how we feel down here about STARTTS, in particular [School Liaison Officer] coming and being so invested in our schools, our students and the community in trying to improve things here”

3. **Gratitude for the dedication and professionalism shown by the School Liaison Officer.**

“The [Rural and Regional cluster] has been very ably established and lead by [School Liaison Officer]. He has kept on track with support and advocacy of local needs. He is responsive and proactive to the needs identified by schools and the EAL/D community of teachers. Having a working party to oversee the planning of and follow up from meetings has been a great idea. The cluster has been a positive establishment due to the ability to focus on local issues and acknowledge their reality”

General feedback about Cluster

Members of the regional cluster were also asked about their experience of the cluster through a completion of a survey, and all “agree” that it has addressed their needs and supported them to address issues and challenges. Others member “somewhat agree” that they felt effectively listened to by the cluster, and that the cluster expanded their professional networks (75%).

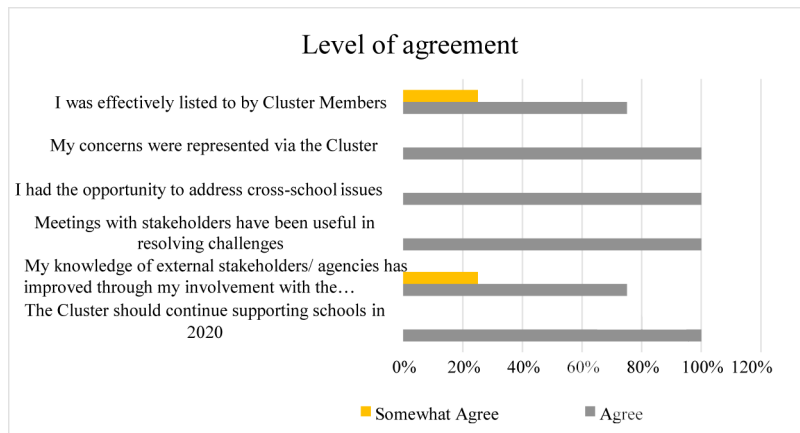


Figure 6.11: Level of agreement

Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation findings indicate positive outcomes of STARTTS creation and support to clusters of schools in New South Wales between 2017 and 2019.

A total of seven clusters were established and supported during this period with the participation of approximately 180 school staff representatives. The partnership with NSW Department of Education (DoE) in the creation and support of those clusters is emphasised as very significant, especially the collaboration with The Refugee Support Leaders (RSLs) and the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team (RSCST).

Qualitative and quantitative analyses show that clusters have an important role in helping schools to make systemic changes to better support children and young people of refugee background in their schools. Participation in the clusters has supported members to increase their networking and collaboration with other schools and specialised services, to share knowledge and best practices, and collectively explore solutions to common needs and challenges. Clusters also became a relevant space for members to expand their knowledge of and communication with non-school based services available, particularly mental health and settlement services providers. Service providers were also able to increase their knowledge of the needs and challenges faced by schools.

The clusters have also offered a valuable opportunity for members to access professional learning to become better equipped with both teaching and wellbeing strategies. Training delivered within the clusters has produced relevant outcomes on the knowledge, understanding, capability and confidence to engage and support students from refugee backgrounds. Cluster members increased their understanding of the refugee experience, the needs of children and young people of refugee background and improved enrolment and school transition processes for students. Notably, some training content was similar among clusters including trauma and using the Refugee Readiness Survey (RRS) to develop and implement whole school approaches to appropriately support students in schools. It may indicate a common need of schools across NSW to improve support to children and young people of refugee background.

Finally, evaluation results suggest that increasing the participation of schools' executive staff, continuing to engage other schools and investing in professional development positively impact the clusters and the support provided to children and young people of refugee background. The importance of the clusters as spaces to advocate for the needs of the schools and their students, particularly in regional areas, was also highlighted in the evaluation results.

Recommendations from Cluster Members

Feedback received from cluster members highlighted the importance of the following:

- Increased participation of executive school staff who might have more agency than teachers in clusters.
- Clusters should continue to ensure that they remain responsive to local needs and circumstances.
- In all areas, including regional areas, clusters should actively advocate on issues affecting the settlement of people from refugee backgrounds.
- Acknowledgement of the value of the Refugee Readiness Audit.
- Using the cluster strategy to facilitate student transitions from primary school to secondary school and/or from English Intensive Centres to mainstream schools.

Lastly,

- the continuation and expansion of cluster activities and continued professional development for cluster members.



Chapter 7: Findings - Impact of the School Liaison Program Steering Committee

Introduction

This chapter explores the impact of the School Liaison Program Steering Committee which later grew to become a consultative mechanism for the whole STARTTS in Schools Strategy. The Steering Committee was identified as an essential structure for project implementation by Professor Peter Shergold AC, NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement.

To determine the impact of Steering Committee, a focus group discussion with 4 members of the committee as well as individual interviews with a further 3 members were conducted. The qualitative data collected was thematically analysed. The findings are presented below.

Background

The Steering Committee, initially convened in 2017, consisted and still consists of representatives from STARTTS, the NSW Department of Education, Independent Schools NSW, Catholic Schools NSW, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Refugee Health. Agency representatives are team leaders and managers overseeing refugee welfare in schools. STARTTS provides secretariat support to the Steering Committee.

The aims of the Steering Committee are as follows:

1. Contribute to the development of a framework for community development and clinical programs conducted with students affected by torture and trauma, and mutual engagement between STARTTS and schools in NSW.
2. Contribute to the development of indicators to evaluate the success of the School Liaison Program.
3. Enable all stakeholders to participate in the development of a plan for collaboration and well-coordinated strategy to enhance the wellbeing of refugee students and families.
4. Provide feedback to STARTTS SLP to ensure the program remains both responsive and strategic and that there is minimal duplication.

While the Steering Committee was initially convened to support the School Liaison Program alone, it later evolved to inform the STARTTS in Schools strategy more broadly.

Participants were invited to attend meetings of the Steering Committee and to contribute to discussions that focused on committee objectives. The agencies were also invited to comment on project documents.

The steering committee met every two months during the first year of the project. Since commencement of the second year, the steering committee met once per term.

Findings

Overall Experience of Participating in the Steering Committee

The comments of members interviewed reflected that their experience of being part of the Steering Committee was extremely positive. Members indicated that the committee provided an opportunity for key education stakeholders to learn about each other's initiatives, services and priorities. This enabled the development of a coordinated approach to providing services to schools, children and young people of refugee background and their families in NSW. Members reported that this coordinated approach (further discussed below) limited duplication of services and prevented different services from working against each other.

"It was terrific actually to be able to meet with other key stakeholders in regards to the overall education unit. So I think you know those types of things are always useful when you're out to get a hold of the stakeholders in one place at the one time. And I think particularly they got us well. So yes it was very good"

"I have found it very useful to find out what STARTTS are doing, to at times find out what was happening in some of the network meetings that were being coordinated by members of the School Liaison team with other members of the department, counsellors and refugee support leaders. And it was also a really good forum in terms of just sharing information, issues, having discussions so that we could be providing a sort of coordinated approach. So without that steering committee, it would have been really hard to coordinate and collaborate on things that are happening locally"

"I do think it's a very complex thing to get people from different agencies to understand one another's priorities and language etc. And in the first meeting we were asked to sort of go around and talk about what we did so everybody did talk from a place of you know what their priorities were. It was sort of like "well where do you go from here?" And I remember Peter Shergold saying, "well I can see there's quite a lot of overlap in what people do and I can see that if you don't work together then there's some problems... duplication and also not working against one another really rather than together". And I think that was the position we started at after the first meeting was how were we going to do this"

"Overall it's been positive. I think it's very valuable for my work in terms of meeting with the other stakeholders and receiving up to date information from them and also just to hear the information from the STARTTS and about the projects and how we can better work together and collaborate"

Developed framework and well-coordinated strategy for programs to enhance wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background and families.

As indicated in the comments above, members deemed the most significant achievement of the steering committee to be the development of a coordinated strategy for programs to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background and their families.

The comments below indicate that members recognised that having multiple agencies/organisations offering various support services to children and young people of refugee background and their families is potentially problematic with the risk of duplication of services and schools becoming inundated with information about various support services from various agencies/organisations.

Members' comments reflected that the Steering Committee enabled greater collaboration, particularly between the NSW Department of Education, Independent Schools NSW and Catholic Schools NSW, and contributed to an enriched, better resourced support team across organisations.

Members attributed the success of this coordinated approach largely to a mapping exercise that catalysed it. Mapping the services offered by each agency/organisation represented in the committee assisted in the identification of overlaps and gaps in services offered to children and young people of refugee background and their families in NSW. The mapping also identified areas in which agencies/organisations could collaborate and resulted in a strategy that enabled key stakeholders to work in a way that was complementary rather than competitive.

"It was a sort of joint response we were able to have because we would consult with each other, we would refer on to each other, we would collaborate on professional learning and we would collaborate on advice. So I think the biggest achievement was being able to sort of present in a way a seamless kind of response bringing the different kinds of expertise into the picture and not just thinking "okay, how do support this particular individual student or family who has needs?" But rather how do we support the school, the teachers, the community liaison officer working at the school, the principal, to provide professional learning for the staff or information to the staff on top of providing that direct support to the child and family. There are a lot of different strategies we roll with and by working together and offer those collaboratively"

"We had to have a really good understanding of how each other's organizations intend to work. Because prior to having this steering committee and prior to having a landscape in which there were three different teams [Department of Education, Independent Schools NSW and Catholic Schools NSW] providing different kinds of support for the schools around, supporting families and children and young people of refugee background, I would say there was a lot more you know STARTTS working with some schools closely without that collaboration happening necessarily either with other teachers, other schools with a counselling service. There wasn't a lot of collaboration necessarily and we didn't necessarily understand the way the other teams and organisations worked [...]. It was a far less rich landscape if you like of support. This steering committee enabled that enriched, better resourced support team if you like across the three organisations to work sort of in a coordinated way"

"Peter Shergold came along because he was Coordinator General of Refugee Resettlement. He came along to the first meeting and we all introduced ourselves and there were these three teams and you know we said "well I am so-and-so and my work is coordinating with this team who is going to be supporting schools" and so we all introduced ourselves and he said at the end of it "Wow! There are a lot of people working to support the schools, it could be great or it could be terrible." Because what could have happened is that we could have all gone off independently and offered our services to schools and it would have been really difficult for schools... how to know who to call for what. So we sat down immediately and thought, "well what can we do about that?" And one of the first things we did in the first year was to map the kind of services that we provided and the expertise that we have. And when we first did that it was quite a lot of overlap between us and as we went on, we were able to understand better I suppose what were the expertise of particular people in teams and where should we spend our energies and where should we ask the other teams to sort of provide their expertise [...]. That really came about as a result of us being able to go to and from our teams, back to the coordinating committee, and back to the team and sort of keep revisiting that over a period of time and change the way the approach is scored depending on that as it unfolded or developed"

"[School Liaison Team Leader and Community Services Coordinator] asked a couple of us from education to get together and to see if we could map out what each of our agencies did. [...] We worked out the mapping sort of overview of what we did and I think that's guided what was happening in the steering committee from then on and as other agencies came on board like Catholic Education and New South Wales Health, they could also add into that mapping exercise that we did and we could see immediately who did what and whether a particular agency was doing that alone or whether they were working in the same areas. And also we could see opportunities to work together where there are opportunities to build our own expertise and agency. I think that to me was a major initiative a major thing that we did and even the steering committee was seeing what everybody did. Organising that in a way that made sense so that we weren't competing with one another".

"I guess how it affects my project and contribution is getting all the key stakeholders together, meaning like private and public schools and religious schools and health and community and education obviously. I think that's one of the greatest achievements that they are able to collaborate with all the key stakeholders and encourage us to work together".

Development of indicators to evaluate the success of SIS

While the indicators for the School Liaison Program evaluation were determined by the Key Performance Indicators outlined in the funding contract between STARTTS and the NSW Department of Education (and later extended to the evaluation of STARTTS in Schools more broadly), minutes of the Steering Committee meetings indicate that the committee was kept updated on the progress of the evaluation, and that members were invited to provide feedback on the evaluation methodologies and evaluation tools employed.

Provision of feedback to STARTTS School Liaison Program and STARTTS in Schools

During interviews with members of the Steering Committee, members clearly indicated that, at each meeting, members of the School Liaison Team, Youth Team and Child and Adolescent Counsellors provided an update on all STARTTS in Schools activities and progress. At this time, all members were provided with the opportunity to provide feedback on program activities.

“Every meeting we had, we had a certain part set aside so that we could see what the progress was like and what were the activities happening in the program. So that was very clearly explained in every meeting that we had with the steering committee and each of the agencies had an opportunity to say what they were doing in relation to this program”

Interviewer: Did you have the opportunity to provide feedback to the School Liaison Program?

Participant: Yes, yes

Interviewer: Did you feel that you were able to provide that feedback and contribute in that way?

Participant: Yes, so at the committee I usually talk about the collaborations that we have with the School Liaison Program. Yes.

Additional Feedback

A member of the Steering Committee attributed the committee's success to its leadership, particularly the leadership of the Community Services Coordinator and the School Liaison Program Team Leader. The member noted the creation of an environment of inclusiveness, openness and respectfulness in which all representatives of agencies could speak openly. The member went on to share that the ways in which the different agencies were able to work together is something to be proud of, as it had far reaching impacts. The member also noted the importance of the continuation of the School Liaison Program.

Another member commented that through participation in the committee, the member was better able to access the support of STARTTS in their work in Catholic schools.

“And I'd like to acknowledge the leadership, the people from STARTTS who were involved [Community Services Coordinator] and [School Liaison Team Program Leader] in particular. In those first few meetings there was an openness, sort of respectfulness that enabled everybody to have their say for their particular agencies and I think I'm probably going to the end here but I think that's what actually happened, we started to work together”

“It was a positive experience to me and when Peter Shergold wrote in a paper which was to the New South Wales government, I think that he was talking about this initiative and how people have worked together and he said was to the credit of all of the agencies involved and I'd just like to stick on that. So it was a very much included and I felt it's something to be proud of... so we can work together. And you know I would also like to say that the liaison program... I'd hate to see it stop. It's been a wonderful thing, wonderful for students, opportunity for many, many things and I know that the evaluation is part of, part of that is to have it explained to your funders why you need to continue. So I'd like to say that I'd really like to see the program continue”

“I have I guess my direct contact with [SLO and SL Team Leader] in the committee to provide a lot of support to me when I need it, so that's for me been another key achievement at the committee. I mean the STARTTS staff are available to provide guidance and support to the Catholic schools and to my project”

The future of the Steering Committee

All members unanimously stated that the Steering Committee should continue to function to ensure the continuation of the provision of a coordinated range of support services to children and young people of refugee background and their families in NSW.

“I would like to keep the steering committee going. It’s really important so that as long as we are providing support for schools in assisting them with the students and families from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, that it’s really important for us to keep meeting and keep working together to get updates on what each other is doing. There’s a lot of work going on in each of our teams, in each of our organizations”

“I mean you have a program that works successfully or an initiative that works successfully it’s because of the personalities involved and sometimes it’s because of the organisation that has been set up around that. I think both of those things of being in the steering committee during my time there, though I think the attitude of the people involved which was “Let’s work together. Let’s make sure we’re thinking about our clientele- the Refugee students in our schools and let’s put them at the top and make sure that we’re not just thinking about the agencies”. So I think that would be very important to maintain. And also the way it was done as I said was done in a respectful way, and everybody was willing to listen to one another and maybe adjust accordingly so that would be very important to maintain too”

“Thank you to STARTTS for organising this committee. I think it’s just really important that the key stakeholders get together and share their information”.

Conclusion

The findings show that the Steering Committee effectively fulfilled its aims. The Steering Committee offered an opportunity for stakeholders from different agencies to connect and familiarise themselves with the initiatives, services and priorities of each agency. This enabled a coordinated approach to providing community development and clinical programs to children and young people of refugee background and their families, reducing the risk of duplicating services across agencies.

At each meeting, updates were provided to the Steering Committee on all STARTTS in Schools activities and feedback on the same was invited. This provided an opportunity for the Steering Committee to ensure that STARTTS in Schools remained responsive and strategic and again prevent duplication of programs across services. Similarly, the Steering Committee was invited to provide feedback on STARTTS in Schools evaluation methods.

All members of the committee agreed that the Steering Committee should remain active going forward.





Chapter 8: General Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation results show significant and positive outcomes of the STARTTS in Schools strategy (SIS). The outcomes of the different chapters in this report show that the SIS strategy has developed a comprehensive and effective intervention approach to support school aged children and young people of refugee background, their families and their schools.

Improved coordination and access to STARTTS specialist services and support for children and young people of refugee background

The evaluation results show that between 2017 and 2019 a significant number of children and young people of refugee background (4,743) were able to access and benefit from STARTTS' specialist services. As a result of the implementation of the SIS strategy and the coordination interface of the School Liaison Program with schools, the number of referrals and the percentage of acceptance to STARTTS services increased significantly during this period with an acceptance rate of 98%, exceeding the 85% target established by the NSW Department of Education and STARTTS (see **Chapter 3**).

External and internal collaboration had an influential role on this positive outcome. Externally, the coordination between STARTTS, schools, the Department of Education and the Catholic Education Office supported schools access and referrals to specialist services for children and young people of refugee background and their families. Notably, the work of the clusters (networks of schools) and the Steering Committee enhanced the development of a coordinated strategy for agencies to meet the needs of children and young people of refugee background in NSW (see **Chapter 6**).

Internally, the collaboration between the different teams within STARTTS allowed the delivery of appropriate and specialist services under the STARTTS in Schools strategy, including individual counselling (14,792 sessions) and targeted trauma-informed group-work interventions (3,138 sessions) (see **Table 3.2 and Table 3.3 in Chapter 3**).

A multidisciplinary group with varied areas of expertise were involved in the delivery of interventions including Child and Adolescent Counsellors, Youth Workers and School Liaison Officers. This was also supported by an increase in overall STARTTS resources associated with the expansion of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program which resulted in an increase in settlement in NSW.

Similarly, training delivered to school staff also increased coordination and access to STARTTS specialist services and support for children and young people of refugee background. Through the clusters and training delivered at schools, participants increased both their knowledge about STARTTS' services and referral pathways and their confidence to refer students. Participants also acquired and increased knowledge, capability and confidence in a variety of areas to support children and young people of refugee background in their schools (see **Table 4.3, Table 4.4 and Table 4.7 in Chapter 4**).

Improved the participation and engagement of children and young people of refugee background at school

The specialist services delivered to children and young people of refugee background supported their participation and engagement at school. Individual counselling and trauma-informed group-work interventions were designed and implemented using a needs-based approach tailored to specific issues, challenges, strengths and circumstances of students and schools. Consequently, the content of interventions, number and duration of sessions were adjusted to identified needs (**see Chapter 3**).

This approach allowed students to work through their own difficulties and also generated positive outcomes on different levels including in the school context. Additionally, the majority of interventions were on school grounds during or after school hours which increased students' motivation to see their new friends and attend school (**see Chapter 5**).

Improvement of children and young people of refugee background wellbeing also positively impacted their participation and engagement at school. Children and young people of refugee background who participated in STARTTS' programs improved their academic performance, concentration, attendance and respect towards peers and teachers at school (**see Chapter 5**). These are clear indicators not only of their capacity to engage, interact and participate in the school environment but also of improvement in wellbeing.

Evaluation results indicate that training delivered to school staff had a positive impact on children and young people of refugee background participation and engagement at school. Participation in professional development increased the understanding of school staff of the refugee experience and their awareness of specific challenges and needs faced by children and young people of refugee background and their families. This equipped them to provide appropriate support to these children/this cohort? and their families at school (**see Chapter 4**). They also acquired new skills to support their everyday teaching strategies and interaction with students, which in turn directly impacted the students' motivation to engage in school activities.

Children and young people of refugee background benefitted from interacting with school staff who were receptive and understood their circumstances and needs. This increased the confidence of children and young people of refugee background to communicate with teachers and increased their sense of acceptance and belonging at school.

Improved psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background in NSW schools

Significant improvements were found in the wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background who were involved in STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions (**see Chapter 5**). These improvements were present in analyses across different dimensions of wellbeing such as sense of belonging, new friendships and sense of happiness. Not only are these dimensions indicators of wellbeing but also of social capital which frames STARTTS' community development projects and initiatives (**see Chapter 2**).

Participating in STARTTS' school-based programs helped children and young people of refugee background to feel and promote a sense of belonging and establish new friendships, relationships and partnerships. Through these programs, students developed resilience, self-confidence, increased self-esteem and a feeling that despite the loss of home and community that often characterises much of the refugee experience, they had the opportunity to re-establish a new circle of support and belonging and feel part of something special and meaningful.

Results also show an increased sense of happiness of children and young people of refugee background who took part in STARTTS' interventions (97%) which is an important indicator of general wellbeing. This increase is attributed to different factors resulting from their participation in STARTTS programs, some of which were mentioned above. These factors are an increased sense of belonging and in friendship within and outside of school, and improved confidence through group participation and interaction with others. Other factors identified are improved physical and mental health through participation in physical activities of STARTTS programs, feeling calmer through the use of self-regulation strategies learned in the programs and acquisition of new skills such as sport and leadership. The exposure to new, fun activities and experiences within STARTTS' programs was also another factor that contributed to the increased sense of happiness of children and young people of refugee background who were involved in STARTTS' trauma-informed group-work interventions.

Similarly, the scores from the WHO-5 wellbeing index and SDQ, suggest that students' mental health, stability and general wellbeing improved after taking part in STARTTS' interventions (**see Chapter 5**). Students experienced improvements in their mood, stress levels and sleep and an increase in their energy and interest for everyday general activities.

Results also indicated that teachers and school staff have observed these groups of children and young people of refugee background to be more productive and physically and psychologically healthier. Further they reported that wellbeing indicators such as academic performance, concentration in class and respect towards themselves, teachers and peers have improved substantially, while their truancy and absence from school have substantially decreased. The majority of teachers attributed these changes to their children and young people of refugee backgrounds' participation in STARTTS' school programs.

Improved capacity of the NSW education system to support children and young people of refugee background

Primary and secondary schools, including government and non-government schools, have increased their capacity to support children and young people of refugee background as a result of the STARTTS in Schools strategy implementation.

Participation in STARTTS professional development and the efforts of the clusters and the Steering Committee have had very positive results in improving the capacity of the NSW education system. School staff participation in professional development increased significantly between 2017 and 2019. As a result, a total of 6,054 school staff have been benefited via 191 different training sessions delivered by the School Liaison Program and other relevant STARTTS staff such as Child and Adolescent Counsellors and Youth Workers (see Table 4.1). Evaluation results from qualitative and quantitative analyses indicate that school staff participants feel more skilled and/or confident engaging and supporting children and young people of refugee background and their families (see Chapter 4). Staff reported having increased knowledge of and confidence toward different relevant topics including:

- understanding impacts of the refugee experience on school aged children and young people of refugee background and families
- learned about school-based strategies to support them and
- increased awareness of STARTTS' services and pathways to refer children and young people of refugee background to specialist services.

The level of satisfaction with training is positive with more than 80% of participants feeling satisfied/highly satisfied. Adjusting training content and methodology to the needs of schools and their children and young people of refugee background and using the expertise of STARTTS and its staff are important factors that influenced the level of satisfaction with training.

Clusters have also taken an important role in bringing school representatives together to increase their capacity to better support schools and children and young people of refugee background. Clusters are a platform for schools and agencies to share best practices and develop resources, practical whole school approaches or support school transition of children and young people of refugee background. Training has provided opportunities for schools to learn about and work together on the Refugee Readiness Audit (RRA) and revise what works well in their schools and what needs to be implemented or further developed. As a result, school multi-methods participants have increased their skills and capabilities to initiate and support systemic changes in schools to better support children and young people of refugee background and their families (see Chapter 6).

STARTTS' partnership with agencies such as the NSW Department of Education, Catholic Education Office and, in some clusters, with NSW Refugee Health, has increased the effectiveness of the clusters to support schools. Cluster coordination and content has been delivered by using a coordinated and multidisciplinary approach which is guided by a diverse range of expertise and perspectives. It has promoted a holistic approach in the delivery of outcomes within the clusters contributing to covering a range of the school's needs.

Similarly, The Steering Committee is an important body that contributes to the capacity of the NSW education system. It brings together leaders and managers who oversee the welfare of children and young people of refugee background in schools in New South Wales. The nature of the Steering Committee and its capacity to influence decision making has increased the impact on policy development that affects all schools in New South Wales and has contributed toward systemic changes in service delivery across the whole educational system. Through mapping exercises about services offered by agencies and organisations involved, the committee has been able to identify gaps and overlaps in services as well as priorities to meet the needs of target populations. As a result, this working group has developed and promoted a coordinated approach to enhance the wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background and their families and encourages service providers to avoid duplication and work in partnership leading to more holistic and effective interventions in schools.

Additionally, the personalised support offered by the STARTTS' School Liaison Program, the Youth Team and the Child and Adolescent Counsellors to School staff was also highlighted in the evaluation results. Before the inception of the School Liaison Program, STARTTS' capacity to support schools was limited. Additional funding obtained via the JPWG process enabled this work to be systematised and extended. The work of the School Liaison Program significantly increased the interaction and support to schools. STARTTS was able to discuss needs with schools, respond to individual consultations, and adapt STARTTS' programs to the educational and social needs of individual schools. This enabled more effective support for resettlement and healing of children and young people from refugee background.

Increased staff understanding of psychosocial wellbeing issues affecting children and young people of refugee background and their families

Through professional learning work undertaken within the clusters and personalised school support offered by STARTTS, school staff increased their understanding of the different issues and challenges affecting the wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background.

As identified previously, training delivered by STARTTS focused on increasing school staff knowledge and understanding of the impact of the refugee experience on the general wellbeing of children and young people of refugee background and their families (see **Table 4.1 in Chapter 4**). Evaluation results show that school staff learned and increased their understanding of the biological, psychological and social impacts of trauma on children and young people of refugee background, their parents and families. They also learned about the common challenges, traumas and stressors experienced by children and young people of refugee background (see **Table 4.3 in Chapter 4**). School staff also increased their confidence in managing triggers of distress for children and young people of refugee background, recognising psychological wellbeing issues and finding and making appropriate referrals to seek support (see **Table 4.4 in Chapter 4**).

The different range of activities and content included in the cluster meetings also contributed to an increase in school representatives' understanding of psychosocial wellbeing issues affecting children and young people of refugee background. Participants were able to share and discuss the wellbeing issues faced by their students at schools and shared good practice while learning from each other. Relevant topics such as the link between trauma and wellbeing were addressed and the use of case studies also increased participants' understanding. To illustrate, some of the content included in the cluster meetings were "refugee trauma and impact on the brain", "welcoming and safe school environment", "adoption of trauma-informed and whole school approaches", "adapting and adopting teaching strategies", "building trusting relationships" and "effective communication strategies and better support students' transitions" (see **Chapter 6**). Clusters used interactive and participatory methodologies and also developed mental health resources for schools to access extra support.

Professional and personalised advice and support offered by STARTTS to school staff was also relevant to increase their understanding of psychosocial wellbeing issues affecting their children and young people of refugee background. School staff members were able to reach STARTTS by phone, email or face to face and discuss and receive guidance on specific cases, issues and situations involving children and young people of refugee background at their schools.

Improved linkages within and across schools to support children and young people of refugee background and their families

The implementation of clusters of schools and participation of school staff in professional development impacted positively the connections within and across schools to support children and young people of refugee background.

Between 2017 and 2019, the School Liaison Program, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Catholic Education Office, supported seven clusters of schools across New South Wales with the participation of approximately 180 representatives from different government and non-government schools (**see Chapter 6**). Those clusters have strengthened professional networks and enabled schools to share experiences, access expertise, access professional advice, share best practices, resources and knowledge and in turn better support children and young people of refugee background.

Clusters became a relevant platform for schools to increase their networks and collaboration with other schools, agencies and service providers toward supporting the mental health and education of children and young people of refugee background (**see Chapter 6**). Evaluation results strongly reflect the success of clusters content and activities to foster systemic collaboration resulting in an increase of schools' knowledge of and engagement with available non-school-based support services, particularly with STARTTS, NSW Refugee Health, staff from the DoE including the RSL and RSCST, and settlement providers. STARTTS' specialist services were also able to be directly involved with schools and with teachers to help them identify and address needs and issues faced by their students and/or their families.

Similarly, the access of school staff to STARTTS' professional development improved linkages within and across schools. School staff members were able to participate in 191 different STARTTS trainings and were better equipped to support children and young people of refugee background and their families at school. Participants had the opportunity to discuss and work collaboratively with other staff within their own schools as well as interact and exchange experiences, knowledge and best practices with staff from different schools.

The effort of the Steering Committee to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to support children and young people of refugee background also promoted the interaction and network extension of government and non-government schools in multiple areas.



Chapter 9: Recommendations

The recommendations derived from the evaluation of the STARTTS in Schools program are set out below.

1.

That NSW Government continues to fund the network of services designed to support children and young people of refugee backgrounds. This includes STARTTS School Liaison Program.

The findings of this report reflect the efficacy of the SIS strategy in providing support systemically to children and young people of refugee background through trainings, individual counselling, trauma-informed group work interventions and school cluster strategies. Much of the success of SIS is reflective of the fact that it operates externally, yet complementary to educational institutions and has the capacity for flexibility in its response to the presenting needs of children and young people of refugee background in schools and across program delivery.

2.

That all school-age education providers in NSW (Department of Education, Catholic Education Office and Independent Schools) prioritise screening for Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) for anyone entering the education system to activate early intervention services and supports for individual students, their families and communities.

3.

That all Tertiary Education institutions providing Teaching Degrees include content related to refugee experience in their regular curriculum. Teacher education should equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to apply trauma-informed pedagogy.

4.

That all Tertiary Institutions providing Allied Health Degrees (psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and nurses) include content related to refugee experience in their regular curriculum to ensure their work is trauma-informed post-graduation.

5.

That implementation structures are developed by all providers of school-education to support teachers to deliver syllabus content that may be regarded as confronting or that has the potential to cause distress for students or teachers.

6.

That regional settlement planning be tailored to the numbers, cultural backgrounds, experience of trauma, specific circumstances and resource availability in each region. Numbers alone are an insufficient planning tool.

7.

That NSW Department of Education and Catholic Education Office continue funding systems specifically designed to address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

This facilitates establishment of and access to refugee support structures in schools to work together to support children and young people of refugee backgrounds alongside their families. This also creates a platform for networking amongst these teams at their different local levels (school communities, education systems and other trauma services).

8.

That interventions for children and young people from refugee backgrounds be encouraged within school grounds during or after school hours by all school-education providers.

The findings of this report (see chapter 5) indicate that such interventions can increase students' motivation to engage with peers and educators, establish new friendships, attend school, develop strong and positive attachment relationships, and, alongside their parents and/or carers, strengthen their very sense of social connection, inclusion and belonging to their school community. This would also alleviate parents'/carers' barriers to supporting opportunities for their children to have social contact with their school peers outside of school hours.

9.

That Department of Education and Catholic Education Office continue supporting the Clusters Approach in collaboration with STARTTS School Liaison Program. This encompasses support for both existing Clusters and creation of new Clusters in relevant geographical areas.

Evaluation findings (see chapter 6) show that clusters and networks are effective and instrumental to supporting and building communities of schools, educators, welfare staff and educational leadership who are indispensable to the delivery of cross-sector supports in the resettlement and education of children and young people of refugee background alongside their families.

10.

That relationships between expert external agencies and the NSW Department of Education and Non-Government Education be governed by clear, mutually agreeable parameters allowing for equal contribution of expert knowledge and competence to ensure trauma informed and culturally safe support is provided to children and young people of refugee backgrounds.

11.

That other FASSTT agencies consider implementing a model of work with schools that incorporates a multidisciplinary (youth workers, clinicians and liaison/systemic support workers) approach and establishment of a Steering Committee bringing together relevant stakeholders. STARTTS is to ensure findings of this report are made available to other FASSTT members.

12.

That in recognition of the complex impact of trauma on brain development, STARTTS continues to prioritise children and young people.

13.

That STARTTS continues to prioritise work with schools as an essential recovery environment across all areas of service (including individual clinical work, trauma informed group work, training and consultancy for school staff) using a multidisciplinary systemic approach.

14.

That STARTTS continues to learn from our work with children and refugee young people and ensure that knowledge is shared widely through training, consultancy and research.

15.

That all schools with enrolled children and young people from refugee backgrounds adopt a Whole School strategy that brings together the relevant school structures including: the Wellbeing Team, Year Advisers or Stage Coordinators, School Counsellors, EAL/D Teams and relevant community engagement school personnel.

16.

That Government and Non-Government school education providers facilitate an opportunity for annual reporting on the Whole School strategy and the reflections of students and their families on the quality and impact of the strategy implementation.

17.

That schools continue to allow learners to take time out of lessons (in a carefully coordinated way) to participate in STARTTS' trauma-informed group work and counselling interventions.

Findings (see chapter 5) demonstrate the benefits derived from participation including the number and quality of relationships in the life of a student healing from refugee trauma, establishing a sense of belonging for all students (stated as a priority area for many schools), improved attendance at schools and improved academic performance.

18.

That schools prioritise provision of and participation of teachers and welfare staff in professional development tailored to their specific learning needs and school context to support children and young people of refugee backgrounds. This includes formal training or professional learning events, professional conversations (for example those enabled by school clusters), professional exchange and webinars.

19.

That schools continue to identify students who can benefit from services delivered through STARTTS in Schools.



Appendix

Types of trauma-informed group-work interventions

STARTTS has delivered a variety of trauma-informed group-work interventions to school aged children and young people of refugee background. Between 2017 and 2019, STARTTS delivered 43 different types of trauma-informed group-work interventions. Trauma-informed group-work interventions were based on the specific needs of schools and their children and young people of refugee background.

The trauma-informed group-work interventions were delivered by different staff at STARTTS including the Youth Team, the School Liaison Team and Child and Adolescent Counsellors from the Direct Services Teams. The Community Development Team and the Clinical Team also delivered trauma-informed group-work interventions between 2017 and 2019 (**see Table 3.4**). As part of the internal collaboration, some of the trauma-informed group-work interventions were delivered by more than one team.

See table next page.

Type of group intervention	Number	Youth Team	School Liason Team	Clinical Team	Child & Adolescent Counsellor - Direct Services	Rural & Regional Community Development Staff	Community Development Team
Beth Mosaic	3	3					
Comic making	2	1			1		
COMPACT/Young Humanitarian	5	5					
Counselling	5		3*		2	1*	
Creative Expression and Emotional Regulation	13				13		
Cultural Exchange Wagga	1					1	
Dance	1	1					
Drama Workshops	1					1	
Drumming	26	11*	12*		15*		
Friday Nights @ The Centre	3	3					
Headstart	2	2					
Hour of Power	1		1				
I Am Beautiful	2	2					
Integrated Listening Systems (ILS)	1				1		
Iraqi and Syrian Youth Group	2						2
Jungle Tracks	6		2		1	3	
Learning to Play - Playing to Learn	1		1				
Momentum	2	2					
Multicultural Youth Groups	10					10	
Mum and Me	1				1		
Musical Odyssey	6	2*	4				2*
Pals - Social Skills Program	4				4		
PAWS 4 Trauma	3		1*	3*			
Project Bantu - Capoeira Angola	39	39					
RAGE	1			1			
Rainbow Program	7		2*		7*		
Rock and Water	1		1*		1*		
Seasons for Growth	13				13		
Settling In	7					7	
Smart Choices	1			1			
Youth Soccer Program	5						5
Social and Skill Development for Young Women	1					1	
Sporting Linx	15	15*		4*			
Swimming Lessons	23	11			1	10	1
The Learning Club	1		1				
The Suitcase Project	2				2		
The Tree of Life	6	2*	5*		2*	1*	
The Uncharted Path	4	4					
Tibetan Youth Group	3						3
Urban Art	2	2					
Yoga	6				6		
Youth Camp	34	21				13	
Youth FICT	1		1				
Total Interventions	273	126	34	9	71	48	13

Table (i): Type of trauma-informed group-work interventions to school aged children and young people of refugee background delivered by the different STARTTS teams

Source: CAREHR - STARTTS

* At least one trauma-informed group-work intervention has been delivered in collaboration between two or more STARTTS' teams

Description of trauma-informed group-work interventions offered by STARTTS in Schools between 2017 and 2019

i. Beth Mosaic

The Beth Mosaic intervention intended to increase sense of trust, self-esteem, communication, decision making and teamwork and encourage a sense of belonging and pride among groups of children and young people of refugee background, and within the school community. The medium for this group was the traditional art of mosaic. The intervention was designed by STARTTS' Youth Team in partnership with the Assyrian Youth Centre.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background aged 12-18 years old

Program Delivery: 1.5 hours, once a week

Designed by: STARTTS Youth Team and Assyrian Resource Centre

ii. Comic Making

The program utilised comic art to explore individual narratives and aimed to increase social engagement among children and young people of refugee background by generating a space for creative expression, storytelling, learning comic making skills and exploring identity and self. The program also engaged students who were identified by their school as withdrawn and/or anxious to help them to generate an individual narrative through the medium of art. STARTTS received funding for this intervention from Liverpool Council.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: weekly 9 sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Child and Adolescent Counsellors and contracted comic-artists

iii. COMPACT/Young Humanitarian

This program promoted social cohesion amongst children and young people of refugee background, introduced them to various education/career paths and increased their confidence in navigating Australian systems. Through this intervention, students grasped the concept of 'community' and 'social responsibility' and gained a sense of confidence and belonging in Australian community.

Students met fortnightly and participated in excursions and workshops as well as receiving information about volunteering, education pathways and ways to participate in emergencies. At the end of the program young people organised the Young Humanitarian Conference. The program was funded by Multicultural NSW via the COMPACT program and delivered through a Consortium consisting of the Australian Red Cross (Consortium Lead), NSW Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN NSW) and STARTTS.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Fortnightly sessions

Designed by: Red Cross, MYAN NSW and STARTTS' Youth Team

iv. Counselling group interventions

Counselling group interventions aimed to build positive self-esteem, sense of trust and belonging and positive sense of identity. These interventions focused on integrating both past experiences and culture with a new life and culture in Australia and building a positive sense of their future and the ability to recognize, understand and deal positively with emotions. The interventions also aimed to reduce the symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and depression and provide support to process grief and loss. Counselling groups provided psychoeducation, discussion and reflection on activities in the program, narrative approaches, mindfulness and relaxation, and craft activities as the main tools to work with children and young people of refugee background.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Child and Adolescent Counsellors

v. Creative Expression and Emotional Regulation

These types of interventions build positive relationships and self-expression via the medium of art. This program enables children to identify thoughts, feelings and emotions and to be equipped with tools to enhance their own emotional regulation and build social skills via group interaction. It uses art/craft and introduces elements of mindfulness practice – simple guided meditation.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Child and Adolescent Counsellors

vi. Cultural Exchange Wagga

This program provided participants with an opportunity to experience multicultural Australia, engage in new cultural activities and build connections and intimacy with peers. It created a space where each participant was treated with dignity and respect.

It consisted of a one-off excursion to experience new cultural activities over a three-day excursion to Sydney. Participants were encouraged to be involved in excursion planning.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: One-off three-day excursion per group

Designed by: STARTTS' Riverina Community Development Worker and Youth Team

vii. Dance

Guided by a choreographer, this intervention brought together young people as co-creators of fusing traditional dances with modern or cultural dance forms to create their own artistic identity.

Target Group: Maximum 10 children and young people of refugee background K-12

Program Delivery: 1.5 hour sessions across 3-4 terms or ongoing

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team and contracted dance artists

viii. Drama Therapy Workshops

These workshops provided a platform for children and young people of refugee background to express themselves through the medium of drama and movement. This gave students more choice around their behaviours and understanding in their relationships. The program was designed to allow students to explore and express their thoughts, feelings and emotions in a safe environment in the context of a play, myth or story. These plays, myths or stories were tailored to the needs of the group and their developmental stage

Target Group: Maximum 10 children and young people of refugee background K-12

Program Delivery: Eight 1.5-hour weekly sessions

ix. Drumming

This program taught social skills and builds self-esteem among children and young people of refugee background. Participants engaged in a cooperative process of creating music together, developing healthy social interactions and connections with others. Participants for whom a more cognitive-based intervention would not be beneficial were provided with an evidence-based therapeutic intervention, emerging from the program with a greater network of peers, often at a deeper level than before as they had shared a positive experience.

Target Group: Maximum 15 secondary school children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Ten 1.5 hour weekly sessions

Designed by: Simon Faulkner (Rhythm2Recovery) and adapted by STARTTS' staff to the specific needs of children and young people of refugee background

x. Friday Nights @ The Centre

This program was conceptualised and delivered by STARTTS Youth Team and it was funded by the Sydney Community Foundation. While it was not delivered at school, it was an extension of the Youth Team's engagement via school groups. It also supported students in an after-school format. The program provided both physical and educational activities designed to improve overall physical, emotional and social health and wellbeing for the children and young people of refugee background.

It used psychoeducation around a variety of topics related to a young person's development by a multi-disciplinary team and included mindfulness and mentoring/leadership based-activities. Specific activities run within this program included homework support, fitness, indoor soccer, career advice, theatre and boxing.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xi. Headstart

This intervention was designed to provide education, life skills and job readiness training. Students ran a mock café, obtained a TAFE Statement of Attainment, partook in skills mapping, goal setting, mock interviews and a campus tour.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Six sessions of various lengths plus volunteer opportunity

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xii. Hour of Power

This consisted of psychosocial education sessions run over six-week which aimed to support the development of practical skills and conceptual understanding of school systems and available supports within the school and the community.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Weekly sessions for 6 weeks

Designed by: STARTTS' School Liaison Team

xiii. I Am Beautiful: Empowering young women

This program aimed to strengthen self-esteem, confidence and positive body image through developing basic hair and make-up skills while exploring varying ideas of beauty.

Each session began with a discussion/activity centred upon self-esteem and confidence, followed by a practical session learning hair care and make up skills. Throughout the program, participants were encouraged to identify and celebrate their personal qualities and attitudes.

Target Group: Young women aged 14-25, who would benefit from a social trauma-informed group- work intervention.

Program Delivery: Six 1.5 hour weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xiv. Integrated Listening Systems (iLS): Calming Program

This intervention aimed to improve brain function through the integration of music, movement and language. It used the iLS 'Calming Program' to facilitate both the auditory and movement components. Furthermore, this program also aimed to reduce feelings of anxiety and stress in the participants. Participants listened to the 'Calming Program without Chant' and engaged in movement as indicated by the iLS Procedure Booklet. The movement component targeted core strength, visual tracking and awareness of where the body is in space. These activities were designed to heighten coordination, balance, motor planning and to establish a firm foundation for higher learning. Movement activities also 'wake the brain' through increased input to higher brain structures. The movement and auditory components were done together.

Target Group: Primary school children and young people of refugee background (aged between 6-9 years) identified as potentially benefitting from the iLS 'Calming' protocol

Program Delivery: One session per day for 1.5 hours, for 10 consecutive business days

Designed by: Integrated Listening Systems

xv. Iraqi and Syrian Youth Groups

This intervention provided psychosocial activities to Iraqi and Syrian children and young people of refugee background between 13 and 15 years old. Activities include yoga, social outings and other group activities targeting participants' needs.

Target Group: Young people who would benefit from a trauma-informed social group-work intervention.

Program Delivery: Six 1.5 hour weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Community Development and Youth Team

xvi. Jungle Tracks

This therapeutic intervention relied on stories to facilitate engagement with children and young people of refugee background within a preventative framework. The Jungle Tracks program consists of 5 illustrated storybooks that deal with diverse refugee experiences, such as persecution, being forced to flee one's home, disappearance and death of family members, being marginalised in a new culture and learning new ways of doing things. The narratives in the storybooks address different emotional themes including grief and loss, anxiety, low self-esteem, dealing with upset feelings and nightmares.

The themes and plots in the stories are influenced by emotional, behavioural and learning problems many children report and present with as they adjust to their new home in Australia. Most of the central characters are animals that mirror the traumas and challenges refugees experience.

The program attempted to capitalise on the power of stories to instill hope and unleash innate healing forces. By identifying with the protagonists in the stories, the reader/listener is encouraged to connect and make meaning of their trauma experiences. Leveraging the power of stories to communicate in a non-threatening manner, Jungle Tracks also attempts to bypass initial resistance to therapy and permits children and young people of refugee background to not feel pressured to talk about their experiences, unless they want to.

Target Group: 6-10 children and young people of refugee background, K-12.

Program Delivery: Ten 2-hour weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Clinical Services Team

xvii. Learning to Play - Playing to Learn

This program intends to build social connections via play, help young children increase confidence levels in their play and take risks to discover their personal identity. This intervention explored different mediums in order to develop better pretend play skills by using a non-directive play approach. Students referred to this program were new arrivals who are having difficulty socially or have limited play skills. This also included students who are quiet and withdrawn and need help to build confidence.

The program developed students' skills in pretend play in relation to play themes, sequences of play actions, object substitution, social interaction, role play, pretend play and construction and symbolic imaginative play. It also includes sensory and exploratory play such as slime, craft, sand and clay.

Target Group: Early primary school (k-2)

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' School Liaison Team and Department of Education staff

xviii. MoMENTum Men's Group

MoMENTum is a multi-session masculinity awareness program. The aim of the program is to introduce young men to a number of topics associated with 'maleness' and examine them in the context of masculinity, this being an ongoing journey with critical choices that need to be made. Classes took the form of an informal discussion of topics, with guest speakers from different backgrounds associated with the topic for session.

A number of set questions were asked of guests regarding their experience of masculinity and their own journey. Each session included a video to create a foundation for discussion, a presentation from a guest speaker and a discussion with staff and guests regarding the topic.

Target Group: Young men from refugee backgrounds

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xix. Multicultural Youth Groups

This program was delivered mainly in rural and regional areas of NSW (Coffs Harbour, Newcastle and Wagga Wagga). It sought to provide a safe place for young people to interact and build connections with peers. It promoted a space where each participant is treated with dignity and respect.

The interventions were designed to engage young people in a range of structured and unstructured activities where they could play, learn and share while building confidence and learning about issues and activities in the community, as well as talk about relevant issues related to their refugee and resettlement experiences.

Activities provided challenges and encouraged team building, while breaking down social isolation, alienation and dislocation among participants. Unstructured activities included futsal, shuttlecock, netball, blackboard drawing, playing, music and dancing and sharing healthy food after school. Structured activities included music, dance, art and drama.

Target Group: children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Rural and Regional Team

xx. Mum and Me

This type of trauma-informed group-work intervention aimed to build social connection, normalise experiences and build self-confidence. It connected single mothers' families through excursions and activities. Mothers also connected with each other, gaining self-confidence and social connections. They went on several excursions to parklands around Sydney during which they had a picnic, walked and played games together.

Target Group: single mothers from refugee backgrounds and their children.

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Clinical Services Team

xxi. Musical Odyssey: Experiential learning evidence-based music intervention

This program aimed to develop music skills for young people and provide artistic opportunities for musicians. Participants were engaged in drumming, percussion and vocal workshops facilitated by professional and community musicians, including opportunities to interact with students and staff from the Conservatorium High School. The program was funded by Crown Casino and Packer Family Foundation.

Target Group: Iraqi/Syrian children and young people of refugee background aged 12 to 24 years

Program Delivery: Up to twenty 1.5-hour workshops during school time or after school, a music camp & school exchanges

Designed by: STARTTS' Community Services Team, contract music artists, staff from the Conservatorium High School

xxii. PALS - Social Skills Program

This program teaches basic social skills, focusing on communication, turn taking, experiencing frustration, expressing emotions and solving problems.

Children and young people of refugee background need extra teaching to learn to interact socially with others, ask for help, assert themselves and manage stress and anxiety. Other children who are aggressive or impulsive need to master waiting their turn, sharing with others, resolving conflicts, empathising with others, managing their angry feelings and being assertive rather than aggressive. Children with Asperger's syndrome or autism need help with basic social skills, such as making eye contact, as well as learning to recognise emotions and develop empathy. PALS Social Skills Program teaches these skills in a fun practical way.

Target Group: Children aged 0-6 years from refugee backgrounds and their parents

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: PALS

xxiii. PAWS 4 Trauma

This is an animal based therapeutic intervention designed to offer children and young people of refugee background opportunities for interaction with animals and farmers. Through these interactions children and young people of refugee background learn more about the animals at the farm, their stories of survival, their unique response and adaptation to challenges encountered. The farm environment gradually becomes a space to encounter fears and explore alternative ways of thinking and behaving.

Paws4Trauma consisted of 10 sessions, with 4 of these being visits to Calmsley Hill City Farm. Interspersed with the farm visits, approximately six sessions were held at school to facilitate reflection and consolidate what was learned at the farm. The school-based sessions relied on activities and guided reflections to assist participants to clarify and/or draw comparisons between their own experiences and the life journeys of displacement and survival of the animals.

The farm visits and group based reflective activities also assisted children and young people of refugee background to explore and learn more about the human-animal bond, emotional expression and regulation. It is intended that the animal stories of adaptation, and courage, notwithstanding the love and acceptance inherent in animal encounters, assist the group to contextualise and process some of their challenging life experiences. This results in improved social relationships, feelings of wellbeing and instills hope for the future. The program received funding through Fairfield and Auburn Club Grants Schemes.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Ten sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Clinical Services Team

xxiv. Project Bantu- Capoeira Angola

Capoeira Angola is an Afro-Brazilian art that can be likened to a dance or to martial arts. Of African origin, it developed in Brazil in the 16th Century during the slave trade. Capoeira Angola is intertwined with concepts of empowerment and resilience as it was used by the African slaves as a mechanism to maintain their cultural identity and overcome the oppressive system of slavery.

This intervention introduced children and young people of refugee background to Bantu Capoeira Angola's healing potential of musical and physical expression, alongside a mentoring approach to provide a range of social and learning opportunities.

For some children and young people of refugee background, trauma associated with their experience can lead to behavioural issues, affecting the ability to develop trusting relationships. Capoeira offered students the chance to excel and succeed through its stages. This acted as a microenvironment, teaching participants that if they can succeed at this, they can succeed in the wider community.

Target Group: IEC and high school students.

Program Delivery: 1.5-hour sessions across 3-4 terms

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xxv. RAGE: Anger management and emotion regulation

RAGE is a strength-based solution focused anger management program for adolescents. It is a hands on, practical program that also fun for students.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background aged 11-17 years.

Program Delivery: Six 1-1.5-hour weekly sessions

Designed by: Richmond Community Services Inc

xxvi. Rainbow Program

The Rainbow Program aims to make a positive contribution to the settlement experience of recently arrived children and young people of refugee background, building self-esteem, a sense of trust and belonging and a positive sense of identity by integrating both their past experiences and culture of origin with their new life in Australia. Through their involvement in the program, children developed their ability to recognise, understand and deal positively with emotions and enhance their capacity to form relationships and to deal with personal challenges in the settlement period.

Target Group: 8-10 newly-arrived children and young people of refugee background, aged 9 to 12.

Program Delivery: Seven 2-hour sessions with optional excursion or parental program at the close. Program requires 2 adult facilitators, potentially a STARTTS Counsellor and a School Counsellor.

Designed by: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

xxvii. Rock and Water: Building confidence, body and self-awareness

Rock and Water is a course that is delivered over a number of sessions to students in primary or high school. A series of exercises and games develop confidence and self-reflection. While not originally designed for refugees, these activities have been shown to help children and young people of refugee background to be grounded and aware of their body. Games are martial arts based and students learn to block, hit strike shields, stand strong, negotiate using 'rock' or 'water' verbal approaches, walk away from a fight, consider alternatives to aggression and develop understandings about who they are, their intuitive feelings and their personal direction.

Target Group: Minimum of 12 students K-12, of refugee backgrounds

Program Delivery: 8 weekly sessions with a minimum of two facilitators

Designed by: Freerk Ykema

xxviii. Seasons for Growth: Grief and loss intervention

Seasons for Growth aims to strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of young people who are dealing with life changes by exploring the impact of the change and loss on everyday life and by helping them to learn new ways to respond to these changes. This program utilises the metaphor of nature's seasons to explore the cyclic nature of grief.

Target Group: Small groups of 4-7 children and young people of refugee background aged 6 to 18 years

Program Delivery: Eight sessions

Designed by: Originally developed and published by Mary MacKillop Foundation, third edition developed and published by Good Grief Ltd

xxix. Settling In

This program supports newly arrived children and young people of refugee background adjust to life in Australia. Students learn from each other, have their feelings and reactions normalised, learn coping strategies and form good relationships.

Topics covered included dealing with anger, anxiety and depression, feelings about settlement, likes and dislikes about Australia and the country of origin, people and places that can help, self-esteem and personal growth, setting goals, problem solving and relaxation techniques.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background.

Program Delivery: Ten 2-hour weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' School Liaison and Clinical Services Teams and the Department of Education

xxx. Smart Choices Program

The program is designed to help clients reflect on their reactions to trauma and loss, provide a framework for understanding and changing responses to triggering situations and provide clients with the knowledge and tools to change their lifestyles in ways that support and fortify trauma recovery.

The program utilises a set of concepts and theories including The SEEDS Model (health promoting factors), the Trans-theoretical Model of Behaviour Change, mindfulness exercises and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Weekly, one-hour session

Designed by: STARTTS' Clinical Services Team

xxxi. Youth Soccer Program

This program aimed to improve social support networks, fitness and physical health and increase awareness of self-care strategies, coping abilities and stress reduction mechanisms. It focused on fostering a coach-player bond as a mentor for an extra source of guidance and support. This program supported children and young people of refugee background to adjust better to Australian society.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background.

Program Delivery: 2-3 hour weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS supported by Football NSW

xxxii. Social and Skill Development

Eight intervention sessions were delivered which aimed to create a safe, supportive and respectful space where young women with refugee-like experiences in years 7, 8 and 9 were able to strengthen their sense of identity, build their confidence, learn strategies to develop resilience, and improve their skills in communication, developing trusting relationships, healthy lifestyle choices, problem solving and teamwork skills. Through this intervention participants also explore the values of their traditional cultures while learning how to participate in Australian society. It used creative exercises including the 'Tree of Life' framework, creating their own Toolbox, role plays and discussions.

Target Group: Young women from a refugee and refugee-like background.

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs

Designed by: STARTTS Youth Team

xxxiii. Sporting Linx: Linking leadership potential

This program utilised local community based organised sport as a tool to promote individual and community skills development and capacity building. The program engaged professional and volunteer coaches to mentor participants in game play, healthy lifestyle and sportsperson-ship, with a focus on interpersonal skills and goal setting, creating opportunities to identify and fostering leadership potential.

Target Group: 15-25 children and young people of refugee background, aged 14 to 18 years who might benefit from a less cognitive based intervention

Program Delivery: 8-10 80-minute weekly sessions. Two periods recommended

Designed by: STARTTS Youth Team

xxxiv. Swimming Lessons

The swimming lessons program aimed to provide a safe, culturally sensitive and respectful space for children and young people of refugee background to develop confidence, awareness and skills about safe water engagement. It also aimed to reduce the incidents of fatalities and injuries to people from refugee backgrounds in pools, rivers and the ocean by giving them accurate information to keep them and their families safe and enjoy the water and not to be fearful or intimidated. It provided activities that encouraged participation and the opportunity for building connections with peers and break down social isolation amongst participants and their parents. The lessons were conducted by professional instructors and provided water safety information relevant to a range of environments including pools and rivers. This program was funded by the NSW Office of Emergency Management.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Length and number of sessions are adapted to groups' needs.

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team and partners

xxxv. The Learning Club

This intervention aimed to support children's school transition and engagement. It focused on newly arrived children aged 5 to 12 years to create meaningful social connections with peers and community members. The program was delivered over a maximum of six sessions per school term and had the support of a bilingual facilitator and a volunteer team.

Students learnt new words, strategies and techniques to communicate effectively through participating in diverse group activities and playing a range of fun games. These activities included art and craft, language and literacy, sport and play. This program is delivered under Fairfield Communities for Children under the auspices of The Smith Family.

Target Group: Children 5 to 12 years old from a refugee and refugee-like background.

Program Delivery: Up to six 2 hour weekly sessions during school term

Designed by: STARTTS School Liaison Team

xxxvi. The Suitcase Project

The Suitcase project is an intervention which used narrative and symbolic representation to link past experience with present and future. The program aims to engage children and young people of refugee background identified by schools as withdrawn and/or anxious, assess their needs and provide recommendations for future trauma-informed group-work or individual interventions.

Participants use art and materials to represent past, current experiences and dreams for the future on a suitcase.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background

Program Delivery: Weekly sessions

Designed by: Diane Welvering and Glynis Clachert

xxxvii. The Tree of Life

The Tree of Life is a collective narrative approach to working with children and young people of refugee background and families who have experienced violence and/or trauma. This approach enables participants to speak about their lives in ways that make them stronger and is not re-traumatising. Utilising the metaphor of the tree, participants explored deeply their life journeys, their roots, knowledge and skills, their hopes and dreams, and the special people in their lives.

Target Group: Children and young people K-12, or parents/carers from a refugee and refugee-like background.

Program Delivery: Ten 1-hour weekly sessions

Designed by: The Dulwich Centre

xxxviii. The Uncharted Path: A visual art – based Program

The aim of this program was to develop critical thinking and analytical skills through an array of art related activities. The UnchARTed Path utilised everyday concepts to connect activities to the overall theme of the lesson. Each theme related to the big picture theme of 'life balance' by incrementally introducing new concepts and skills each week. Children and young people of refugee background were provided with learning opportunities in achieving life balance, together with practical art skills.

Target Group: Maximum 15 senior children and young people of refugee background, who would benefit from a creative intervention and exploration of the self

Program Delivery: Ten 80-minute weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Youth Team

xxxix. Tibetan Youth Group

The Tibetan Youth Group consisted of fortnightly meetings, group outings and workshops. The program aims to foster social cohesion and support among the Tibetan youth, develop leadership and encourage the participants to be meaningfully engaged in their community.

It provided Tibetan youth with the opportunity to try new activities, explore their aspirations, develop self-confidence/esteem and gain new practical and social skills. It also aimed to increase awareness among the Tibetan youth of the risks of drug and alcohol misuse and enable them to make informed and positive choices about their health.

Target Group: Young people from Tibetan refugee background who would benefit from this type of intervention

Program Delivery: Fortnightly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS' Community Development Team

xi. Urban Art: Visual arts-based Program

Urban Art utilised the popular art form of graffiti-based design to explore emotions and enhance artistic ability, developing creative thinking, design skills, enhancing existing artistic ability and exploring the importance of and how emotions are expressed. Students learnt how to draw basic cartoons through using common shapes and following patterns to create a work of art. Students' progress to exploring their existing knowledge of emotions and expressing specific emotions positively through artworks culminated in the creation of a class mural.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background K-12, who would benefit from a more creative intervention.

Program Delivery: Ten 80-minute weekly sessions

Designed by: STARTTS Youth Team

xli. Yoga Classes

The Yoga program aimed to inspire psychological calm through focus on the breath and improving physical wellbeing and mind-body connection. This intervention promotes body awareness and relaxation and offers a safe place for participants to explore themselves. Each class was tailored to suit the varying needs of the groups. Modifications were offered throughout the class, allowing participants to choose their physical expression.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background who were identified as likely to benefit from this type of intervention

Program Delivery: Weekly yoga classes run by a qualified yoga instructor and a STARTTS counsellor for 40 minutes

Designed by: STARTTS and Yoga Impact Charity

xlii. Youth Camps

Youth Camps were run by STARTTS Youth Team and Rural and Regional Community development staff. While Youth Camps are not school-based programs, they offered new opportunities to children and young people of refugee background engaged through school groups and individual counselling. STARTTS' Youth Camp program brought children and young people of refugee background together to explore ways to communicate, play, live and learn together, fostering long-lasting relationships built upon trust, friendship, mutual understanding, cooperation and common interests.

Children and young people of refugee background were given the opportunity to spend time away from their normal routine and supplied with a space that promoted stress relief and respite from home and settlement stress. Young people were provided with opportunities to connect with nature, new activities and interests, and a physical outlet through sporting activities, providing a positive life experience and building life and social skills.

Target Group: Children and young people of refugee background 10-14 years and 15-18 years of age. 20-30 places

Program Delivery: Run each school holidays, the camps were residential over four days and three nights. Different age groups and gender camps occurred periodically throughout the year. STARTTS Youth Team ran at least 7 Camps per year and rural and regional staff ran 5 camps per year.

Designed by: STARTTS

xliii. Youth FICT

Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) aims to reduce social isolation and introduce refugee families to key conceptual frameworks underpinning Australian society. It helps them to identify challenges to family dynamics resulting from exile, migration and resettlement, and develop appropriate coping strategies. This program builds refugee communities' capacity to help themselves by training members of the community and employing them as facilitators. STARTTS staff have further adapted FICT to the needs of children and young people of refugee background.

Target Group: Newly arrived children and young people of refugee background.

Program Delivery: Ten 3-hour weekly sessions, with a group outing during the final week.

Designed by: STARTTS

xliv. Bringing Up Great Kids: respectful, responsive and reflective parenting

This program aimed to increase the reflective capacities of parents of children and young people of refugee background and is modelled upon respectful, responsive and reflective practice. Reflective and thoughtful parenting is achieved through sessions designed to facilitate reflection upon messages from parents' past, and to understand behaviour as meaningful communication, helping participants understand the importance of the parent-child relationship and to parent their children in a manner that strengthens this relationship.

Target Group: Parents of children and young people of refugee background who are interested in harnessing their reflective parental capacities.

Program Delivery: Ten 2-hour weekly sessions

Designed by: The Australian Childhood Foundation

xlv. Beaut Buddies: Transitioning to the mainstream school environment

Beaut Buddies is a semester-long school-based peer-support program aimed at transitioning children and young people of refugee background from an English language centre to the mainstream school environment. The program is aimed to improve mental health and wellbeing by promoting positive contact between people from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Target Group: Newly arrived children and young people of refugee background who are transitioning from an Intensive English Centre to a mainstream high school

Program Delivery: Three terms/phases – Preparation, Consolidation, and Post-transition.

Designed by: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

xlvi. Tailored Programs/Interventions

When appropriate, programs were designed and tailored to the identified needs and interests of a particular target group and school. This occurred through a co-design process with group participants and schools. The outcome of the co-design process was a group intervention specific to the particular group of young people.

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