



Implementing the LOVE BiTES Program into Northern Tasmanian School Communities

An evaluation of the LOVE BiTES Train the Trainer workshops piloted in Northern Tasmania in August 2009. A collaborative project co-ordinated by Yemaya Womens Support Service, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services Family Violence Counselling and Support Service and the Department of Education.

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Introduction

Yemaya Women's Support Service, with support from Family Violence Counselling and Support Service North North-West (FVCSS, which is a unit within Disability, Child Youth and Family Services within the Tasmanian Government's Department of Health and Human Services), received funding through FaHCSIA (Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children Program to pilot LOVE BiTES Train the Trainer workshops in two locations across Northern Tasmania, and then implement LOVE BiTES in four Tasmanian Schools in August and September 2009.

Tasmania's key policy response to family violence, the *Safe at Home* initiative, is an integrated, whole of government initiative. One aspect of the *Safe at Home* approach to family/domestic violence is the recognition of the interface between family violence and child abuse (Tasmanian Department of Justice, 2009). It recognises that family violence is the responsibility of many agencies across multiple sectors. Its introduction is aimed at reducing Tasmania's incidence of family violence, which can be measured by the 4767 family violence incidents in 2007-08, and the rate of children on care and protection orders which in 2008 was 7.7 per 1,000 children (Tasmania Together, 2009).

Within Tasmania there are pockets of high levels of social disadvantage and social exclusion. Two of these areas, the West Coast in the north west region, and the West Tamar in the northern region were targeted for the LOVE BiTES pilots.

LOVE BiTES TRAIN THE TRAINER Workshops in Tasmania

The application for funding to pilot the LOVE BiTES Train the Trainer workshops in Tasmania was a planned strategy by professionals to address community concerns regarding domestic/family violence and the risks to children and young people caused by domestic/family violence and sexual assault. The aim of the LOVE BiTES project is to increase knowledge and understanding of family violence and what constitutes a healthy relationship by directly targeting key school-based teaching staff (such as drama and music teachers as well as welfare coordinators), social work personnel from

school communities, and other key professionals and support workers engaged in domestic/family violence and sexual assault work.

Demographic Overview

The West Coast of Tasmania has a population of approx. 5,000 and is classified as rural and remote (Skills Tasmania, 2008). Its main industry is mining, supplemented in recent times by tourism. Using the SEIFA data set compiled by the ABS, which summarises four different aspects of the socio-economic conditions of people living in an area, the West Coast population suffers significant disadvantage. The towns of Zeehan and Rosebery score one (most relatively disadvantaged) in all four SEIFA indexes, and Queenstown scores only marginally higher in the indexes (ABS, 2008).

On the West Coast, the West Coast Steering Group is a cross-sectoral partnership consisting of representatives from various Department of Health and Human Services agencies, local schools, Tasmania Police and the local council. With a clear understanding of the nature and extent of family violence and sexual assault in their region, they were seeking opportunities for community projects that challenge the normalisation of violence in the community and reduce domestic/family violence and child protection incidents. Through research they identified the LOVE BiTES program and were pivotal in bringing together the stakeholders involved in the West Coast pilot.

The West Tamar pilot was instigated by local professionals who had experience working in the community, and were familiar with demographics and socio-economic profile of the area. Straddling the suburban fringes of Launceston and extending into the rural areas of the West Tamar, this sub-region contains some of Tasmania's most disadvantaged communities. The main town of Beaconsfield scores one (most relatively disadvantaged) on all four SEIFA indexes, and the other key towns of Exeter and Beaconsfield also have very low scores on each SEIFA index. Like the West Coast, the West Tamar sub-region presents many and varied issues for professionals in addressing culturally entrenched views to intergenerational violence, and professionals who live and work in these communities are seeking innovative, fresh and engaging programs for adolescents to build resilience and social capital (West Tamar Community Safety Planning Group, 2009).

Ashley Youth Detention Centre is the only custodial centre for young people aged 10-17 years in Tasmania. The centre, which can accommodate up to 51 young people, services both females and males and works closely with the Community Youth Justice Service. The co-location of Ashley School, a Tasmanian Department of Education funded and administered school, within the facility ensures educational and training services are provided to the young people in custody. The reported profile of young people admitted to Ashley in 2004/05 was:

- 20% aged 10 – 14 years
- 50% aged 15 – 16 years
- 30% aged 17 years
- 17% female
- 6.5% Aboriginal.

It is also reported a “large proportion” of young people admitted to Ashley are affected by physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and many have committed serious offences involving violence. Many also leave school early, reportedly before year 8, and have low literacy skills (Smith & Douglas, 2006).

The aims of the LOVE BiTES Project were to:

- introduce a nationally recognised and highly regarded program into four Tasmanian school settings, that addresses the complex issue of domestic and family violence within the adolescent age range;
- provide training for key personnel within schools to incorporate material from LOVE BiTES into the Health Relationship curricula, addressing issues such as family violence and child abuse; and
- enhance and strengthen working relationships between the government and non-government sector by co-facilitating LOVE BiTES.

The Training

The Train the Trainer workshops were conducted in August 2009. These were held on the West Coast and in the West Tamar regions in Tasmania and were facilitated by the National Manager and Sexual Assault Project Officer of the LOVE BiTES program. The two day workshops were supported by a resource manual that provides:

- evidence based research the program is based on;
- planning processes for implementation of the LOVE BiTES program in the community;
- detailed guidelines for facilitators conducting the program with young people;
- suggested community activities and templates;
- a detailed program outline;
- examples of outcomes from the program; and
- suggested resources and research material.

A pre-questionnaire and post workshop evaluation were distributed to each participant for completion.

The Participants

The four participating schools were Rosebery District High School and Mountain Heights District High School, on the West Coast and Riverside High School and Ashley School. Originally Exeter High School, in the West Tamar was also a target school for the LOVE BiTES pilot, but in the end elected not to participate and Ashley School, which is attached to the Ashley Youth Detention Centre participated in its place. The Ashley School is administered by the Department of Education and runs education and learning programs for the young people from the Ashley Youth Detention Centre 48 weeks of the year.

There are two District High Schools on the West Coast (Rosebery District High School & Mountain Heights District High School) with the grade 9-10 cohort being approximately 132 students. Riverside High School, in the West Tamar, has a grade 9-10 population of 421.

There were a total of 30 workshop participants, 16 from the West Tamar and 14 from the West Coast.

Participant's Professions

Teachers	8
Psychologists	2

Family Violence Workers	7
Community Workers	2
Guidance Officer	1
Social Workers	7
Program Delivery Officer	1
Occupational therapist	1
Youth and Family Early Intervention worker	1

Love Bites and its Evidence Base

The LOVE BiTES program is an innovative model confronting and fostering attitudinal change to domestic/family violence and sexual assault in the community, by providing information and support to young people, and through promoting collaboration and non-traditional partnerships between school personnel and professionals working in the sector.

The impact and exposure of young people to domestic/family violence and sexual assault is highlighted by National Crime Prevention (2000) statistics:

- 1 in 3 young people have witnessed incidents involving physical violence (including yelling and threats) involving their carers;
- 1 in 3 young people (both males and females) reported they experienced violence within their own relationships;
- young people’s experiences of dating violence increased with age, from 24% of 12-14 year olds to 46% of 19-20 year olds;
- 1 in 20 young people considered forcing a partner to have sex, throwing things like plates at each other, and regular slapping or punching are part of “normal conflict” rather than domestic violence, when given a choice between the two; and
- 37% of males and 12% of females agreed with the statement “men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household.”

In an effort to change these outcomes for young people, and in direct response to requests from teachers in rural NSW who identified a lack of skills, knowledge and confidence to speak with young people about family and domestic violence and sexual

assault, the LOVE BiTES model was developed by the NSW North Coast Area Health Women's Health and Sexual Assault Service six years ago. Its key objective was to promote a clear consistent community approach to the issues of domestic and family violence and sexual assault from both workers and teachers in the local community.

A guiding principle of the LOVE BiTES program is that prevention and early intervention for domestic/family violence and sexual assault is essential in reducing its prevalence in our communities. Additionally it was recognised by the developers of the program that early adolescence represents an important opportunity for preventive intervention and changes in attitudes and values.

This focus on early intervention and prevention is reinforced in the recently released paper *Review of the Integrated Response to Family Violence: Discussion Paper (2009)*, from the Tasmanian Department of Justice. The report highlights the important role of targeted and general community education and awareness-raising, and identifies mainstream services and universal service providers such as schools and hospital workers as important stakeholders in this. LOVE BiTES is aligned with these principles, and also with the principle of integrated responses, which the report notes is an element of best practice in domestic/family violence interventions.

The content of the LOVE BiTES Program draws on a variety of research about preventative programs for adolescence in relation to domestic/family violence and sexual assault. This includes research by Jane Mulroney examining the key elements of *Prevention Programs for Young People (2003)*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, which found that violence prevention programs with young people seek to promote “pro social” behaviours demonstrated by equitable and respectful relationships. They aim to influence choices by providing knowledge and skills, and challenge values and attitudes that encourage violence. Strategies include:

- **Knowledge:** information booklets, games, videos, education sessions;
- **Skills:** activities such as role-plays and case studies to encourage the acquisition of skills such as assertive communication, problem solving, conflict resolution;

- **Values:** guided peer group discussions promoting critical reflection on power and gender issues, including exploration of components that are part of healthy relationships.

The research work by Dyson and Flood (2007) on *Building Cultures of Respect and Non-violence in the AFL* also outlines the characteristics of effective preventative programs that seek attitude and behavioural change to violence and sexual assault. They are described as:

- comprehensive, in that they address and involve all relevant community members and systems;
- intensive in that they offer learning opportunities that are interactive, involve active participation, are sustained over time and have multiple points of contact with reinforcing messages;
- addressing cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains: what people know, how they feel, and how they behave;
- relevant to the audience, tailored to the characteristics of participants and focused on peer-related variables, use of peers in leadership roles, and emphasizing the relationship of sexual assault to other issues; and
- providing positive messages which build on men's values and predisposition to act in a positive manner.

Further work by Dyson and Flood in their paper *Building Cultures of Respect and Non-violence (2007)* described the principles of good practice education programs that guide the LOVE BiTES program. They are that programs need to be:

- respectful
- goal orientated
- relevant to participants
- autonomous and self directed
- focused on the environment and changing social norms
- capacity building
- practical
- focused on increasing receptiveness and engagement with preventative messages and decreasing defensiveness

- focused on skill development
- adaptable and culturally appropriate.

Specifically the LOVE BiTES Program delivers educational workshops to young people on sexual assault and domestic violence, as well as providing interactive workshops aimed to consolidate the core teachings through creative outlet. Participants can write, perform and record a hip hop song, radio advertisement or drama piece; as well as develop art works for posters and other resources focusing on the prevention of violence against women. These creative works are then used to develop local campaigns, led and delivered by young people in their communities. The program is aimed at young people aged between 14 and 18, and to date over 20,000 high school students throughout NSW and Queensland have participated.

The content of the LOVE BiTES program has been adapted to reflect the feedback from focus groups with students and participants in the Train the Trainer workshops over an eighteen month period. An evaluation framework to measure sustained changes in attitudes toward family/domestic violence and sexual assault is currently being developed in collaboration with the University of Melbourne.

Participant Evaluation Outcomes

For the Tasmanian pilot workshops a pre-workshop questionnaire and a post-workshop questionnaire was distributed and completed by 30 participants. These sought to assess and rate participants' changes in knowledge of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, confidence in engaging youth in the program and their preparedness and resources to engage in a whole community approach to domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Participants reported they were seeking the following outcomes from participating in the training:

- to gain knowledge of family and domestic violence and sexual assault;
- to feel confident to raise the issues with young people;
- to run workshops with young people;

- to gain strategies to raise and maintain awareness of the issues in the community; and
- to promote working relationships between community agencies.

Knowledge of domestic/family violence and sexual assault

The pre-workshop questionnaire results showed a greater understanding of domestic /family violence as an issue affecting young people than sexual assault among participants. 70% of participants rated their understanding of domestic/family violence as *excellent*. In contrast, only 36% of participants rated their understanding of sexual assault as *excellent* with 63% rating their understanding as *moderate or limited*.

The post workshop evaluation outcomes reveal all participants had rated their knowledge of sexual assault was moderate or limited had subsequently felt that the training had increased their knowledge *significantly*.

Confidence to raise domestic/family violence and sexual assault issues with young people

These results correlate with both the participants' perception of the relevance to young people about these issues, and their confidence in talking to them about these issues. Participants that rated themselves as having a *moderate or limited* understanding of sexual assault also rated sexual assault as being only *somewhat relevant* to the lives of young people, and their confidence to talk to young people as *moderate or nil*.

63% rated as themselves as *very confident* to talk to young people about domestic and family violence with 36% giving a rating of *moderate or nil* confidence. However only 30% were *very confident* to speak with young people about sexual assault and 70% gave a *moderate or not confident* rating.

The evaluations clearly demonstrate that increasing levels of understanding of domestic and family violence and sexual assault results in an increased confidence to engage effectively with young people about these issues.

Capacity to run workshops with young people and engage young people in local community campaigns about domestic violence and sexual assault

Following the workshop all participants rated themselves as *likely* or *very likely* to be able to engage young people in community activities about domestic violence and sexual assault. This compares with the pre-workshop questionnaire where 45% rated themselves as *unlikely* to have the capacity to engage young people in local community campaigns.

60% of participants commented that creative and practical suggestions for running sessions with students and having the confidence and the resources to run groups in schools was one of the three key outcomes from the workshop.

To promote working relationships between community agencies

When rating their knowledge of social services and resources for domestic/family violence and sexual assault half of the participants felt that they had only *moderate to limited knowledge*. Significantly, as an important potential point of contact for students, all the school teachers were in this category. In the post workshop evaluation 6 of the 8 teachers felt their knowledge of local resources had *significantly* increased through participation in the workshop.

Additionally networking with like minded and committed service providers, and forming community partnerships to address domestic violence and sexual assault across the community, was cited by a majority of participants as being one of the three most valuable outcomes from the workshop.

Knowledge, understanding and/or skills to facilitate forums for youth on violence

57% of participants self assessed in the pre-workshop questionnaire as having below average capacity in this area, including workers and teachers with more than ten years experience in their current roles. After the workshop only one participant self-assessed as having below average capacity in this area.

Feedback from the pre-workshop questionnaire and the post workshop evaluations demonstrates the core aims outlined in the funding submission have been achieved.

The introduction of the LOVE BiTES Train the Trainer workshops into the targeted school communities has resulted in an increased knowledge and understanding among

key stakeholders of the extent of family and domestic violence and sexual assault in their local community, has provided resources and the capacity to work creatively with young people about these issues and has enhanced and strengthened working relationships between the government and non-government sector.

Planned Implementation of the LOVE BiTES Program

Each school involved in the training has implementation plans in place that are appropriate to their local circumstances and meet the needs of the local communities they operate in. They all highlight the value of partnerships between schools and professionals working in the area of sexual assault and family violence.

West Coast

Following the workshop participants from the West Coast have formed a West Coast LOVE BiTES Committee with a representative from each organisation that was involved in the training. To date the LOVE BiTES Committee has organised the following activities.

- Timetabled training in both Rosebery and Mountain Heights Schools on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of November 2009 for 100 hundred Grade 9 and 10 students.
- Approached absent priority organisations and invited them to be involved. These are identified as North West CASA, (Centre Against Sexual Assault), Child Protection and Tasmania Police.
- Applied for funding to print the young people's designs on T-shirts to worn on White Ribbon Day 25th November.
- Canvassed the Tasmanian Department of Education to incorporate the LOVE BiTES program into the Health Relationships curricula statewide.

Ashley School

The approach being taken in Ashley School is appropriate to its circumstances and to the highly disadvantaged and at risk young people in the school. The Community Education Worker and psychologist working in the Children and Young Persons Program in Family Violence and Counselling Support Service(FVCSS) have scheduled three one day staff training workshops over the next three months. They aim to introduce the information about healthy relationships, domestic and family violence

and sexual assault contained in the LOVE BiTES training to the teachers working at Ashley School. An evaluation of the benefit of implementing all or parts of the LOVE BiTES program into the school will then be assessed collaboratively with FVCSS and the school's Principal and teacher responsible for staff training.

Riverside High School

Riverside High School has allocated responsibility for implementing the LOVE BiTES program in its Health and Well Being Department. To date Riverside High School has:

- held a meeting of interested fellow participants in the training to help facilitate parts of the Program to Grade 9 students in term 3;
- presented the program to the Health and Well Being staff;
- plans to present the LOVE BiTES program to the whole of Riverside High School staff within the next month;
- plans to hold in-school activities for White Ribbon Day on 25th November 2009; and
- held discussions with Department of Education Learning Services North to launch the program in other schools in 2010.

Conclusion

Trialling the Love Bites program in four targeted Tasmanian schools is the outcome of collaborative effort on the part of Yemaya Women's Support Service, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services Family Violence Counselling and Support Service management. The impetus for introducing this innovative model into schools is based on the understanding that protecting children from the effects of family violence and sexual assault involves whole of community engagement to foster attitudinal change.

Feedback from participants and the immediate plans for implementing the LOVE BiTES program into the targeted schools demonstrate that the sustainability of the aims as outlined in the funding submission have been achieved.

Recommendations

1. As an early intervention and prevention program for young people LOVE BiTES has demonstrated it is grounded in sound research and a strong evidence base, and is engaging and informative for both educators and young people. It is backed by comprehensive learning support resources. We therefore recommend it is promoted widely to school communities, in Tasmania and nationally, as an existing program backed by excellent implementation resources, which can be integrated into existing health and well being curricula to educate young people on family/domestic violence and sexual assault issues.
2. The development of a promotion and implementation strategy, which identifies appropriate roles for NAPCAN, FaHCSIA, state departments of education, state departments of human services and community based service providers, should be considered before extending implementation into new locations.

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