Service and Program Awards Application Cover Sheet

Category: Education, Training or Workforce Development

Entry Title: Youth in Distress: Managing Suicidality and Self-harm – Upskilling the School Counsellor Workforce December 2017

Name of Applicant: Alexandra Richardson

Organisation: Black Dog Institute

Additional Information/Introduction

The **NSW Department of Education** engaged the **Black Dog Institute (BDI)** to customise its existing accredited Advanced Training in Suicide Prevention workshop for the high school context. The workshop, "**Youth in Distress: managing suicidality and self-harm"** was developed in a collaborative effort between Black Dog Institute's researchers, educators, lived experience representatives and clinical subject matter experts, along with the department's school counselling staff. The program is an adaptation of the BDI Suicide Prevention training program **"Advanced Training in Suicide Prevention"** that engages GPs and health professionals to manage suicidality and self-harm in their patients as part of the LifeSpan and National Suicide Prevention Trials being undertaken across Australia. The Youth in Distress program differs as it focuses on the target population of youth and within a school context.

The workshop was designed to build on the current level of skills of counselling staff, and to further develop confidence in undertaking risk assessments and safety planning for youth in distress. Over 1,196 school counselling staff received this training in 2018.

Self-report questionnaires were issued before training, immediately after training and at 3-month follow-up to assess participant knowledge and confidence in relation to managing suicidality and self-harm. The results showed positive measurable effects for improving school counselling knowledge and confidence in managing suicidality and self-harm. There were immediate improvements in knowledge and confidence after training, with improvements being sustained over time.

BDI also worked closely with the Department of Education NSW to update the Department's existing support document for the school counselling service: *Management of suicidality in students: Advice to school counselling staff.* These guidelines have been distributed to the whole school counselling workforce.

What are the outcomes of the Program?

The aim of the new program is for school counselling staff to:

- Undertake a suicide risk assessment effectively
- Develop a collaborative safety plan
- Implement a team approach to treatment planning
- Provide effective management following a suicide attempt
- Identify strategies for self-care

The program received highly positive feedback from its pilot session which ran in December 2017 in Freshwater, NSW:

> *"Best workshop I have been to in 25 years in this job…"* School counsellor, NSW Department of Education

2. Addressing the Award Criteria

2.1 Evidence of a significant contribution to the field of mental health on a local, state or national level.

In 2015, more Australian young people aged between 15 and 24 years died by suicide than by any other cause (ABS, 2016). Around one in 10 adolescents (10.9%) reported having ever self-harmed. This is equivalent to 186,000 young people aged 12-17 years who had deliberately injured themselves. About three quarters of these adolescents (amounting to 8.0% of the full population or an estimated 137,000 young people) harmed themselves in the previous 12 months.

Black Dog Institute partnered with the NSW Department of Education to develop "Youth in Distress: managing suicidality and self-harm" a 6-hour face to face training program which has been designed to build on the current level of skills of counselling staff, and to further develop confidence in undertaking risk assessments and safety planning for students experiencing suicidal thoughts and self-harm.

In 2018, Black Dog Institute's expert clinical facilitators delivered **39 sessions** of the 6-hr face-to-face training to the NSW Department of Education's counselling service over a 6-month period which has equated to **1046 participants trained**.

The 1046 school counsellors trained in Youth in Distress will serve as crucial gatekeepers to students and their mental wellbeing. The impact that these school counsellors will have on being able to recognise and treat students experiencing suicidality and self-harm will be imperative to the early detection and management of suicidal behaviour in government schools in NSW. Indeed, the results showed positive measurable effects for improving school counselling knowledge and confidence in managing suicidality and self-harm. There were immediate improvements in knowledge and confidence after training, with improvements being sustained over time.

- 16% increase in confidence in conducting a suicide risk assessment
- 19% increase in confidence inability to help and support a suicidal student

In 2019, Youth in Distress was also delivered to other school counsellors through the Catholic Diocese and Independent school bodies due to the interest and success of delivery to NSW Department of Education.

Catholic School Dioceses trained in Youth in Distress include:

- Catholic Diocese of Wollongong – 30 counsellors
- Catholic Diocese of Parramatta – 64 counsellors
- Catholic Diocese of Maitland – 40 counsellors
- Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay – 40 counsellors

Independent School Bodies trained in Youth in Distress include:

- Independent Schools NSW – 60 counsellors

ACT Education Directorate counsellors trained – 120

2.2 Evidence of innovation and/or recognised best practice

Black Dog Institute is a world leader in the diagnosis and prevention of mental illness as well as in the space of suicide prevention research. As a medical research institute, the Institute embodies innovation. Our programs are founded on a knowledge translation model meaning that they are all led by research that happens here at the Institute and around the world.

The Youth in Distress program is an example of knowledge translation in action, embracing research, clinical expertise, educationalists and lived experience to create accessible and practical training and resources.

The workshop was developed alongside experts from Lifespan (the suicide prevention trial conducted by Black Dog Institute), The Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention (CRESP), and in collaboration with NSW Department of Education and School Link (Department of Health NSW) to better inform the program's content and ensure it reflects best practice for the workforce targeted.

The Youth in Distress program was adapted from Black Dog Institute's existing evidence-informed program titled Advanced Training in Suicide Prevention (ATSP). The content, tools and strategies within this program are recognised as best-practice. ATSP was nationally implemented as part of the Commonwealth funded Suicide Prevention Trials and through the NSW/ACT high fidelity Suicide Prevention research trial known as Lifespan.

The Youth in Distress program is based on recognised best practice principals of suicide prevention: combining leading research with clinical wisdom from experts and lived experience. In addition to that, the format of the workshop was created by instructional designers observing best-practice principles of adult learning.

The workshop combines the following learning methodologies:

- didactic teaching using Power Point presentation with invitation and prompting of questions for whole group discussions
- role plays to practice learned skills
- small group discussions with interactive feedback sessions
- use of hypothetical case studies to provide material/content for above
- viewing video interviews with real consumers / carers and discussion

The program includes the offering of interactive peer group activities to continue the learning after the program is completed. Participants who attended the workshop can work through activities that are focusing on the key five topics covered in the program. This approach of ongoing engagement with the content embeds the learning.

2.3 Evidence of participation of mental health consumers in the planning, implementation and evaluation. There may be exceptions to the involvement of mental health consumers. If so, please address this when responding to this criterion.

The lived experience perspective is integral in the development of all education programs at Black Dog Institute. Every new program goes through a consultation process involving a range of stakeholders including consumers, carers, health professionals, subject matter experts and relevant organisations.

This focus on lived experience enables Black Dog Institute programs to target the needs identified by consumers and carers.

The Youth in Distress program is based on the Advanced Training in Suicide Prevention program developed by Black Dog Institute which engaged consumers and carers in its development. Consumers and carers were involved from the very beginning of the development process, providing input into what health professionals need to know, all the way through to finalising and reviewing the content.

In order to adapt the program for the school setting, further consultation was carried out to build in specific lived experience perspectives of young people who had accessed school counselling services.

The experiences of young people were sought from within Black Dog Institute's network of youth lived experience volunteers. They were consulted to help develop and review the case study scripts. Adry, a member of the youth volunteer network was interviewed, and his experiences were included in the course, including his experiences of support from his school counselling service.

Further key to the success of Youth in Distress was ensuring it met the needs of school counsellors. Focus groups with school counsellors were carried out where they shared case examples of students they worked with and were representing their experiences. A predominant amount of the consultation focused on what the school counsellors felt they needed in order to enhance their skill base. This helped further shape the content of the program to meet the needs of the intended audience.

2.4 Evidence of Partnerships and Linkages (collaboration for continuity between organisations).

Development of Youth in Distress was a collaborative effort between multiple stakeholders at Black Dog Institute, NSW Department of Education and the Department of Health via School Link. The success of the Youth in Distress program was built on the strength of this collaborative effort and partnership.

The NSW Department of Education and Black Dog Institute conducted multiple focus groups consisting of the Leader of Psychology and Wellbeing services for the NSW Department of Education, State Office staff, School Link project officer and multiple leader psychologists from different regions across the state. The initial focus groups were to help guide the direction of the program development, while later groups focussed more on the learning needs of school counsellors/psychologists.

Across the training within the state, School link coordinators were invited to attend the training and did attend in many cases and this enabled better relationships between school counsellors and their local school link coordinator. This relationship is vital to the effectiveness of the counselling staff and has been further enhanced by the training delivered in such a collaborative manner.

The partnership between Black Dog and the NSW Department of Education will continue following on from the success of Youth in Distress. This is further indication of the success of the partnership.

The NSW Department of Education have identified the need to update their existing guideline resource ‘Managing Students at Risk of Suicide’. Black Dog Institute will redevelop the resource to ensure it is more practical and to help address the management of students who have attempted suicide. The update to the resource will be based on best available evidence and draw on the research and clinical expertise within Black Dog Institute and our Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention.

Black Dog Institute will also continue to work with the NSW Department of Education to continue building the capacity of their psychology and counselling workforce. The collaborative relationship will continue via the development of a new program on managing depression and anxiety in children and adolescents. This is already in development with delivery and implementation expected to be completed by end of 2019.

Black Dog Institute is also working with similar bodies to implement this model of training to other psychology and counselling workforces within the Education system nationally. This currently includes Catholic School Dioceses across NSW, the ACT Education Directorate (the NSW Department of Education equivalent in the ACT). The next steps are further partnering with other state Education departments across Australia, further the delivery of the program across new Catholic Dioceses and target delivery within independent school networks.

2.5 Verification and evaluation of the program's effectiveness e.g. quality improvement activity, data collection and its use including graphs and tables, achievement of performance indicators, e.g. attendance figures, outcome measures, number of document downloads, page views, click through rates.'

Self-report questionnaires were issued before training, immediately after training and at 3 months follow up to assess participant knowledge and confidence in relation to managing suicidality and self-harm. The number of completed evaluation questionnaires received were 768 before training, 651 immediately after training and 261 at the 3-month follow up.

Changes in school counselling staff's knowledge and confidence after training

Figure 1 shows the proportion of employees who agreed, or strongly agreed with each statement in relation to their knowledge and confidence, before training (n=768), immediately after training (n=651), and at longer-term follow up (n=261).

Pleasingly, for across the entire cohort, the results showed positive measurable effects for improving school counselling knowledge and confidence in managing suicidality and self-harm. There were immediate improvements in knowledge and confidence after training, with improvements being sustained over time.

Figure 1

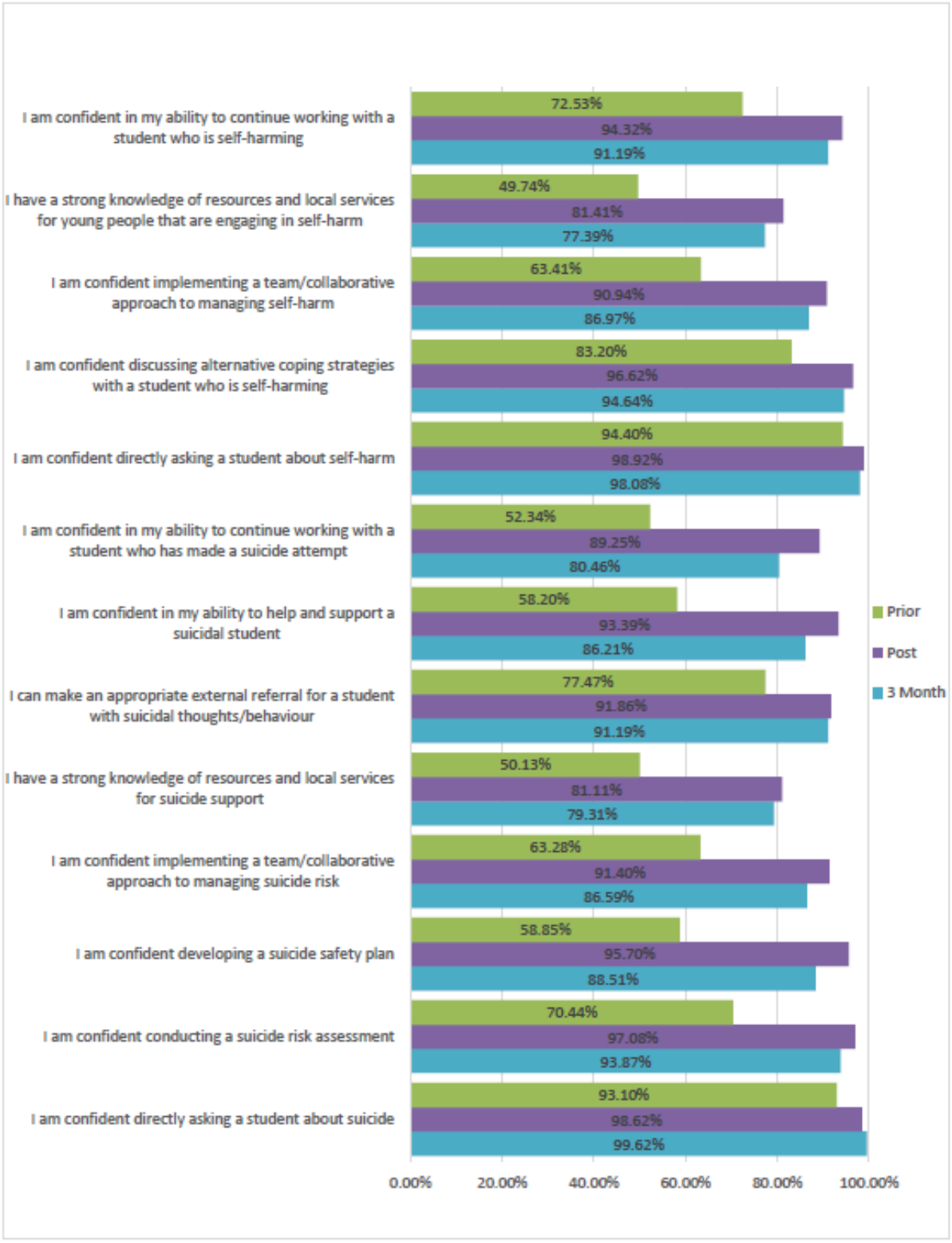

Figure 1: Participant self-rated knowledge and confidence of managing suicidality and self-harm prior to training (n=768), after training (n=651) and at follow-up (n=261)

Quality

The Black Dog Institute prides itself on the quality of its materials and facilitators, and a key part of our evaluation is focused upon the quality of our delivery.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of school counsellors who rated as very good or excellent the stated aspect of the workshop (n=651). The results indicate strong satisfaction with the quality of the facilitator/s and training program.

Figure 2

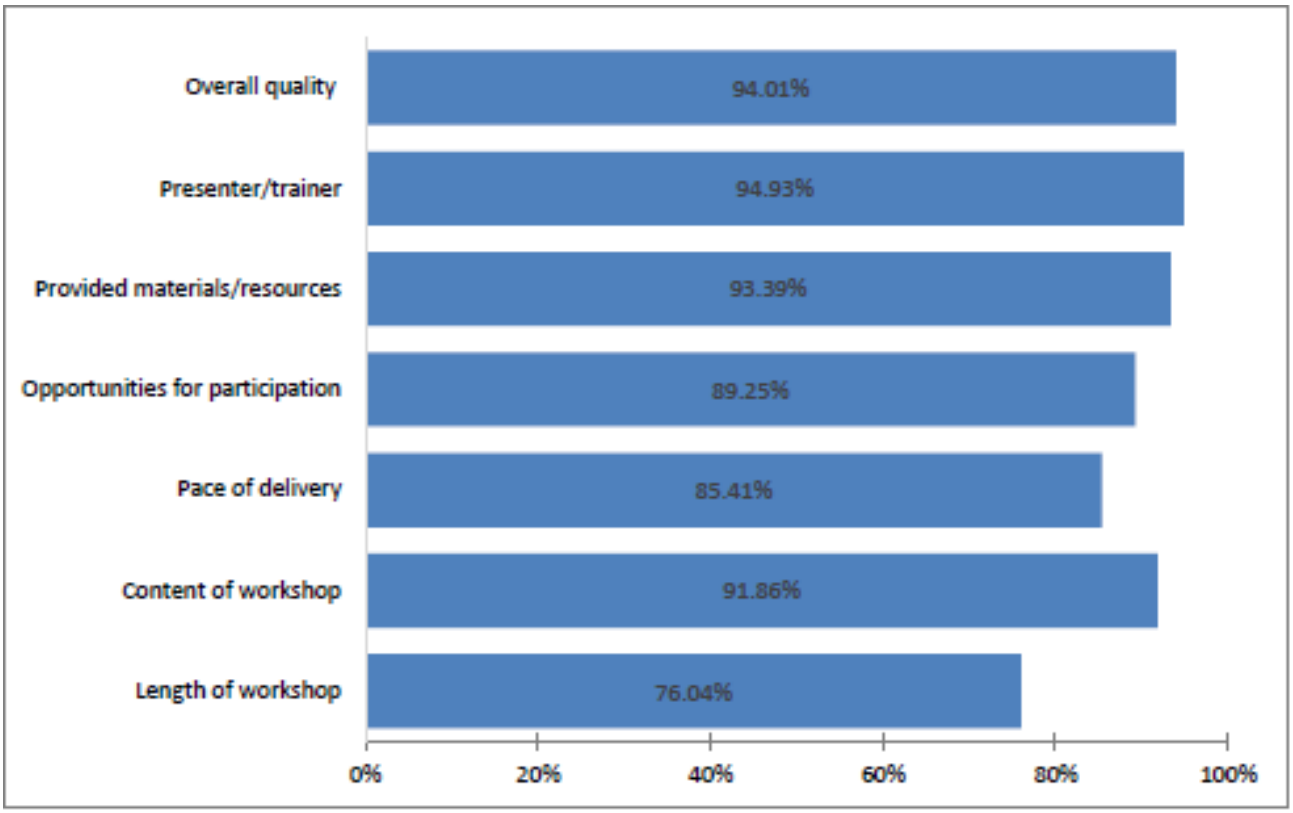

Figure 2: Percentage of participants who rated the components of the training as very good or excellent (n=651)

Post evaluation showed a statistically significant increase in the participant's confidence in conducting a suicide risk assessment and confidence in their ability to help and support a suicidal student.

- 16% increase in confidence in conducting a suicide risk assessment
- 19% increase in confidence inability to help and support a suicidal student
- 92% found the overall quality of the training to be excellent
- 77% found the training extremely helpful for their role.

Qualitative results

Feedback and comments have been received following the post-workshop and 3-month follow up questionnaires. These qualitative responses have been analysed and categorised according to content analysis principles. The number of comments received for the post workshop was 307 and for the 3-month there were 97.

Category	Number	Percentage*
Postive	n=201	65%
Negative	n=6	2%
Suggestions	n=126	41%
Venue	n=7	2%
Specific Program Content	n=91	30%
Resources	n=47	15%
Group Work	n=29	9%
Workshop Delivery & Timing	n=114	37%

Table 2 Categorised post workshop feedback (n=307)

Category	Number	Percentage*
Postive	n=62	64%
Negative	n=7	7%
Suggestions	n=21	22%
Venue	n=0	0%
Specific Program Content	n=15	15%
Resources	n=13	13%
Group Work	n=7	7%
Workshop Delivery & Timing	n=14	14%

Table 3 Categorised 3-month follow up workshop feedback (n=97)
* Not mutually exclusive.

<u>Qualitative Feedback received:</u>

- *"As a direct result of your training I was able to manage a situation where there was risk of suicide in a manner that was calm, and methodical, informed other school staff who were unsure of procedure, and ensured the best possible future outcome for the student at that time, and hopefully in the future. I am confident your course will help save young lives."*
- *"This course was so valuable, thank you! I would see this as an important component of professional development to complete every year; to improve my confidence, maintain my skills, experience collegiality with other school counsellors and for self-care in dealing with student's distress daily."*
- *"Fabulous workshop - thanks. Best I have been to in 25 years in this job. Really great to get to the 'nitty gritty' of our job. Video/vignettes were realistic and helpful. Questions all make us clarify our thoughts and procedures."*
- *"I honestly think this course IS THE BEST TRAINING in dealing with self-harm & suicidal ideation I have attended in my 6 years as school counsellor. I felt much more confident when I left, and I used the resources (safety plan &*

suicide Risk assessment) with the first child I saw the next day. Excellent presenter too. Thank you."

- *"Thank you so much to Blackdog and Department of Education NSW for this initiative. Students' lives may well be saved as a ripple effect of this professional learning. Thank you!"*

3. Conclusion

The school counselling service plays a critical role in identifying, managing and responding to suicide and self-harm in schools. The NSW Department of Education school counselling workforce has 1026 full time positions. An estimated 40 new staff each year enter the workforce and will require training in suicide prevention.

The Youth in Distress program has already proven a huge difference in the counsellors confidence and skills in managing suicide and self-harm within their schools, and as Black Dog Institute and Department of Education NSW continue to work together and collaborate on new programs to further develop and support the school counselling workforce, the better the outcomes will be for current and future young people will be.

Youth in Distress' success is evident in the significant increase in the workforces' ability to identify and manage suicidality and self-harm in students as well as the ability to roll this training out to scale, nationally, to other state Departments of Education and within the Catholic Dioceses, and independent school bodies.

Evaluation Report

Delivery of training to school counselling service

NSW Department of Education

Prepared by:
Black Dog Institute
Sarah Connor
Manager Health Professional & Community Education
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Putting health in mind

Black Dog Institute

Overview

Black Dog Institute (BDI) is pleased to present this report to the NSW Department of Education (the Department) summarising the successful delivery and evaluation of the professional development workshop *Youth in distress: managing suicidality and self-harm.* The workshop was delivered to 1,196 school counselling staff between December 2017 and December 2018.

Youth in distress: managing suicidality and self-harm workshop

This training program was developed following a need identified by the Department to continue to build upon the knowledge and confidence of school counselling staff to support students experiencing suicidality and self-harm.

The 6-hour face-to-face workshop was developed in a collaborative effort between BDI's researchers, educators, lived experience representatives and clinical subject matter experts, along with the Department's school counselling staff.

The learning objectives of the workshop are to:

- Undertake a suicide risk assessment effectively
- Develop a collaborative safety plan
- Implement a team approach to treatment planning
- Provide effective management following a suicide attempt
- Identify strategies for self-care

Summary of Program Delivery

Youth in Distress: managing suicidality and self-harm has been delivered by Black Dog Institute on 39 occasions reaching 1,196 of the Department's school counselling staff in the period from December 2017 to December 2018. See Table 1 for details of workshop locations and participant numbers.

Table 1: Summary of Youth in Distress workshops delivered to NSW Department of Education school counselling staff, Dec 2017 – Dec 2018.

Date	Venue	Suburb	Participants
7/12/2017	Freshwater Senior Campus	Freshwater	27
8/03/2018	Hopetown School	Wyong	27
9/03/2018	Glenfield Education Office - Conference Room	Glenfield	37
14/03/2018	Leadership Centre Armidale Education office	Armidale	17
16/03/2018	Hopetown School	Wyong	26
23/03/2018	Glenfield Education Office- Conference Room	Glenfield	37
28/03/2018	Batemans Bay Soldiers club	Batemans Bay	17
4/04/2018	Cex Coffs	Coffs Harbour	31
6/04/2018	Glenfield Education Office- Conference Room	Glenfield	37
7/05/2018	Five Islands Secondary College	Port Kembla	25
8/05/2018	Five Islands Secondary College	Port Kembla	30
16/05/2018	The Clubhouse- Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School	Tamworth	29
17/05/2018	The Kidman Wayside Inn	Griffith	14
23/05/2018	Club Taree	Taree	30
25/05/2018	Strathfield Education Office	Strathfield	38
29/05/2018	West Wests Convention Centre	West New Lambton	40
1/06/2018	Arncliffe Education Office	Arncliffe	39
6/06/2018	Dept of Education Office	Maitland	26
8/06/2018	Miranda Education Office	Miranda	42
13/06/2018	Lawson Motor Inn	Wagga Wagga	36
14/06/2018	Arncliffe Education Office	Arncliffe	39
15/06/2018	Henry Parkes Equity Resource Centre	Whalan	40
20/06/2018	Rivendell School Concord	Concord West	35
22/06/2018	Club Maquarie	Argenton	30
28/06/2018	Ocean Shores Country Club	Ocean Shores	29
29/06/2018	Richmond Trade Training Centre	Richmond	31
2/07/2018	Fairfield RSL	Fairfield	43
4/07/2018	Blue Mountains Theatre & Community Hub	Springwood	33
30/07/2018	Hornsby RSL	Horsnby	40
6/08/2018	Hornsby RSL	Hornsby	30
8/08/2018	Casino RSL Club	Casino	25
13/08/2018	Hunters Hill High School	Hunters Hill	37
17/08/2018	Henry Parkes Equity Resource Centre	Whalan	42
21/08/2018	Trade Training Centre	Orange	29
22/08/2018	The Bangamalanha Centre	Dubbo	30
23/08/2018	Broken Hill Education Office	Broken Hil	7
6/09/2018	Queanbeyan Education Office	Queanbeyan	18
5/12/2018	Rydges Sydney Central	Surry Hills	28
11/12/2018	Rydges Sydney Central	Surry Hills	25
		Total	**1,196**

Evaluation

Self-report questionnaires were issued before training, immediately after training and at 3 month follow up to assess participant knowledge and confidence in relation to managing suicidality and self-harm. The number of completed evaluation questionnaires received were 768 before training, 651 immediately after training and 261 at the 3-month follow up.

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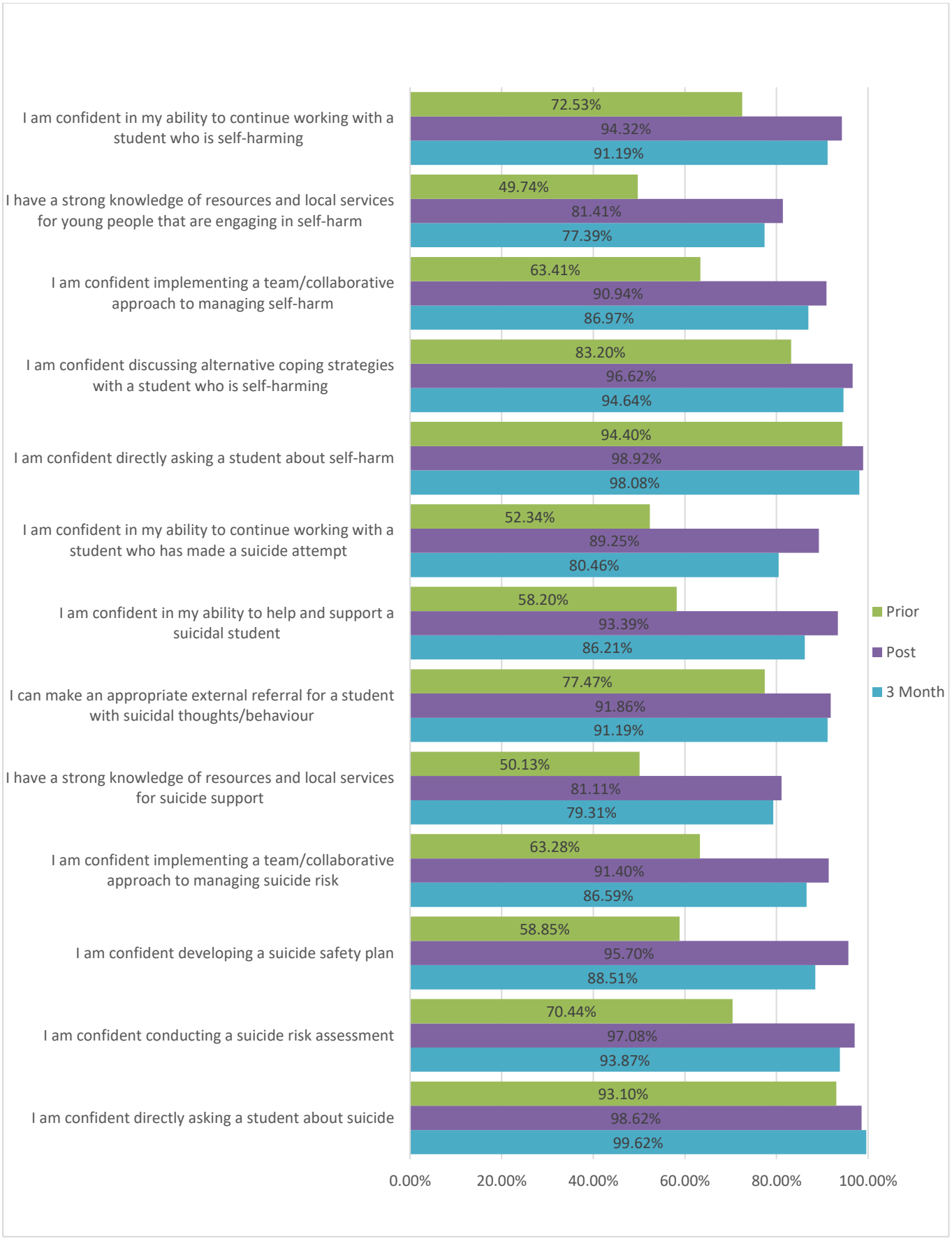

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Figure 2 shows the percentage of school counsellors who rated as ***very good*** or ***excellent*** the stated aspect of the workshop (n=651). The results indicate strong satisfaction with the quality of the facilitator/s and training program.

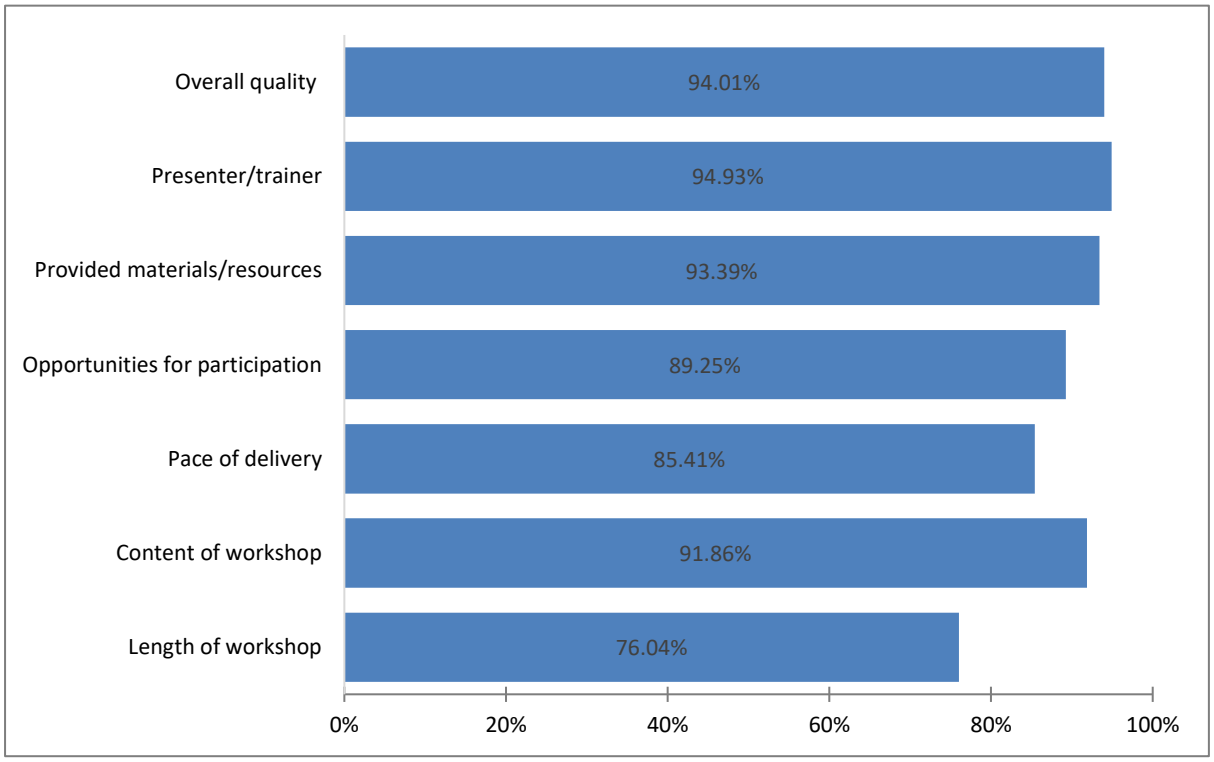

Figure 2: Percentage of participants who rated the components of the training as very good or excellent (n=651)

Qualitative results

Feedback and comments have been received following the post-workshop and 3-month follow up questionnaires. These qualitative responses have been analysed and categorised according to content analysis principles. The number of comments received for the post workshop was 307 and for the 3-month there were 97. See Appendix for the full list of comments.

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Positive comments

On the whole, positive comments were general in nature such as "Thanks", "Excellent Program" and "Well done" or they complimented the facilitators and resources. Positive feedback featured below indicates the significant impact achieved on school counsellor knowledge and confidence of the topic.

> *"As a direct result of your training I was able to manage a situation where there was risk of suicide in a manner that was calm, and methodical, informed other school staff who were unsure of procedure, and ensured the best possible future outcome for the student at that time, and hopefully in the future. I am confident your course will help save young lives."*

"This course was so valuable, thank you! I would see this as an important component of PD to complete every year; to improve my confidence, maintain my skills, experience collegiality with other SCs and for self-care in dealing with student's distress on a daily basis."

"I honestly think this course IS THE BEST TRAINING in dealing with self-harm & suicidal ideation I have attended in my 6 years as school counsellor. I felt much more confident when I left and I used the resources (safety plan & suicide Risk assessment) with the first child I saw the next day. Excellent presenter too. Thank you."

"Thankyou so much to Blackdog and DoE for this initiative. Student lives may well be saved as a ripple effect of this PL. Thank you!"

Specific program content

The comments about content were often quite general such as "*Excellent trainer, content and nice facility. Thank you".* Other examples referred to the depth and relevance of content and tools featured in the workshop.

"This workshop was effectively targeted to our specific needs, I felt that the presenters and content were relevant and applicable across the different school setting I work in.

"We've been provided with practical and workable tools to implement into daily practice."

"Going back into schools after the training I found that I was using it immediately and it increased my confidence"

"Very relevant, appropriate and well-delivered. Excellent revision for many of us with latest research. Thank you."

"A vitally important course to increase the skills of school counsellors when dealing with complex life-threatening issues. It was good to do this course with other counsellors to listen to their views on the material presented and the recommended approach."

Resources

Feedback around resources were categorised as anything regarding to the workshop materials such as workbook, videos and activities. A range of examples highlightling the practicality of the resources are featured below.

"[…] I felt much more confident when I left and I used the resources (safety plan & suicide risk assessment) with the first child I saw the next day […]"

"The modelling provided by the video was most important to my sense of accessing the way to conduct such an interview. The information provided in a video is much fuller than provided in a script or even an audio recording […]"

"Very thorough course, like the pre-reading research component as well. Resources were very professional - like the semi-structured interview - very helpful for reliability - approachable trainers."

"Practical, relevant strategies and resources to use in my role, presented thoughtfully and in detail. Thank you!"