

Implementing Resilience Strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in boarding schools

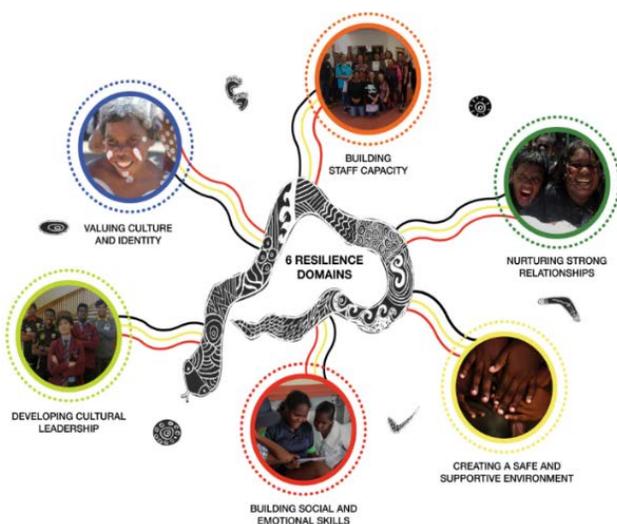
RESEARCH BRIEF

Why should schools implement resilience strategies?

Schools are extremely important environments for supporting and developing the resilience of children and adolescents. School resilience programs impact the school environment through the culture, values and environments of schools; the quality and nature of relationships between students and teachers, and students with peers; and individual student impacts, including their sense of belonging and willingness to engage in their schooling (Heyeres et al., 2018).

Working on resilience with boarding schools

A Participatory Action Research resilience intervention designed and co-facilitated with Transition Support Service was run with each boarding school across two school years. The intervention involved multiple strategies with school-based resilience-strengthening plans designed around the specific contexts of each school. Schools were encouraged to think of various domains that contribute to resilience.



Strategies within the intervention included:

1) School based STEP UP planning

S – Strengths based
T- Tuned in
E- Evidence based
P- Plan is measurable

U- Understanding
P – Partnerships

2) Online professional development

3) Annual Schools and Communities meetings

Many schools saw positive changes in their environment.

“There were Indigenous kids here [before], but they were not a voice...just part of the crowd. But now I feel like they have more of an identity and they’re more willing to speak up. Their grades are improving, and they are existing here in a lot more positive way - I think that’s because of what we’ve been doing”

However, schools also faced challenges in trying to achieve this, such as;

- **Time;** staff time and opportunities for learning outside of already packed schedules and boarding shifts, as well as time to implement strategies
- **Priorities;** competing priorities for a range of student, academic, and co-curricular programs
- **Funding;** allocation of resources, particularly for expensive costs such as travel to communities

You aren't alone! The benefits of a Community of Practice

One of the most commonly referred to benefits of the intervention was the opportunity to connect with and learn from other boarding providers face-to-face. Finding a point of connection with other schools also helped staff to recognise the common concerns and challenges across sites, and what might be unique to their site. This often helped to identify where to focus their resilience planning and focus.

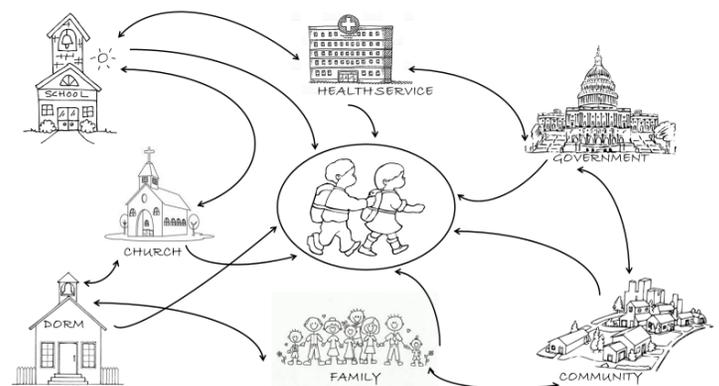
“We learnt a lot from people who had been doing this role for [a long time] and just little things that we could start doing here at school that they weren't going to be a big production, just little changes that we could put into place”

Resilience as an integrated ecology of support

A key finding of the study so far is that what students say makes them strong (resilient) are factors that are largely outside of their individual control. Additionally, schools and school staff indicate that there are factors beyond their individual professional role or a school's capacity that can either enable or hinder the changes needed to improve student support. Therefore, looking at resilience from an integrated ecology of support (i.e. linking all of the resources for students) such as schools, families, communities and peers. This means that stand-alone support from any of these areas is not enough, but that resilience requires each of these, along with connections between them.

How can we help boarding schools to implement resilience strategies?

- **Systems support** to ensure;
 - boarding environments with high staff capacity (e.g. National boarding standards, integrated support from health and education systems);
 - Clear and easy to access resources (e.g. Abstudy funds, health care, mental health support services);
- **Top-down support** to implement resilience and social and emotional wellbeing strategies (e.g. from school leadership teams, Education departments);
- **Opportunities to connect** and bring together students, schools, relevant service providers, and community members (e.g. ongoing support and funding for schools and communities' meetings, and school-community connections)



References

Heyeres, M., McCalman, J., Langham, E., Bainbridge, R., Redman-MacLaren, M., Britton, A., . . . Tsey, K. (2018). *Strengthening the Capacity of Education Staff to Support the Wellbeing of Indigenous Students in Boarding Schools: A Participatory Action Research Study. AJIE*, 1-14. doi:10.1017/jie.2017.42