

**Evaluating the Content of Skylight's Travellers Programme  
Final Report**

**Commissioned by Skylight  
and funded by the Ministry of Health**

**Marieke Jasperse, Michelle Stevens and Larah van der Meer  
Faculty of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington**

**2014**

# **Evaluating the Content of Skylight's Travellers Programme**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Skylight's Travellers Programme, funded by the Ministry of Health, is an early intervention programme run in New Zealand secondary schools for Year 9 students identified through an online wellness survey. The overall aim of Travellers is to enhance protective factors for young people experiencing change, loss and transition events and early stages of emotional distress (Skylight, 2005).

Skylight has commissioned external evaluations since its inception (Dickinson, 2004; McCluskey, 2010; Robertson, Boyd, Dingle & Taupo, 2012), which have consistently reported that the Travellers Programme provides a transformative experience that appeals to a diverse range of students experiencing major life changes. Students who participate in the programme report significant shifts in attitudes and behaviours and significantly less subjective distress, whilst facilitators seem satisfied with the initial training and support provided by Skylight.

### **Present Evaluation**

The present evaluation is in response to Skylight's request to have a further evaluation of the programme, focusing on the content of the Travellers Programme.

A mixed method approach was utilized in the current evaluation, taking care to pursue the perspectives that reflect the diversity present within participating New Zealand high schools.

An online survey was developed in Qualtrics to remind students of the different sessions and activities they participated in during Travellers and assess their engagement and enjoyment of each activity. The perceived efficacy of these activities in meeting their intended objectives was also explored. Thirty-two students completed this survey and represented a range of high schools from Wellington and Auckland, with decile rankings ranging from 1–9.

An additional two focus groups were conducted following a similar format to the online survey. One was conducted with eight students from a relatively high decile school, the majority of whom identified as NZ European/Pakeha. While the other focus group was

conducted with six students from a lower decile school, the majority of whom identified as Pasifika. All students participated in Travellers in Term 2, 2013.

Twelve interviews were conducted with school guidance counselors experienced in facilitating the Travellers programme. An equal number of female and male counselors participated, the majority of whom identified as NZ European/Pakeha. They represented high schools ranging from decile 1 – 9, from Wellington, Hamilton and Auckland.

Data collection for the project was conducted over three months (June – August 2014). The responses of students to the student survey were compiled and subjected to a frequency analysis within Qualtrics, while the responses to open ended questions in the survey were extracted and analysed thematically. The student focus groups and facilitator interviews were audio recorded and analysed thematically.

## **Results**

### **Students' perspectives**

Overall the majority of students viewed all aspects of the programme favourably, rating all the questions established to assess their engagement, enjoyment and the perceived efficacy of the different sessions and activities positively (agreement ranged from 70% - 100%), with the exception of one activity (see Recommendation 4). Refer to the full report for an overview of feedback regarding each session and associated activities.

### **Facilitators' perspectives**

Guidance counselors' accounts of facilitating Travellers were remarkably consistent, with descriptions of how the travelling metaphor and associated activities reliably prompt meaningful discussion and learning. Guidance counselors reported that their students generally respond well to the programme and disclosed how witnessing the students' progress over the course of the programme was satisfying. A number of guidance counselors also noted the significance of making connections with specific students that they could continue to support in other ways outside of Travellers.

An appreciation of the flexibility of the programme and ability to modify activities to suit their students was expressed, whilst suggestions to modify and/or remove particular aspects of sessions were consistent with previous evaluations.

## **Recommendations Regarding the Content of Travellers**

- 1. Slogans:** Reduce the number of slogans to two per session. Consider rephrasing these two statements to communicate the key concepts as concisely as possible and add Maori translations to each. Change the colour of the slogans for Session 8, which are currently brown.
- 2. Graphics:** Consider changing the graphics on the bingo and paired interviews sheets to a more mature, graphic novel style (see example provided in Appendix M).
- 3. Travellers Diary (Session 1, Activity 6):** Change the glossy paper the Travellers diaries are printed on to reduce the smudging of coloured pens. Consider incorporating the Travellers pass into the Travellers diary. This way the travelling metaphor continues to be reinforced while the issue of students losing their passes is addressed.
- 4. Life Maps (Session 2, Activity 1):** Consider creating stickers that break the life map into stages, such as 'started primary school'. Using 0 – 14 years was perceived to be too open and overwhelming for students.
- 5. Day Trips (Session 3, Activity 3):** Remove day trips. Only 25% of students enjoyed this activity and facilitators reported little perceived value in this exercise.
- 6. 'Thinking positively about myself' worksheet (Session 5, Activity 4):** Modify the 'Thinking positively about myself' worksheets to allow personalization. Remove the statement 'I'll never be famous' and add blank sections for students to incorporate their own negative self-talk statements.
- 7. Time Scheduling (Session 6, Activity 1):** Remove the time scheduling worksheet and consider a simplified, visual alternative such as the construction of pie graphs (see Appendix N for suggestion).
- 8. Circles of Support (Session 7, Activity 2):** Consider removing the prompts 'Family', 'Friends' and 'Acquaintances' from the circles. Participants pointed out that 'Family' is situated in the inner circle, but can often be a major source of stress.

## **Additional recommendations**

- 1.** Consider developing a re-structured alternative 10-week programme to be run within 60-minute sessions.
- 2.** Keep facilitators informed of research evaluations, which they can use to justify the continuation of Travellers with school management and stakeholders.
- 3.** Encourage facilitators to organize Travellers reunions for their students.

4. Continue to provide the training and support that is regarded so positively.

### **Future Research**

For future evaluations consider implementing a longitudinal study of programme outcomes, following a similar methodology to the evaluation conducted by Robertson and colleagues (2012). It would be interesting to incorporate additional time points one year later and three years later as students prepare to leave school in order to explore whether the initial outcomes of participating in Travellers are retained.

### **Conclusion**

The Travellers programme, in its current form, is perceived as an enjoyable and effective programme that facilitates meaningful engagement from students and the effective transmission of key learning objectives. An appreciation of the programme's structure and ability to modify activities to suit their students was expressed by facilitators and the recommendations coming from this evaluation are consistent with previous evaluations which regard Travellers as '*a well liked model*' that requires minor '*cosmetic surgery rather than a major face lift*' (McCluskey, 2010, p 7).

*'I've been running Travellers since it started ... I think it's a wonderful programme ... I hope it continues, that's all I can say'*

*(Guidance counselor)*