

**Facilitator, Principal and Student
Review of Skylight's Travellers™
Programme**

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Executive Summary

Skylight's Travellers™ programme has been running in New Zealand secondary schools since 2000. The programme aims to enhance protective factors for young people experiencing change, loss and transition events and who are in the early stages of emotional distress. This report presents the results of a research study that examined the views of facilitators, principals and students after involvement with the Travellers™ programme.

The study involved qualitative interviews with 22 programme facilitators and 10 school principals, and focus groups with 32 students who had been on the programme. The interviews and focus groups explored the views of those involved with the programme as to its content and overall appeal, reasons for using it, factors important in choosing whether to continue with it or not and the characteristics of those who participate. Students were also asked about the helpfulness and impact of the programme.

Schools supported the need for a programme such as Travellers™ to address the needs of some of their students. Schools continued use of the Travellers™ programme was based on facilitators' and school principals' perception that the programme was effective in bringing about positive change in the behaviour and attitudes of those students who participate. In schools where principals devolve major decision-making at the departmental level to section heads, reliance on the competence of facilitators to accurately recommend ongoing programme involvement is common.

For participating students, many reported their initial motivation was the provision of food at the programme. However the motivation to continue subsequently shifted to forming relationships with facilitators and other students, and satisfaction from participation in the programmes learning and activities.

Interviewees were asked to comment on the programme and to detail any aspects of the programme that they felt could be improved. The general view of the programme was remarkably positive, but there were clearly some elements that

would benefit from attention and these are listed below (further detail is given in the body of the report).

Changes to the programme -

- Add resources to Session 1 Activity 4 – exploring the journey.
- Session 2 language – could be simplified for some students.
- Session 2 resources – add take home cards to practice range of emotional adjectives.
- Session 2 visuals –resources added to participant created ones.
- Session 3 language – include less adult and more youth language. More alternatives for how to introduce feelings.
- Session 3 – more on the spiritual dimension for Maori and pacific students.
- Session 4 language – change the ‘Express yourself!’ slogan.
- Session 4 visuals – improve drawing of faces so emotion is easier to identify.
- Session 6 activities – simplify time scheduling exercise to focus on a day rather than a week.
- Session 6 language – improve the way the relaxation exercise is run, e.g. by giving facilitators guidelines to prepare students, remove obstacles.
- Session 6 language – improve the language used for some concepts.
- Conduct student follow up evaluation at 6 months.
- A six month follow up student get together be considered.
- Skylight to reconsider the support needs of schools and consider visits to schools. Consideration also is given to facilitating communication between Travellers™ practitioners.
- Audio visuals materials (e.g. CDs, DVDs) are developed to support the programme.

Modifications to the programme -

- Session 1 visuals - students are helped to make use of the stickers.
- Session 2 activities – consideration is given to students being able to work on life maps and diary between sessions.
- Session 3 visuals – use a picture to illustrate the key concept slogan and the link between self-esteem and self-worth.
- Session 5 visuals – slight improvements could be made to session visuals.
- Session 8 language – reconsider some of the slogans and the phrasing for less literate students.

- Session 8 visuals – change the colour on the posters to increase the contrast. Consider a pan-ethnic waka to symbolise travel and make more use of the Passport during the session.
- Number of sessions – the possibility of optionally running the programme over 10 weeks is considered.

Aspects recommended remaining unchanged -

- Continued use of global data and feedback to schools and facilitators.
- Skylight continues to liaise with schools and facilitators.
- Support for the facilitators manual, although more options for presenting some material was supported.
- Many elements of the sessions were felt to be very effective. For example the life is a journey was supported as the programmes primary metaphor and Life Maps were seen as very effective and enjoyed by students.
- Some suggestions were made by facilitators and students for minor improvements in the look of programme materials and the language used.
- Length of sessions seemed right for most facilitators, although accommodating the programme depended somewhat on length of school lesson periods.
- Facilitator training was positively regarded. There was also wide support for the 6 month training follow up for facilitators.
- Most facilitators supported having training in Term 3.
- The online delivery of the survey was seen as most effective.

It needs to be noted that the above practical suggestions were often provided with the insistence that such changes should not serve to replace a system that seemed to work well, but rather augment and strengthen the core ideas and the presentation thereof.

This study illustrates that notwithstanding the incredible diversity that exists in New Zealand schools, Travellers™ has widespread appeal amongst staff and students alike and crosses racial, cultural, gender, decile, and learning ability boundaries. Selecting the aspects of the programme which are best suited to given groups of students, facilitators are managing to adapt the programme in a flexible manner so that it can reach, touch and affect the attitudes and behaviour of many of their charges.

These results would suggest that the Travellers™ programme is a well-liked and received model that requires some cosmetic surgery rather than a major facelift. While some schools will be willing and have the ability to pay for the costs associated with running the programme without concern, for some this decision must be given serious consideration. In particular, smaller middle-decile state schools tend not to have the parental financial support of higher decile schools, or the significant additional government funding of larger low decile schools, and yet all of these schools have students confronting the challenges associated with transitions that Travellers™ seeks to address.

In running the programme choices occur at different levels (e.g. whether or not to run the programme and what aspects of the programme should be modified to meet contextual needs more effectively) and under different constraints. This study has identified many of these choices, needs and constraints, but has also raised questions for further research. In particular it would be beneficial to have systematic research on programme outcomes, in order to support the positive anecdotal reports in this evaluation.