

Speak Up, Speak Out

A 2019 pilot initiative that aimed to strengthen current evidence around effective primary prevention initiatives to address family violence and violence against women in Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Introduction

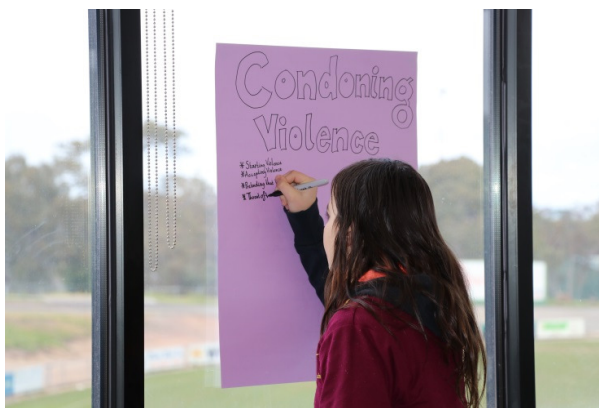
Speak Up, Speak Out (SUSO) was a pilot initiative funded by the Victorian State Government through the *Aboriginal Family Violence Primary Prevention Fund* in 2019.

The pilot included two programs, engaging a total of 26 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people aged 9-12 years. All participants attended schools in the Moreland and Hume local government areas.

Held at the Essendon Football Club (SUSO #1) and then the Greenvale Football Club (SUSO #2), the programs utilised fun, engaging activities, role play and group discussion to teach equal and respectful relationships education, gender equity and upstander actions.

The programs were also heavily focused on connecting the young people to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community.

The evaluation data collected from the two programs indicates improvements in knowledge, confidence and understanding in relation to the program objectives.



SUSO participant learning about respectful relationships

Quick Facts

Years implemented

Pilot initiative delivered in 2019

What is it?

Pilot initiative that engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from Hume/Moreland in equal and respectful relationships education, gender equity, upstander training and connection to culture and community

Reach

Direct: 26 participants, aged 9-12 years
Indirect: Staff, students and families from 9 Hume/Moreland primary schools

Key partners

The Long Walk Trust
Merri Health
Primary schools in Hume/Moreland LGAs
Wandarra Aboriginal Corporation

Key achievements

- 2 pilot programs delivered
- Average of 18 hours of learning per program
- Average attendance was 77% and 84% in the two programs respectively
- 80-90% of participants said that they had improved their knowledge and understanding of safe, equal and respectful relationships
- 70-100% participants said that they feel more connected to their culture
- Aboriginal staff reported increased knowledge and confidence to deliver primary prevention initiatives
- 100% of Elders surveyed felt ownership over the project

Speak Up, Speak Out

Project activities

Project partners The Long Walk Trust and Merri Health received funding to deliver the first SUSO program in Term 2, 2019 and were subsequently offered some extension funding to run another program in Term 4, 2019.

Between August 2018 and December 2019, the project partners undertook the following project activities:

- Recruitment of an Aboriginal Project Officer
- Staff training for program staff (4 facilitators)
- Curriculum development in consultation with Aboriginal Elders (and subsequent curriculum re-development based on evaluation from the first program)
- EOIs to schools in Hume/Moreland
- Participant recruitment and registration
- Organisation of catering and transport
- Development of risk management frameworks and disclosures protocols
- Engagement of specialist contractors to deliver some program content
- Delivery of 2 x SUSO programs
- Communications (weekly e-news, and creation of SUSO video)
- Evaluation (pre and post) & qualitative



Traditional owner, Kellie Hunter, welcomes participants with a smoking ceremony

Curriculum summary

For both SUSO programs, the curriculum was split into either fortnightly (SUSO #1) or weekly (SUSO #2) yarning circles of 2-2.5 hours each.

The first SUSO program relied much more heavily on utilising external facilitators and contractors to deliver content. This was modified in the second program and delivered greater success in terms of participant learning and connection to the facilitators.

The final SUSO curriculum was as follows:

Yarning circle #1	Welcome to Country and getting-to-know-you games
Yarning circle #2	Leadership
Yarning circle #3	Gender equality & equal and respectful relationships
Yarning circle #4	Upstander training
Day on Country (First program was an overnight camp)	Welcome and smoking ceremony, possum skin burning and other cultural activities
Yarning Circle #5	Planning for the Family Day
Family Day, celebration and graduation event	Opportunity for families and teachers to come and see the students demonstrate their learning
Yarning circle #6	Evaluation

Evaluation

Pre and post evaluation surveys were conducted with all participants and Aboriginal staff involved with SUSO. Post evaluation data was collected from teachers and families, as well as the Wandarra Elders who helped to inform the initiative.

A dedicated evaluation session was conducted with participants at the end of each SUSO program to

Speak Up, Speak Out

collect qualitative feedback. A compilation of qualitative responses has been made into a video:

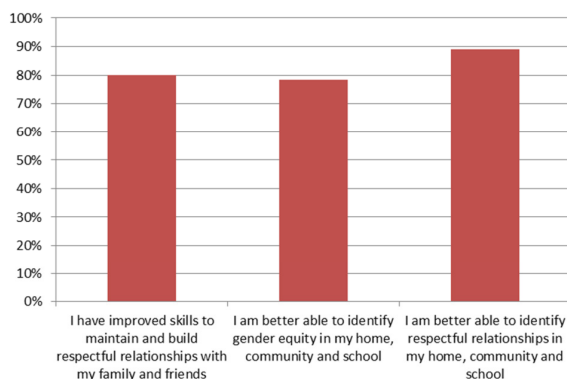
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_3ea24kNvc&feature=youtu.be

For a range of reasons – including group dynamics, program structure, participant behavioural and learning needs in the first program – the evaluation results for the participants in SUSO #1 and SUSO #2 sometimes varied. When this was the case, results have been presented separately for the two cohorts.

The following provides a summary of results for each objective of the project.

Objective #1: Increase participants' knowledge and understanding of healthy, supportive and safe relationships

In self-reported post evaluation surveys, a high proportion of participants from both SUSO groups reported increases in their knowledge and understanding of safe, equal and respectful relationships.



Graph 1: Percentage of participants from both programs that agreed with these statements

These results are consistent with reports from families and teachers. In a post evaluation survey, 90% of respondents said that they have observed changes in their child or students' knowledge or understanding of what constitutes a safe, respectful and healthy relationship.

"In small ways, they are beginning to communicate respectfully about their feelings and actions they see."

Teacher

Interestingly, the pre and post surveys revealed a decrease in participants' perceived confidence to be able to access support and services if needed (pre-evaluation 87.6% answered yes, compared to only 58.3% post-program).

It is therefore likely that participation in SUSO highlighted the need to seek help when required, but that the curriculum inadequately addressed how and where to find help. This hypothesis is supported by facilitator reflections and it is therefore a recommendation that future programs seek to redress this oversight in the curriculum.



SUSO participants learning about Country

Speak Up, Speak Out

Objective #2: Increase participants' skills and confidence to take positive action as an upstander to promote healthy, supportive and safe relationships

Post-program quantitative surveys revealed a significant increase in participants' skills and confidence to take upstander action.

"I liked the focus on the upstander actions... society teaches our kids the opposite"

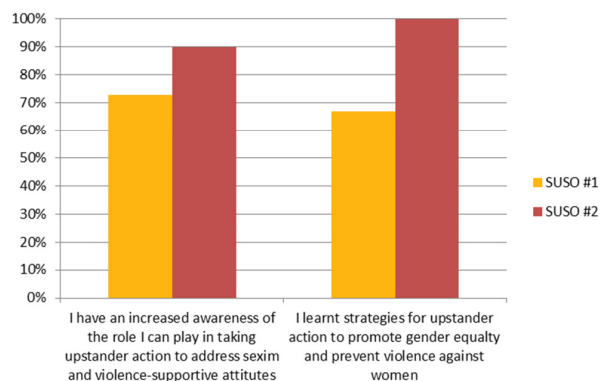
Parent

84% of participants from both programs said they intend to take upstander action to address sexism and violence-supportive attitudes.

73% of participants from the first program and 100% from the second program reported that they had increased their leadership skills as a result of SUSO.

Interestingly, at the end of the program, only 13% of participants from the first group could correctly identify all four upstander actions. After modifying the curriculum to embed upstander content throughout the program, 70% of participants from the second program could name all four actions.

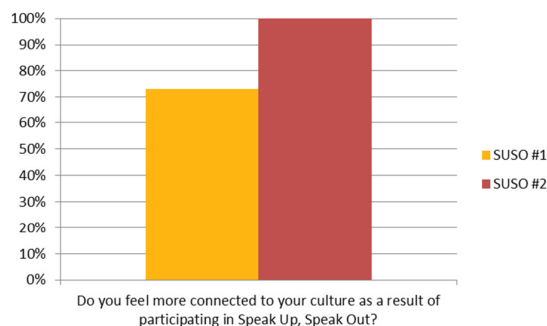
In self-reported post-evaluation surveys, a moderate proportion of participants from the first program and a large proportion from the second program either agreed or strongly agreed they had increased their awareness and learnt strategies for upstander action.



Graph 2: Percentage of participants that either agreed or strongly agreed with these statements post-program

Objective #3: Increase participants' sense of connection to culture and community

Evaluation data reveals that participation in SUSO strongly affected participants' sense of connection to their culture and community.



Graph 3: Percentage of participants that answered yes

Speak Up, Speak Out

"They enjoyed the cultural activities, the yarning circles, the day on country the cultural craft and possum skin burning."

Teacher

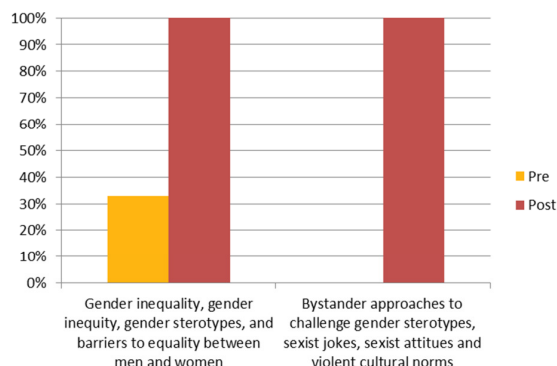
Additionally, in post program surveys 80% of participants from both programs said that they had made new friends as a result of their participation in SUSO.



Objective #4: Aboriginal staff involved with the project increase their knowledge, understanding and confidence around utilising primary prevention strategies that address healthy, supportive and safe relationships in Aboriginal communities in Melbourne's North

Objective #4 sought to upskill the three Aboriginal project staff involved with SUSO, with the ultimate aim of contributing to the Victorian primary prevention workforce.

Although the three Aboriginal staff members came into the project with different skill and knowledge levels, pre and post surveys showed distinct improvements in self-rated knowledge in all areas including gender equity and upstander approaches.



Graph 4: Percentage of Aboriginal staff pre and post that rated themselves as 'very knowledgeable' in these areas

By the end of the project, all 3 Aboriginal staff members could accurately identify the drivers of violence against women, as well as accurately report the proportion of violence that is perpetrated by men against women.

Additionally, two out of three Aboriginal staff members reported increased networks with Aboriginal organisations as a result of their involvement with SUSO.

The biggest shift for the Aboriginal staff involved with the project was increased confidence to plan, implement and evaluate primary prevention initiatives to address family violence, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Objective #5: At the conclusion of the project, Aboriginal Elders will report ownership, confidence and pride with respect to the project

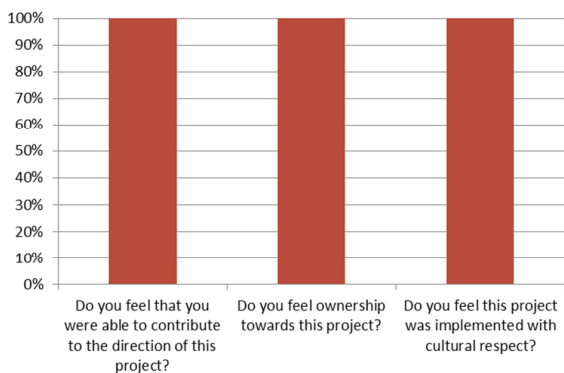
Throughout the planning and implementation of both SUSO programs, the SUSO team consulted with the Wandarra Elders group monthly to ensure that the curriculum content was culturally appropriate, and that the program was implemented with integrity.

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"Really enjoyed the day on country with the kids. They all really liked the boomerang throwing"

Uncle Paul Ashton

A post evaluation survey with the Elders revealed a strong connection with the project:



Graph 5: Percentage of Elders surveyed post-program that answered 'yes' to these questions

Other unexpected impacts

1. Confidence and empowerment

While this pilot did aim to increase confidence and leadership skills with respect to taking upstander action, teachers and parents reported a much broader impact on many of their students or children in terms of increased confidence.

Many teachers reported that as a result of their participation in SUSO, their students increased their confidence to speak in front of groups:

"He has more confidence when public speaking." Teacher

"This really built huge amounts of confidence in my child." Parent

2. School attendance

Some of the Aboriginal students engaged with SUSO had low school attendance.

For some students, their participation in SUSO also increased their school attendance:

"[SUSO] helped my son attend school on a regular basis and he gained a lot more confidence within himself." Parent

"SUSO is reaching at-risk students and giving them an exciting reason to come to school"

Teacher

3. Impact on families and communities

After the first SUSO program, the project team removed the objective relating to impacts on families, due to limited ability to contact and connect with families during the program.

Nonetheless, a post program evaluation with teachers and families revealed that 64% of respondents said they also had learnt something about respectful relationships, gender equity, stereotypes or upstander action as a result of their child or student's participation in SUSO.

Eighty per cent of respondents also believed that their child or student's participation in SUSO had already had a broader impact on their family or school.



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Challenges

Group dynamics and attendance

Within the first SUSO group in particular, a range of complex personal circumstances, experiences and behaviours affected some participants' engagement with the program, broader group dynamics and the learning outcomes of the group.

A range of challenges presented during the camp, causing significant disruption to the camp schedule and learning outcomes.

Although attendance at SUSO was relatively good – and in some instances much better than school attendance – when participants missed several yarning circles in a row, this negatively affected their learning.

Further, there were times when staff were unaware that students were absent from school until they arrived to pick them up.

Scheduling and transport

SUSO engaged students from across Hume/Moreland and thus, logistics for pickups and drop-offs were challenging, particularly for the first SUSO program where students came from everywhere across the region from Brunswick to Sunbury. Multiple vehicles were required to transport the students to a central location, and sometimes these vehicles were difficult to secure amongst competing demands from other services.

Securing cultural consultants was also sometimes a challenge, due to the need for advanced booking time.

In the first SUSO program, yarning circles were held fortnightly, however, the project staff reflected that the inconsistency of the groups impacted on the continuity of learning for the participants. In the second SUSO program, yarning circles were scheduled weekly, which was much better for participants. However, this created its own challenges

in relation to planning time for facilitators, with most project staff working part-time.

Evaluation

Using surveys that aim to measure pre and post knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to respectful relationships is very difficult. SUSO project staff utilised questions from existing surveys, including the Department of Education and Training *Student Survey Year 7–12, Respectful Relationships Evaluation*, version 2, January 2018.

However, pre and post answers from these questions proved very ineffective at accurately measuring change over time in this cohort. Ultimately the project team found post-evaluation self-assessment surveys – triangulated with qualitative evaluation – more telling.

Learning & Recommendations

The following summarises the key learnings and recommendations from the SUSO pilot:

- Encouraging the participants to find out and share their family stories was particularly important for the participants, as it connected them to their identity.
- It is vital to have an Aboriginal Project Officer and Aboriginal facilitators.
- Consultation with Aboriginal Elders is important to ensure project quality and culturally appropriate content.
- Continual professional development opportunities for staff is important, including pre-program refresher training for facilitators on upstander training, gender equity, primary prevention approaches and cultural awareness.
- It is important to form relationships with participants' teachers and families to ensure consistent attendance.
- Be prepared to be flexible to ensure attendance (e.g. picking up participants from home if they are not at school).

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- Meet with schools, students and families before the program to accurately assess any learning needs, behavioural concerns or other presenting life circumstances that may be relevant. It is also important to have staff that are skilled at working with children who may be experiencing a vast array of social issues.
- Run 4-hourly sessions on a weekly basis, incorporating a food break. Feedback from families and teachers also suggested that the program should be longer in duration, perhaps six months.
- If running a camp, it is suggested that outsourcing to a camp provider would be much less time-consuming for staff. Alternatively, the Day on Country proved to be an effective (and cheaper) alternative to a camp.
- In hindsight, the curriculum neglected to include enough content relating to help-seeking, particularly in relation to services and supports.
- Include sport and active activities to keep participants engaged.
- Utilise participants from previous programs to mentor new participants.
- The weekly e-newsletter with photos from the program was reported to be an excellent and well-utilised tool to keep schools and families engaged with the learning.
- Keep the connection with the school by inviting Elders to visit the school and having students present at assembly.
- Given the promising evaluation results, it is suggested that SUSO be sufficiently funded to be developed into an ongoing state-wide school program.

Some of the highlights from SUSO were made into a mini-documentary that can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMzhi6ytiQ8>



Conclusion

The evaluation data shows that programs – like SUSO – that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in targeted interventions that teach equal and respectful relationships and upstander approaches, might be an effective way to address family violence and violence against women in community, utilising a primary prevention framework.

Although longer-term, follow-up evaluation would be required to confirm this, the initial impact data shows promise, not only in relation to the participants involved, but also for the Aboriginal staff who reported increases in confidence, skills and knowledge to deliver primary prevention initiatives.

Speak Up, Speak Out

Budget

Expenditure	\$244,396.61
Staff costs and professional development	\$8,719.26
Wages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aboriginal Project Officer (approx. 0.6EFT) – Koorie Community Engagement Officer, Merri Health (approx. 0.3 EFT) – Community Arts and Development Officer, Merri Health (approx. 0.2EFT) – Team Leader, Youth Health Promotion, Merri Health (approx. 0.3EFT) – General Manager, The Long Walk – Admin & Event Coordinator, The Long Walk 	\$148,772.98
Consultancy – The Long Walk	\$40,000.00
Organisational overheads	\$21,079.71
Program costs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Resources – Specialist cultural contractors – Catering – Video clips production – Costs associated with the camp, Day on Country and Family Day 	\$25,824.66
Income	\$244,396.61
Grant funding	\$145,909.10
Merri Health & The Long Walk in-kind support	\$98,487.51

Key supporters

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 Brunswick North Primary School
 Brunswick South Primary School
 Sunbury Heights Primary School
 Newbury Primary School
 Bethal Primary School
 Coolaroo South Primary School
 Mickleham Primary School
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