



## Reece High School

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To whom it may concern

This is a letter of endorsement for Mind Matters Youth Empowerment Program (or YEP).

For many young people adolescence is a very challenging time. It is the time when mental health issues, issues around identity, substance use and abuse, bullying and harassment, managing change often increase dramatically but too often help is not sought and adults are locked out. Adolescents are often reluctant communicators and schools struggle to find a way to give students a voice, a space from which they can reach out, a place where they can turn to for help or support.

For a number of years Reece High School sought a response to the issues commonly associated with adolescent social and emotional development.

We have chosen to fund additional school psychologist and social worker time and we have trialled many programs. We are happy with the increase support from the perspective of counselling, testing, and clinical intervention although like most secondary school we could always have more. We have always been very clear that teachers are not counsellors and that professionals must provide that service.

Unfortunately we were never fully satisfied with the programs that were introduced by teachers and aimed at increasing student awareness, the proactive dimension to our work. There were some short term gains but no programs became embedded in our practice. Evaluation, through the school review process, provided the answer and as unpalatable as it was, the reason was that we were 'doing it to' the students. Students could not see any real connection to them nor did the programs empower them to make their own decisions, to indentify the right pathway for them as individuals or they felt that we, teachers, team leaders and school leadership, were simply reacting to their behaviours or concerns and by the time teachers knew of the issue it was either too late as the moment had passed or things had gone too far.

In 2005 we became aware of Mind Matters Youth Empowerment Program (or YEP) and the decision was made to train our school leaders and for these students to work with other students in the school.

Although we started slowly by very early in term two 2006 we began to see a change and evaluation at the end of 2009 revealed the following:

- Student voice has increased dramatically
- Student empowerment is at the centre of much of the schools work
- Increase in mental health promotion and a reduction in the stigma around mental health
- Increase in self referral or referral of peers or family members to school psychologist
- Decrease in explosive or unexpected student behaviours
- Improvement in relationship between junior school and senior school students
- Increase in student support of each other
- Increased teacher awareness of the issues
- Improvement in relationship between students and teachers.
- A more positive school culture.

Reece High School is a low socio economic school and many of our students come from very challenging circumstances. Values underpin every thing we do at this school and MMYEP has helped us to translate those values and expectations into the school community. This work complements the work done by professionals in the field of mental health; it is about being able to make a difference.

If you require further information please do not hesitate to make contact.

Yours



Sheree Vertigan  
Principal