

# **A Wraparound Approach to 'Whole of Student' Issues: Education, Health, and Community Services**

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# Background

- In 2019, the Gonski Institute for Education awarded a research grant to UNSW School of Education researchers, Professor Terry Cumming and Professor Iva Strnadová that focused on wraparound models of support.
- They assembled a team that included Dr Ellen (Hee Min) Lee, Dr Lisa Gilanyi, and Dr Robyn Lonergan.
- The project, titled 'A Wraparound Approach to 'Whole of Student' Issues: Education, Health, and Community Services)' aimed to examine existing models of wraparound support in metro Sydney as well as schools in rural and remote NSW

# Background

- There is a growing population of students with complex needs, including those with disabilities, mental health issues, and social disadvantage.
- When left unmet, these needs increase students' risk of poor outcomes, including educational disengagement, precarious housing, substance misuse, and involvement with the juvenile justice system (Dowse et al., 2014).
- Many students with complex needs receive a variety of services both in and outside of school, and a lack of central coordination of these services results in both gaps in and overlapping supports, resulting in poor outcomes (Eber et al. 2011).

# Background

- Education systems have attempted to address some of the issues encountered by young people with complex needs by instituting various models of integrated care, such as “wrap-around” systems.
- Effective wraparound models typically involve merging education with other sectors, such as health, and involve a community liaison officer, counsellor, or school nurse as the lead coordinator to manage ‘whole of child’ issues.
- This research project examined existing wraparound theories and models, and as well as the wraparound support service needs of schools in rural and remote areas. In addition to adding to knowledge in the field, an important outcome of this study was the development of a wraparound implementation guide.

# Deliverables

- A report and published journal article on a systematic review of the grey literature concerning wraparound
- A report and published journal article on a systematic review of the research literature concerning wraparound
- A report and published journal article on a series of interviews conducted with school leaders, teachers, counsellors, and other relevant school personnel exploring how schools are supporting students with complex needs
- A Wraparound Implementation Framework based on the work above

# Supporting Students with Complex Needs Living in Rural and Remote New South Wales

The third stage of the project involved interviews with key stakeholders in six rural and remote NSW high schools (referred to as 'the Schools'), which sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1. What are the perceived Wraparound service needs of students with complex needs in regional schools as reported by stakeholders?***
- 2. What are the enablers of effective wraparound support in regional schools as reported by stakeholders?***
- 3. What are the barriers to effective wraparound support in regional schools as reported by stakeholders?***

# Participants and Setting

- A total of 18 interviews were conducted (2 small group and 16 separate), with 24 interviewees. The participants ranged in age from 27-63, and the majority were female (11).
- The six schools included in the project were located in four towns in inner regional and outer regional areas of NSW.
- Schools ranged in size from 300 – 1,100 students.
- Many of the students' families were low of low socio-economic status (SES) and had significant and complex needs, such as drug and alcohol dependence, homelessness, unemployment and mental health issues, that limited their capacity to support their children's health and educational needs.
- There was also a high proportion of student families from Indigenous backgrounds.

# Results

Thematic analysis uncovered four key themes from the interview data:

1. Current approaches to wraparound
2. Their strengths
3. Barriers to effective wraparound
4. Additional resources needed for effective wraparound

# Current Approaches to Wraparound

- None of the schools had a formalised wraparound team or approach with that title, however most had well-developed collaborative practices to support students with complex needs

*“Not so much a program... more a strategic approach.” (DCS4)*

- However, a lack of resources means that support is often crisis driven. Interviewee (W2) described the approach to wraparound as, *“We just work it out ourselves as we go along.”*
- Some schools operated as a hub for a range of external providers, enabling them to use school facilities to meet with students
- Several school staff were involved in liaising with external providers, helping students and their families to access services, and coordinating the provision of these services.
- School staff also collaborated with case workers from external organisations such as the NSW Department of Education, NSW Police, Juvenile Justice, Family and Community Services (FACS) and NSW Health, facilitating a coordinated approach to support

# Strengths of Current Approaches

- External Collaborators

- All of the Schools were extremely resourceful in identifying available sources of support and taking a leadership role in coordinating support from external collaborators
- *'We generally do our utmost to fulfil the students' needs both academically as well as socially, and considering lack of funds, I think, you know, we don't ever turn anyone away...we generally work with all of the different agencies that we can utilise and it's good, hard work from the people that actually come day to day' (G2)*

- School-Based Resources

- Committed and experienced staff
- Targeted support for First Nations students (Aboriginal Education Officers/Advisers, Clontarf for Boys and Girls Academies)
- School learning support units often acted as a hub for services, as well as providing behaviour support through the use of individualised EBPs
- Restorative Practices (one school reduced suspensions by 50% in the first year and had the local community also involved)

# Strengths of Current Approaches

- Positive Relationships with Students and Families
- Fostered by:
  - Actively involving both the individual students and their family members in the development of individual plans.
  - Regular, constructive communication that is open, respectful, honest and culturally sensitive, devoid of aggression and judgement, and including both positive and negative feedback.
  - Home visits and phone calls.
  - Introduction of restorative practice described by W2 in one of the schools has had a very positive impact on breaking down generational mistrust of schools and building constructive relationships with students and families.

# Barriers to Effective Wraparound

- Lack of services
- Geography
- Support service staffing
- Lack of school counsellors, resulting in school counsellors being “swamped”
- Student and family issues
- Communication issues with external agencies
- School issues
- Inconsistent student attendance
- The overarching barrier (mentioned by every participant) was a lack of access to medical and other external support services
  - Mental health services were of particular concern, both lack of services and long waiting lists, leading to GPs handling medication (not always appropriately)

# Lack of school counsellors, resulting in school counsellors being “swamped”

- *“... I get a lot of referrals from teachers, parents, self-referrals from students, but it really comes down to, is there risk of significant harm? And there is risk of significant harm, and I’m often filling out the MRG, I’m taking kids over to the hospital who are suicidal, calling parents, obviously calling other services, trying to, you know, hook kids up and families up with other services, so there’s a fair social work type aspect to it at times...” Daniel*
- *“Our counsellor is only a triage. She is here with us 3 days a week and that is all she has the capacity to do is triage and assessment testing.” Bella*

# Barriers to Effective Wraparound

- NDIS funding models are problematic, as the provision of services was being informed primarily by availability of services, rather than student need
- Negative relationships between students and external agencies, particularly NSW Police and FACS, were cited as a challenge to incorporating these agencies into wraparound support.

# Additional resources needed for effective wraparound

- School staffing
  - Wraparound coordinator
- School facilities for holistic support
  - Space for services on campus
- Improved access to health care
- Streamlined funding processes
  - NDIS and the department

# Discuss

- Do have any experience with wraparound in your context?
  - If yes, describe what it looks like.
    - what works/what are the barriers?
  - If no, do you think there is a need for it? What kind of wraparound would you like to see?
- How do you think Wraparound must vary due to context and geography?

# Recommendations

- Systemic
  - Funding
  - Staffing
  - Improved access to health care
    - On-site facilities may alleviate this problem
- School-level Strategies
  - Professional development
  - Use of technology to support collaboration



**Thank You!!**