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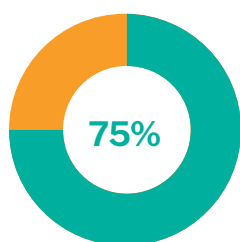
# RESILIENCE PROJECT

## University of Melbourne Evaluation

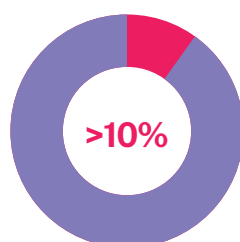
The core purpose for The Resilience Project (TRP) is to use evidence based programs to support the health and wellbeing of young people. From 2017- 2019, TRP commissioned The University of Melbourne to conduct an independent evaluation of the program and any behavioral changes achieved in relation to gratitude, empathy and mindfulness.

### Why was this important?

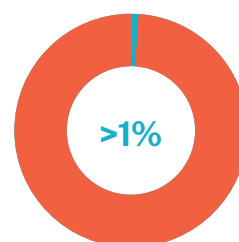
Mental health in Australia is at a crisis point and young people are suffering the most.



1 in 5 Australians suffer from mental ill health and 75% of people that develop mental ill health, have their first experience under the age of 25 years.<sup>1</sup>



Less than 10% of young people who required mental health support in 2019-20 received the help they needed.<sup>2</sup>



Less than 1% of the mental health budget is going towards *preventing* mental ill health.<sup>3</sup>

### What is needed

The Productivity Commission Mental Health Report and the Victorian Mental Health Royal Commission Report both conclude that there needs to be a greater focus on prevention to help people proactively from a young age develop the life skills for positive mental health and wellbeing.

### What the Resilience Project delivers

A whole school approach to teaching and embedding positive mental health strategies to help people become happier and more resilient. The holistic program works with teachers, students, parents and carers to support the wellbeing of young people and develop their future capacity to deal with adversity.

\*This evaluation was conducted by researchers from the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at The University of Melbourne. The research team included Professor Lisa Gibbs, Dr Karen Block, Ms Hannah Morrice, Dr Elena Swift and Dr Lauren Carpenter. Additional investigators providing expert advice included Professor Nicola Reavley, Dr Rebecca Armstrong, Professor Andrew Mackinnon, Ms Janette Cook, Mr Derek McCormack, Professor Lou Harms and Mr Jason Gaffee. The University of Melbourne recruitment and data collection team includes: Dr Anna Barrett, Ms Kathryn Young, Mr. Edwin Kwong, Ms. Lauren Mettam, Dr. Ash Hosseini, Ms Kate Burke, and Ms Molly Harrington. It was a mixed-methods study, including student surveys (N=1046 grade 4-6 students, mean age 10.6 years) and interviews and focus groups with students, parents and teachers, 12 schools in Victoria (6 using the program, 6 not using the program)

1. Productivity Commission inquiry into Mental Health, 'Overview and Recommendations- Mental Health Draft Report', Pg 2, October 2019

2. The Royal Commission into Victorias Mental Health System, 'Fact Sheet- Infant, child and youth mental health and wellbeing services', Pg 1, Feb 2021

3. Prevention United, 'Annual Report 2019-2020' pg15

## What the evaluation concluded

The information below reflects outcomes from both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the evaluation.

### Gratitude

Children in The Resilience Project school program reported **significantly higher** use of gratitude strategies, than those that were not in the program.

*"I feel a lot more grateful for the things I have. Before, The Resilience Project I didn't really know what I should be grateful for, but now I do"*  
— Grade 4

The evidence behind gratitude that informed TRP development: <sup>1</sup>

Practicing gratitude helps rewire the brain to scan for the world for the positives. In just 42 days, people report significantly higher levels of happiness, energy, optimism, focus and determination.

### Empathy & Kindness

Teachers and students described how the program helped to create a kinder school environment.

*"I've learnt its good to ask more questions to find out how people are feeling and how we can help them. Rather than just accepting the "yeah, I'm fine" when you know they're not".*  
— Grade 4

*"I'm more kind now and I feel like I'm a lot nicer to people."*  
— Grade 4

*"I just see the changes on some of my friends. They're more open when their upset and they talk. We're all more open. We're all happier as a class."*  
— Grade 6.

The evidence behind empathy and kindness that informed TRP development: <sup>2</sup>

Every time you do something kind for someone else, your brain releases Oxytocin. Oxytocin leads to increased self esteem, confidence, positivity and happiness.

### Mindfulness

Several students spoke of the benefits of practicing mindfulness regularly.

*"[Mindfulness] actually calms me a lot. Before I did it, I was stressed out about homework and stuff, so every night it helps me just relax."*  
— Grade 6.

The evidence behind mindfulness that informed TRP development: <sup>3</sup>

Practicing mindfulness for just 6 weeks increases children's ability to pay attention by 3 times.

### Emotional Literacy

There were many accounts from teachers and students of how the program had assisted children in being able to articulate their own emotions and recognise emotions in others.

*"I felt freer to share my emotions after The Resilience Project".*  
— Grade 4

The evidence behind emotional literacy that informed TRP development: <sup>4</sup>

Children with higher emotional intelligence are better able to pay attention, are more engaged in school, have more positive relationships, and are more empathic.

## Benefits of the program

The University of Melbourne evaluation Findings indicated that the program benefits arose from both the program content and the style of delivery. The variety helped many children engage with lessons and each other.

The greatest demonstrated change overall was improved student gratitude. There was also reported benefits for many students in relation to;

- emotional skills/literacy
- social relationships at school and home
- confidence and self esteem
- supportive classroom environments



*"Its so great to have it as part of the curriculum, creating space to really delve into wellbeing by articulating emotions, practicing gratitude and social skills. So refreshing that we are making the time for that"*  
— Teacher

1. Gratitude — Source: Melanie Greenberg Ph.D, 'How Gratitude leads to a happier life', Psychology Today, 22 November, 2015.

2. Empathy — Source: Marilyn Price-Mitchell Ph.D, 'Acts of Kindness: Key to Happiness for Children & Teens', Psychology Today, 2 January, 2013.

3. Mindfulness — Source: Randima Fernando, 'Measuring the Efficacy and Sustainability of a Mindfulness-Based In-Class Intervention', Mindful Schools Research Study, pg 17.

4. Emotional Literacy — Source: Shauna L. Tominey, Elisabeth C. O'Bryon, Susan E. Rivers and Sharon Shapses, 'Teaching Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood', National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), March 2017, pg 6

## What the schools had to say

The focus groups and interviews with students, parents and teachers provided insights into their experiences of the program.

### Students

#### Findings and observations:

Students in many schools spoke to their understanding of the key concepts of the program, and importantly, **how** to embed the behaviour into their daily lives

- Helping them with their understanding of kindness, which in some schools contributed to kinder and more inclusive school environments.
- Using mindfulness strategies helped calm themselves and cope with anxiety.
- Helping them understand their emotions and feel more comfortable sharing their emotions with others.
- Those who particularly benefited from the program showed improved confidence and self-esteem, especially in relation to their peer relationships.

#### When asked about their experience of the program, students responded with:

- It was refreshing. It was unlike regular schoolwork, in that there were no right or wrong answers.
- It was fun and engaging.
- They noticed changes in their peers.
- They felt more confident to share in class.



*"...it actually calms me a lot. Before I did it (mindfulness), I was stressed out about homework and stuff, so every night it helps me just relax."*  
— Grade 6



*"You learn a lot about lots of feelings and what some people go through. Then you learn a bit about yourself as well because when you're answering the questions you realise that I have that too."*  
— Grade 6

### Parents

#### Findings and observations:

Parents of children who showed particular benefits described how the program had positively impacted their child

- The program built life skills and strategies that will help their children cope with adversity in the future.
- Their children appeared more grateful for what they already have.
- Parents reflected positive changes to their child's communication at home.
- Their children were communicating more openly about situations they had previously had difficulty articulating.
- Parents reported more opportunities for positive parent-child interactions, due to the life skills they had built through the program.



*"It's definitely made a big difference to me, because I'm having to do less. I'm doing less counselling and more talking about how to manage situations"*  
— Parent



*"As a mother it's really helped me help my kids through certain issues and anxieties they've had to face"*  
— Parent



*"It's made a massive impact and difference to our family life"*  
— Parent

## Teachers

### Findings and observations:

Many teachers shared details of why they valued TRP program.

- The curriculum provided students with the opportunity and ability to share emotions, help others, have fun and be creative.
- The curriculum made teaching and practicing wellbeing easy and enjoyable. It became a common language throughout the school.
- The content was widely appreciated and age relevant.
- Teachers could recount several examples of positive shifts in behaviour and peer dynamics.
- Some teachers reported seeing a calming effect and less disruption in class as a result of the mindfulness practice.
- The resources allowed for flexibility and timely responses to issues occurring in the classroom and/or playground.
- Many teachers found the variety in the ways the lessons were delivered, resonated strongly with various learning styles and preferences.

*"I find the resilience project is embedded into everything that we do from 9:00 till 3:00 not just from 2:30 till 3:00."*  
— Teacher

*"There's never been a lesson that the kids haven't enjoyed, I particularly find the videos engaging."*  
— Teacher

When asked to summarise their experience of the program in one word, teachers responded with:

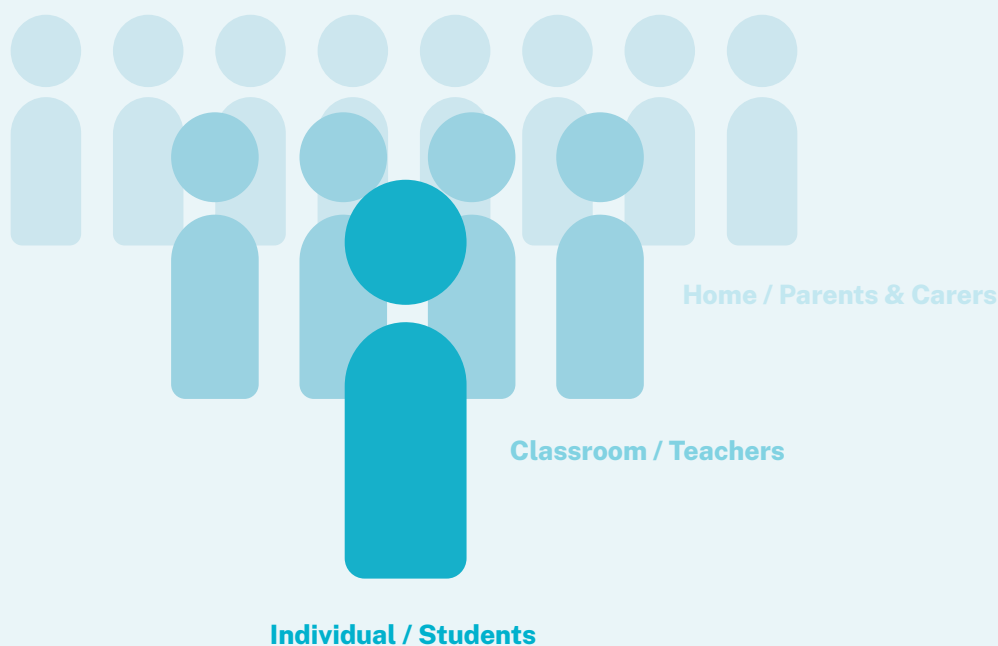


## Overall Outcomes

The Resilience Project benefits aligned with available evidence and theory on child and youth resilience, which demonstrated the appropriateness of the program structure and focus. Program benefits arose from both the program content and the style of delivery which altered the ways in which children engaged with lessons and each other, contributing to overall improved social and emotional skills. There were obvious and positive changes in the classroom context, promoting a kinder and more inclusive environment overall.

### Three Levels of Impact

1. **Individual / Students:** emotional wellbeing, communication and behaviour
2. **Classroom / Teachers:** kinder and more inclusive environment
3. **Home / Parents & Carers:** calmer and more connected home environment



## Bringing The Resilience Project to life through a range of perspectives

When the University of Melbourne completed their evaluation of The Resilience Project program, they developed the below stories to provide further context and describe the ways that various audiences experienced the program. The stories do not reflect the experience of one specific child or teacher, rather an amalgamation of what was spoken about in the focus groups and interviews conducted for the evaluation.

The purpose of these perspectives is to provide anonymous representations of actual experiences of The Resilience Project program. They can be used as a guide about who may benefit from the program, and the mechanisms through which this may occur.

### 1. A 'sports lover' perspective — Meet Tim

Tim is 9 years old and has just started Grade 4 at Northlane Primary School in metropolitan Melbourne. His favourite subject at school is physical education and he loves kicking the footy with his friends at recess. Tim doesn't really like other subjects like maths and reading. He feels like every time he tries in these subjects he gets the answers wrong. This has affected Tim's confidence quite a bit and now he is too nervous to contribute in class, although he can't quite articulate why. He has become particularly nervous this year because he doesn't have a lot of close friends in this class. Everyone else in class seems to know what to do, so if he gets an answer wrong Tim thinks everyone will laugh at him. Tim has started to disengage from these subjects which is affecting his performance in class.

Tim is very talented at sports. He plays football and basketball on the weekend and attends training two nights a week. Tim finds that when he gets home from training, he is very energised and struggles to wind down before bed. Tim also loves swimming and recently made squad at his local swimming club. This means that he will need to attend competitions across the state throughout the year. He will need his parents to drive him to these competitions, which in some cases are three or four hours away from his home.

Tim's school has decided to do the Resilience Project this year and so he must attend a presentation with the rest of the school. He doesn't really want to go, but it is a chance to get out of maths and see his friends, so he goes. Tim listens to the presentation and hears a story about a boy the same age as him, who doesn't have a lot of possessions, but seems very happy in life. Tim starts to think about the things that he has in his life. He particularly thinks about his parents and how lucky he is to have them supporting him to do sports, especially giving up their weekends to drive him to swimming competitions. Tim also hears about his favourite football player and how nervous he gets before games. Tim never thought that such a superstar would get nervous before games, he thought that was just something that happened to him.

Tim's grade starts to do activities from their Resilience Project book in class. Tim really likes doing these as there doesn't seem to be any right or wrong answers, not like maths or reading. Tim starts to contribute more to class and gets to know the children in his class better as they do each lesson, building his confidence to contribute. Tim hears a few other students say that they don't like answering questions in class in case they get the answer wrong. He is surprised, he thought he was the only one who felt like this. He starts to become more comfortable in class when he realises that it is not just him.

There are lots of different activities in the Resilience Project book, but his favourites are the colouring pages that are included. Every afternoon when his class returns from lunch, Tim's teacher puts music on, and they colour for 5 minutes. Tim's teacher has noticed that his class seems to be a little bit easier to handle since he has started doing this daily activity. Tim's mum suggests doing some mindful colouring when he gets home from training during the week, hoping that it will help relax him before he goes to bed. Tim starts to do this and finds that he is much more relaxed before he goes to bed.





## 2. A 'gaming-enthusiast' perspective — Meet Ahmed

Ahmed is 11 years old and in grade 5 at Skyvale primary school in inner metropolitan Sydney. Ahmed is a quiet child, he loves to hang out at home with his dog Oscar, a four-year old golden retriever. He spends a lot of time watching car racing or playing video games in his room with Oscar by his side. He is an average student in most subjects, but he is quite talented when it comes to maths and computers. Ahmed likes going to school, particularly because he gets to see his friends, but he does find it hard to get out of bed and get ready in time in the morning.

Ahmed has had a pretty tough time over the last year, his parents separated about 12 months ago and they had to sell the house that he grew up in. Ahmed is still adjusting to the separation and having to live in two new houses. Oscar is living at his Mum's new house, so he misses him when he is at his Dad's house. Ahmed also now needs to share a bedroom with his younger brother, Bahir, when they are at his Mum's new house. Bahir is 8 years old and idolises Ahmed, he always wants to do what he is doing and play with all of Ahmed's gadgets and toys. Ahmed can get quite angry and frustrated with Bahir, particularly when he uses his X-box or i-Pad.

When Ahmed is at home, he spends most of his time on his X-Box or i-Pad. His Mum is finding it increasingly difficult to get him off these devices when he needs to have dinner or when it's time to go to bed. Ahmed gets angry and yells at his Mum and brother when this happens. It has created a lot of tension in their household and is upsetting his brother and his Mum. Ahmed can't really explain how he is feeling and he doesn't want to talk about it with his Mum.

Ahmed's school has started doing a program called the Resilience Project. All the students at his school attended a presentation at the start of the year. He didn't really want to go because it sounded daggy, but it was actually pretty fun. They heard this guy talk about different things that had happened to some of the people he had met. There was even a kid who was a similar age to his brother, who lived in on the other side of the world. He didn't have an X-Box or iPad, but he still seemed to have heaps of fun with his friends. Ahmed started to think how lucky he was to have both of these things, and decided that when he got home from school he would let Bahir play with one of them.

Over the next few months Ahmed's class started doing the Resilience Project lessons. At first, he thought it boring, but the more he listened to everyone in his class, the more he realised that everyone was dealing with different things going on in their lives. Even Clarissa, the really smart girl in his class, was having a tough time because her parents were separating, just like Ahmed's had a year earlier. Clarissa told the class that when she was at her Dad's house she talked to her cat about what was happening in her life and that always made her feel a lot better. Ahmed started talking to his dog Oscar and realised how much better he felt being able to say what he was feeling. When he was at his Dad's house and couldn't talk to Oscar, he started writing down how he felt. That wasn't as good as talking to Oscar, but it did help still.

Ahmed's Mum also noticed some changes in him over the months since he started the Resilience Project. Ahmed had started to do mindfulness for 5 minutes each night before he went to bed, he told her it was something that he had learnt at school and it made him feel a bit more relaxed. He seemed to be talking to her a bit more about what was happening at school and she had also noticed it was becoming easier to get him off his Xbox each night before dinner and when he had to go to bed. She also noticed that Ahmed had started to ask Bahir to play on his Xbox with him. There weren't as many arguments as there had been before, which has slowly been making life much calmer in their household.



### 3. A 'socially connected' perspective — Meet Priya

Priya is 10 years old and in grade 4 at Panorama Primary School in Adelaide. She enjoys going to school and her favourite subjects are sport and art. Priya does ok academically, but she can be quite a chatterbox in the classroom. Her teachers think she would excel if she weren't distracted so easily. Priya has a busy life outside of school, she plays hockey and basketball on the weekends and trains throughout the week. She also likes to hang out with her friends every chance she gets.

Priya's school has started the Resilience Project this year. All the students attended a presentation at the start of the year. It was so much fun, they even got to get up and dance for a little bit. They heard a story about a girl who struggled with anxiety and how she coped with it. Priya remembered talking to one of her hockey friends, Bridget, who said she always became nervous and felt sick before training and games. Priya thought she was just being silly at the time, but after hearing about anxiety she wondered if that was what her friend was experiencing.

Priya spoke to her Mum about the presentation when she got home, initially she listened intently, but then as usual got distracted by her phone. Priya was annoyed because she really wanted her Mum to go to the presentation the Resilience Project were doing for parents at school next week. Priya made sure she told her Mum about it at dinner that night, and her Mum promised she would try to go.

At school Priya's class started to do activities out of the Resilience Project books. The activities were fun, and Priya loved it when their teacher got them to all sit together and talk about what they were learning. Everyone seemed to have something to say, even the kids who were usually really quiet. Priya had always wondered why those kids were so quiet, she couldn't really understand why you wouldn't want to talk if given the opportunity. After starting the Resilience Project, Priya had started to think more about what other people might be feeling and had to remind herself that just because she liked to do something, it didn't mean that everyone else did.

Priya's class did quite a few activities about emotions and anxiety which she really enjoyed. They learned about mindfulness and how they could use it when they needed to calm themselves, or when they were nervous. Priya wondered if Bridget, her friend from hockey, had ever tried to do mindfulness before a game when she was nervous. The next time they were at hockey together, Bridget told her about mindfulness and the strategies they had been learning in the Resilience Project. She said she could teach her some of the strategies and they might help her to not get so nervous. With Priya's help, Bridget started using some of the techniques, and although not all of them were helpful, she found that some helped ease her nerves before games.

Priya's Mum attended the parent presentation as she had promised, and she even got Priya's dad to go along as well. Her mum said that they both really enjoyed it, and it had made her think about how much she used her phone. Over the next few weeks, Priya noticed that her Mum didn't seem to be on her phone as much as she used to be. When she mentioned this, her Mum told her that after attending the presentation she had decided to delete quite a few apps and was finding that her phone wasn't as distracting as it used to be. She said that from now on, she was really going to try and not look at her phone when she was talking to other people, or when they sat down for dinner each night.





## 4. A 'regional creative' perspective

### — Meet Amber

Amber is 12 years old and in grade 6 at Clark Hill Primary School in regional New South Wales. She is very creative and loves drawing, painting and knitting whilst listening to her favourite music. Amber is a high achiever academically but is quite reserved and shy. She has a small group of friends at her school but doesn't interact a lot with the other children in her class. Amber is in her final year of primary school and preparing to start secondary school next year. The school that her parents want her to attend is in the next town over, so she will need to travel on the bus each day to get there. Amber is quite nervous about this. None of her immediate friendship group will be attending the same school and she has never travelled alone on a bus before.

Amber has also been having a few problems with Meg, a girl in her friendship group. Meg can be very bossy and sometimes pressures Amber to do things she doesn't really want to. Recently, at recess Meg has been wanting to play skippy, and she always tells Amber and their other friend Ruth that they must turn the rope while she skips. Amber thinks this isn't fair, and that they should take turns skipping, but isn't sure how to express this to Meg.

Amber's school started doing the Resilience Project this year. Everyone at her school attended a presentation at the start of the year and they have been working through activities in their class. Amber really enjoyed the presentation, it made her laugh a lot and it was interesting to hear stories about other people. Amber had always been grateful for what she has in her life, but this presentation made her think about all the little things that her parents do for her.

One of Amber's favourite activities is the random acts of kindness. Every few weeks, her class will aim to do something kind for someone each day of the week. Amber has tried to do nice things for her Mum, Dad and little brother and looks forward to telling her class about them at the end of each week. Amber also really likes the activities where they get to build things, especially the glitter jars. She has found that she has started talking to other people in her class, whom she wouldn't usually talk to. Amber has even discovered there is one other girl in her class, Mel, who will be going to the same school as her next year. Mel was also nervous about not knowing anyone and having to travel on the bus alone, but they have decided that they will practice together a few times in the school holidays. They have also been talking about how they could use what they have learnt in the Resilience Project next year in high school.

Amber's class has also started to learn about different emotions. Amber was really surprised when her teacher Mr. Smith told her class that he suffers from anxiety. She never thought teachers could have anxiety, and it never looked like anything bothered Mr. Smith. Amber was a bit worried that they would have to talk about their emotions in class, but to her surprise Mr. Smith said that they had the choice of talking about what they were feeling out loud or writing it down. They also didn't have to share anything they didn't want to with the class, which was a relief. Amber has been using this time to write about how it makes her feel when Meg bosses her around, which has made her feel a bit better about things. She has also been thinking about what the Resilience Project taught her about everyone being different, perhaps Meg hasn't thought about how she makes Amber feel when she bosses her around. Yesterday at recess Amber told Meg that it wasn't fair that she and Ruth always had to turn the skipping rope for her, and that she should think about how she would feel if Amber always told Meg she had to turn the rope for her. Meg was surprised, but when she imagined being in that situation, she realised how upset she would be. Each of the girls took turns skipping and turning the rope for the rest of recess.



## 5. A 'reserved teacher' perspective — Meet Aaron

Aaron has been a teacher for 10 years and has spent the last four teaching grade 5/6 at Breakwell Primary in Perth's eastern suburbs. Late last year Aaron's colleague Emma, the wellbeing coordinator at Breakwell Primary, went to one of the public presentations from the Resilience Project. Emma's friend had been trying to get her to go to one for quite a while and she had finally found the time. Ever since the presentation, Emma had been telling everyone how much she enjoyed it. She had also been advocating for Breakwell Primary to undertake the Resilience Project's school program the following year. When Emma first mentioned this, Aaron just rolled his eyes. Great, he thought, another program to try and fit into an already crowded curriculum. Emma's enthusiasm for the program didn't dampen however, and she successfully convinced leadership at the school to try the program in the next school year.

When Aaron looked at the project information Emma circulated, he was a little bit more interested but still not convinced. It seemed like a lot of extra work to add to the curriculum. He already spent so much time planning lessons, coming into school early so he could make sure he was prepared for his classes. Aaron had suffered a lot from anxiety, so being prepared and organised was his one of his strategies for managing this.

At the start of the school year, Aaron attended the Resilience Project student presentation and was surprised at how much he enjoyed it. There was so much energy in the room, and it was great to see the kids so enthusiastic, really engaging with the stories that were being told. For the next couple of weeks it was the buzz of the school. Aaron then attended the professional development session(s) that were run for the teachers. The lessons seemed straightforward, including a lot of concepts he was already familiar with, but there were some that he hadn't looked into that much previously.

Aaron started to do one lesson a week with his class. He decided not to teach them in order, rather try and weave them into what they were already doing in class or use them in response to issues in the classroom. There had been some bullying happening with a group of girls in his class, so he decided to use some of the lessons on kindness and empathy to start a discussion with his class. Over the next few weeks the bullying in this friendship group seemed to subside.

The mindfulness activities seemed to be a favourite of his students. They loved being allowed to colour in and it being counted as 'work'. Aaron started to use the activities as ways to start the afternoon lessons after lunch as a way of calming everyone down. Aaron had noticed this seemed to be helping him as well, he would usually come back after lunch worried about what he had to get through that afternoon. He found that 10 minutes of mindfulness really helped him concentrate on what he needed to do.

By the end of the year, Aaron had noticed a subtle change in his classroom. Students started to interact more with others outside of their immediate friendship groups, the kids who didn't speak up as much in lessons seemed to become more confident with voicing their opinion. Overall, the classroom felt a lot calmer and Aaron felt like he and his students had gotten to know each other a lot better. The Resilience Project was having a different impacts on students in the class and there were definitely a number of kids, particularly those who had a lot to deal with in their home lives, who it seemed to have really transformed.

