



Murraylands Rock and Water Program

May-July 2008

Program Overview and Qualitative Evaluation



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Psychologist

15th August, 2008

Murraylands Rock and Water Program

Program Summary and Qualitative Evaluation

REASON FOR EVALUATION

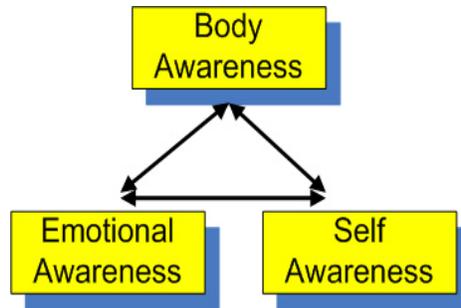
Two Rock and Water programs were conducted by Connected Self psychologist, Ivan Raymond, for male and female young people within the Murraylands region from May to July 2008. The programs were supported by the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), Families SA, Headspace, District Council of Murray Bridge, Lower Murray Nungas' Club, Country Health SA and Anglican Community Care (ACC). The programs were designed as a pilot initiative. This evaluation reviews the programs, summarises the qualitative evaluation and provides recommendations for future programming. As the author delivered both programs, this evaluation cannot be seen as truly independent, however, the evaluation has been conducted in a manner consistent with the author's professional affiliations.

PROGRAM CONTEXT

"Rock and Water" is a manual-based program that was developed by the Dutch educationalist, Freerk Ykema (2002; 2003). Ykema initially developed the program for boys aged from 10 to 18 in response to his perception that traditional educational programs were unable to support boys in key aspects of their development. Such areas included: (1) verbal and emotional expression, (2) emotional regulation, (3) self-management of impulse driven tendencies and (4) the ability to respond to and manage aggressive tendencies in both themselves and others.

Ykema (2002; 2003) designed the Rock and Water program upon a psychophysical intervention framework, with a number of existential and transpersonal philosophies built into the program (for detailed overview see Ykema, 2002). In other words, Ykema developed the program to support young people develop body awareness (e.g., the ability to control one's physical state, i.e. breath), which in turn, provides the platform for young people to develop emotional awareness (e.g., as emotions are expressed through the body). The program also provides physical exercises, group activities and role-plays to foster the development of self-awareness (e.g., the ability to link together one's environment, emotions and thoughts). In summary:

"The building-blocks of the Rock and Water program are self-control, self-reflection and self-confidence. Building on to this foundation, it is possible to pay attention to the themes of safety, assertiveness, communication and finding their own way (the inner compass) that connects them to others (solidarity) and gives them direction (spirituality)." (Ykema, 2003, p. 9)



An important component of the Rock and Water program are the symbolic references. For instance, “rock” represents a rigid and uncompromising approach to life, while “water” symbolises flexibility, communication and cooperation. The program teaches the consequences, both positive and negative, of approaching the world in either a “rock” or “water” manner.

The author has designed and delivered the Rock and Water program for groups of young people within the South Australian alternative care system since 2002. The program had previously undergone continuous development and evolution as it attempted to match the learning and therapeutic needs of complex client groups (for a detailed overview of this evolution process see Raymond, 2006).

Initial evaluations of the Rock and Water program for guardianship clients were undertaken in 2005 (Raymond, 2005a; 2005b). These qualitative or descriptive research methodologies found that both clients and youth workers reported a range of positive outcomes from the program. A number of key performance indicators provided preliminary support for the efficacy of the program (e.g., high rate of program completion and attendance); however, apart from this, questions remained regarding the generalisability and longevity of the program outcomes.

A more systematic and robust qualitative evaluation of a Rock and Water program delivered to male and female young guardianship clients was conducted by Raymond and Simpson (2007). The quantitative results remained inconclusive, and the authors were unable to indicate the degree program outcomes led to long-term behavioural changes, or, the degree the outcomes were generalised to other settings. Despite this, the qualitative findings replicated the previous evaluations and the authors concluded that Rock and Water represents a “program with a purpose”.

“In summary, two important features of this and the previous Rock and Water program evaluations are noted. First, young people share a very positive regard for the Rock and Water program and this would appear linked to the high program completion and participation rate. Traditionally, young people residing in alternative care present with high rates of program drop-out and report very negative evaluations towards schools and programming in general. Second, the

evaluation showed that young people and youth workers reported an overwhelming sense of “connectedness” to the Rock and Water program and to both youth workers and participants associated with the program. It would appear that the Rock and Water program provides the opportunity for children to experience fun and playful interactions with both peers and adults. Such activities remain a fundamental development task for male and female young people who have experienced backgrounds of abuse and trauma (Hughes, 1997; Perry; 2004). It is through these positive adult interactions and experiences, facilitated by fun and playfulness, that young people are provided alternative examples of adult-child interactions that challenge their earlier negative relationship experiences. This provides a foundation for young people to reconstruct their experiences of trauma and abuse” (Raymond & Simpson, 2007, p. 12).

PROGRAM AIMS

The aims of the current programs were:

- To engage young people (and their significant adult figures) in a manner and style that can both support and augment more intensive intervention, case-management or future educational pathways.
- To provide opportunities for young people to experience secure attachment relationships with key adult figures (e.g., agency staff, psychologist).
- For young people to experience the program environment as a “safe place”.
- For young people to learn and then practice a range of verbal and non-verbal self-protective behaviours.
- To increase the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the young people.
- To improve the young people’s body-, emotional- and self-awareness, and by doing so, improve their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviours.
- To teach and then support young people to implement more adaptive social and problem solving skills.
- For young people to learn and practice relaxation exercises and to experience a state of inner calm (this may be a foreign state for some young people).
- For young people to complete a program and to achieve success, and for this to be used as a positive narrative that can lay the foundation for future positive outcomes.

THE CURRENT PROGRAMS

Two programs were delivered for female and male groups of young people aged from 11 to 16 at the Murraylands Youth Centre (Headspace) and Lower Murray Nungas’ Club, respectfully. Participant selection was conducted by representatives from DECS and Families SA. Participants included young people who:

- Were disengaged from the school system;
- Presented with complex needs or at-risk behaviours;
- Presented with substance use problems;
- Presented with low self-esteem and self-confidence.

Both programs delivered by the author integrated the Rock and Water program with a range of experiential exercises designed to engage the group and assist in the delivery of the program outcomes. Relaxation and mindfulness activities were embedded into the program. Photographs and digital images were taken throughout both programs. They were combined to form a digital presentation which was provided to all young people in the aim of supporting the young people to develop a positive and reflective narrative of the program.

Both programs were delivered from weeks 2 to 10 over Term 2. One program session was cancelled for the girls' program due to DECS industrial action.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Participation Rates

Twenty young people attended the girls' program in total, and 12 of these young people attended the final presentation session. Five adults supported the program from DECS, Lower Murray Nungas' Club, Anglican Community Care and Families SA

Twenty one young people attended the boys' program, and 15 of these boys attended the final presentation. Over the course of the program 8 individual support facilitators supported the program from DECS, Lower Murray Nungas' Club, Anglican Community Care and Families SA. A core group of three facilitators attended the majority of sessions.

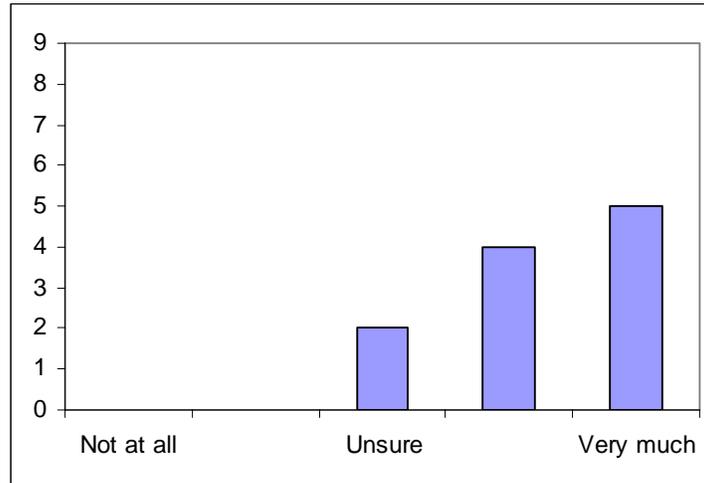
To the author's knowledge, there were no critical incidents or injuries during the course of either program. After one session of the boys' program, graffiti was found within the Lower Murray Nungas' club.

Participant Qualitative Data

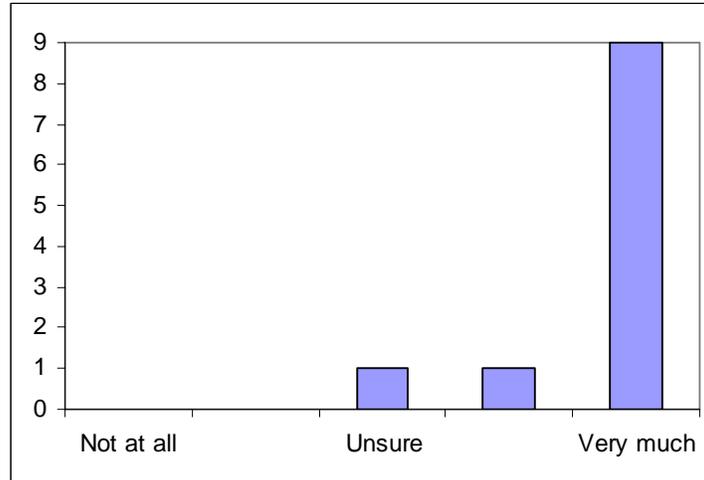
At the conclusion of the girls' program, all participants were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire that tapped aspects of the program. Owing to the lower literacy rates of the male participants, the post-program questionnaire was not completed by this cohort.

The post-program questionnaire asked participants to rate on a five point Likert scale, from not at all to very much, the level they agreed with items relating to the program. The frequency of participant responses was as follows:

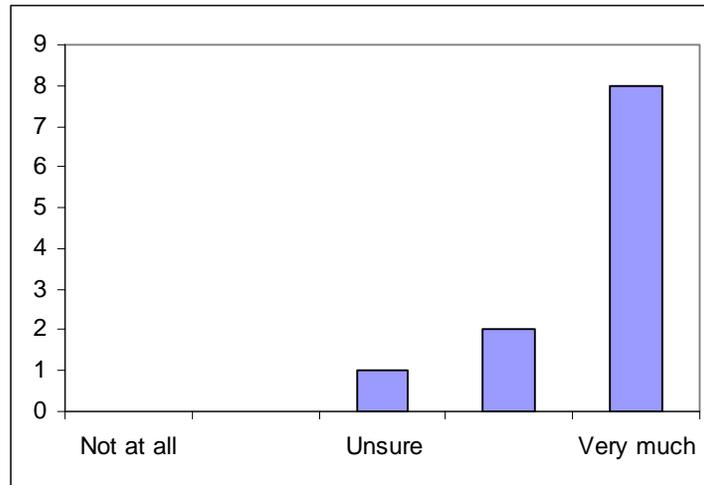
1. I really enjoyed the Rock and Water Program



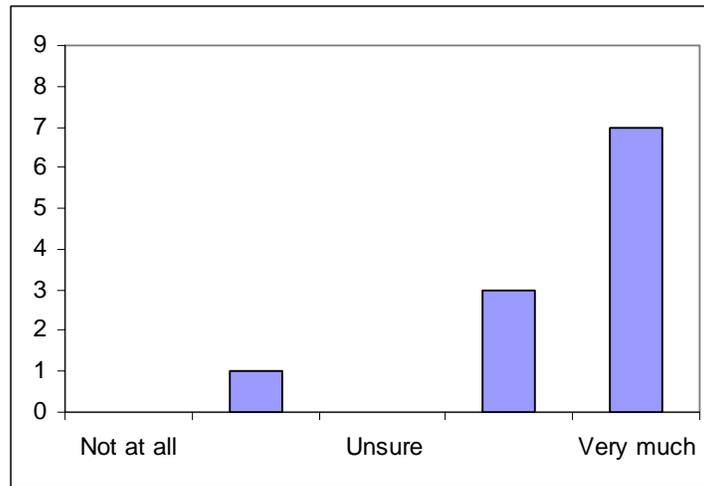
2. I learnt some valuable skills from the Rock and Water Program



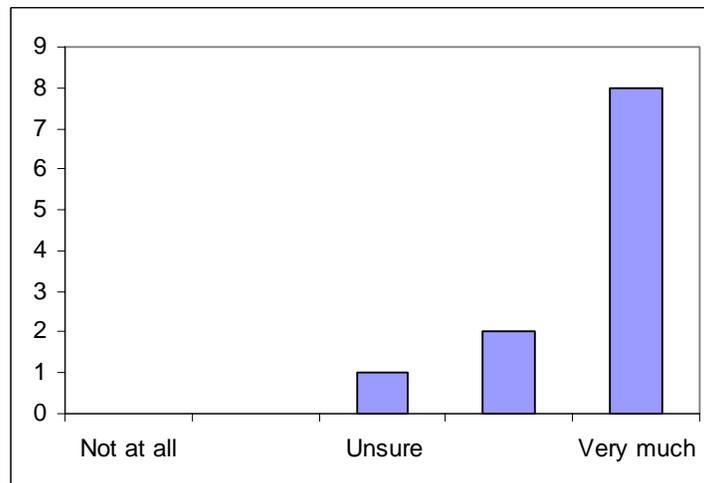
3. I enjoyed the relaxation exercises during the Rock and Water Program



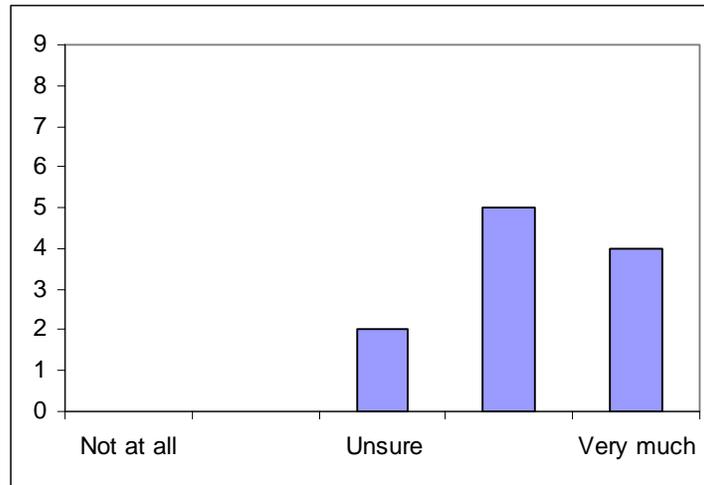
4. The Rock and Water Program has given me skills to help me deal with kids who bully me



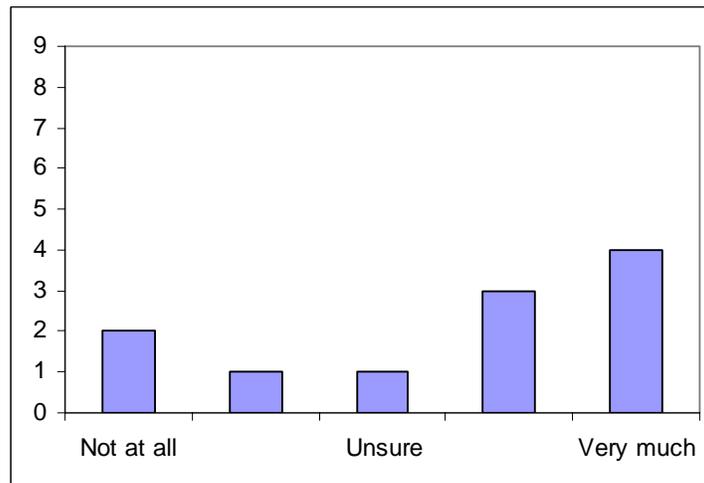
5. The facilitator who conducted the program did a good job



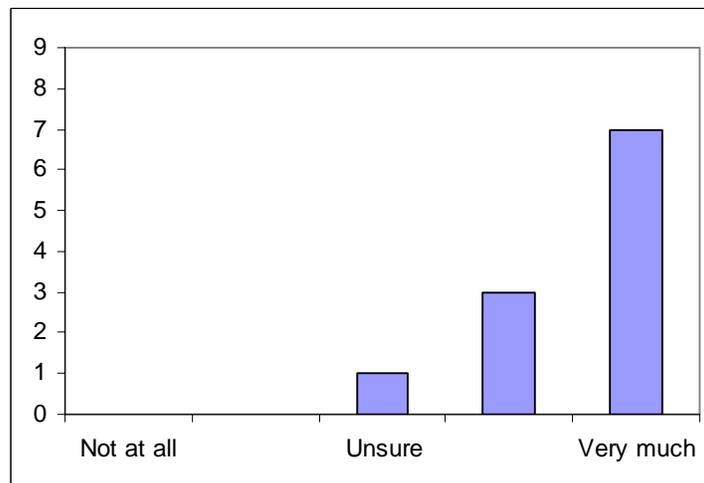
6. The Rock and Water program has given me the skills to deal with school better



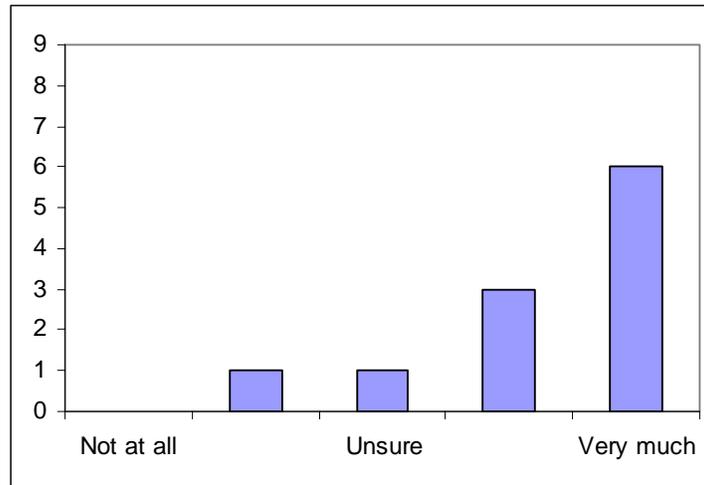
7. I participated at my best (e.g., gave 100%) during the Rock and Water Program



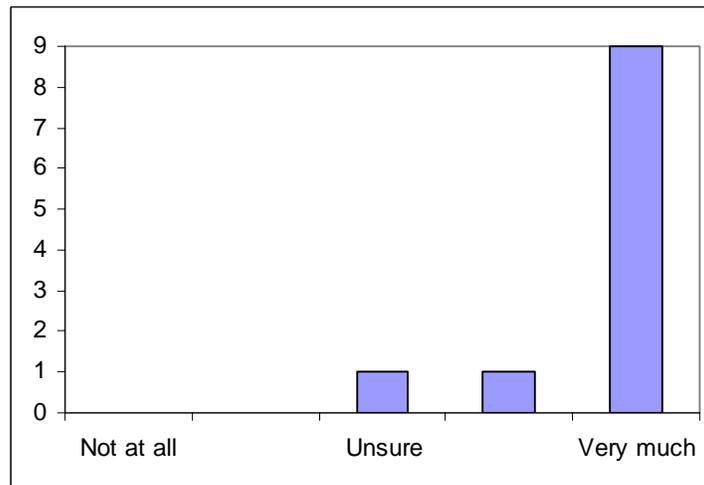
8. I had fun during the Rock and Water Program



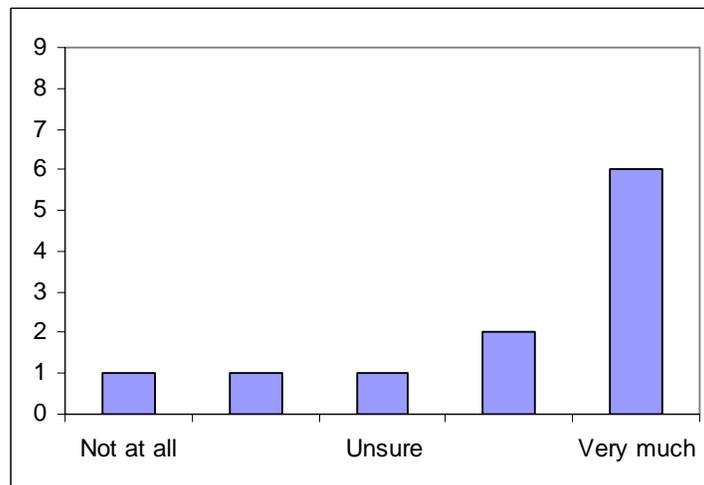
9. The facilitator who conducted the program made me feel safe



10. The adult staff that conducted the Rock and Water Program did a good job



11. I would do the Rock and Water Program again



The participants also completed a number of open-ended questions designed to tap their independent experiences of the program. Responses (without alteration) were as follows:

What were your favourite activities/games from the Rock and Water Program?

1. chiese boxing, boxing = punching bags
2. water balloons, kicking
3. water balloons, relactachion
4. water balloons, relaxation
5. water balloons, getting grounded
6. Chinese thing
7. water balloons, Chinese boxing
8. relaxation, water balloons
9. water balloons, relaxation
10. relaxation, water ballons
11. water ball, rexlashon

Write down three things you have learnt from the Rock and Water Program?

1. self defence, to have a calm mind when problems occur, to be grounded
2. be grounded, self defence
3. grounded, learn to get along with other people, getting new people around new
4. .
5. to respect others, don't lie to others and you self, to participated
6. .
7. self control, defending myself
8. how to fight, self control, self defence
9. self defence, self control, confidance
10. to get grounded, to fight for what you belive in, self-defence
11. grounded, learn to get along with people, peope a round your

What things did you not like about the Rock and Water Program?

1. nothing
2. .
3. I didn't like standing on the block
4. nothing
5. nothing
6. .
7. .
8. Chinese boxing
9. Chinese boxing
10. Chinese boxing

11. I did not like the block game

Write down some things about the Rock and Water Program that could be improved for next time.

1. nothing it was great
2. .
3. to participate in all the games
4. nothing it all fine
5. nothing
6. .
7. .
8. show that we can do more
9. everything
10. somethings but not everything
11. to have more fun

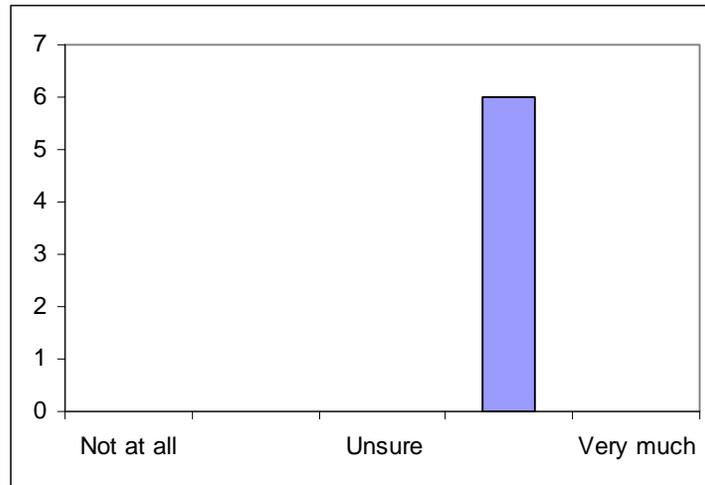
Any comments you would like to make?

1. everyone made a good effort and that was good
2. .
3. I would like to thank all the teachers that helped in this program Rock and Water
4. no
5. yes keep on going Ivan I liked your work and how you did stuff with us
6. .
7. .
8. no
9. .
10. .
11. I would like to thank you for letting me do this Rock Water

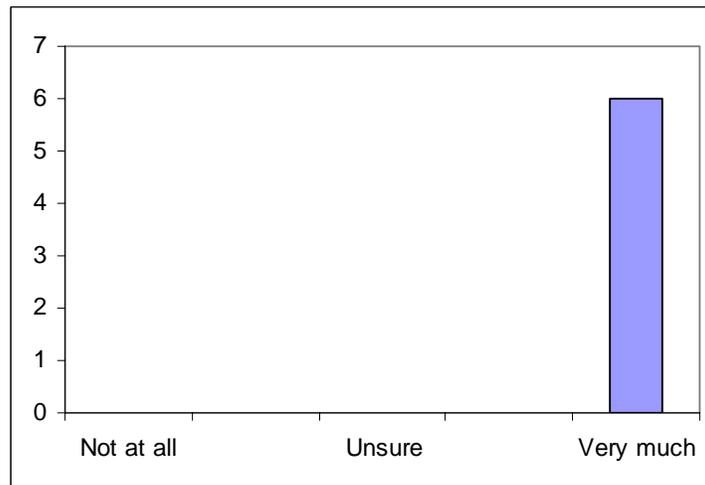
Support Staff Qualitative Data

The program would have not been possible without the support from sponsoring agencies. Support staff who attended the program were asked to rate their experiences of the Rock and Water program through a post-program questionnaire. The program questionnaire asked staff to rate on a five point Likert scale, from "not at all" to "very much", the degree they agreed with items relating to the programs. Post-program questionnaires were completed for both programs, and as there was no observable difference in feedback between both programs, the evaluation data for both programs has been combined. The frequency of participant responses was as follows:

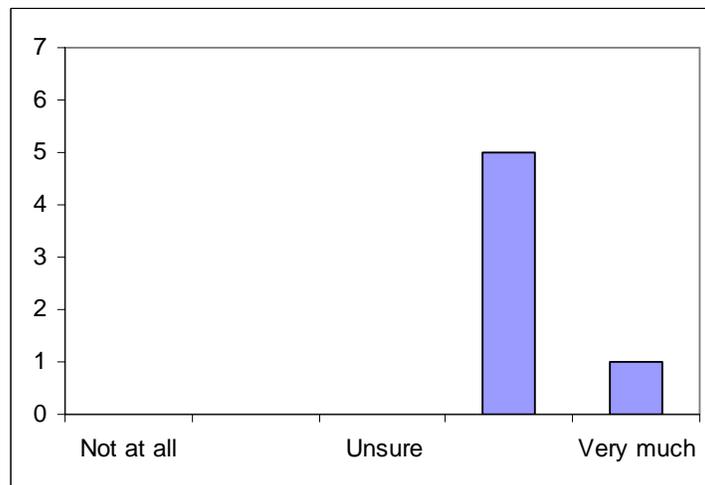
The Rock and Water program achieved its stated goals



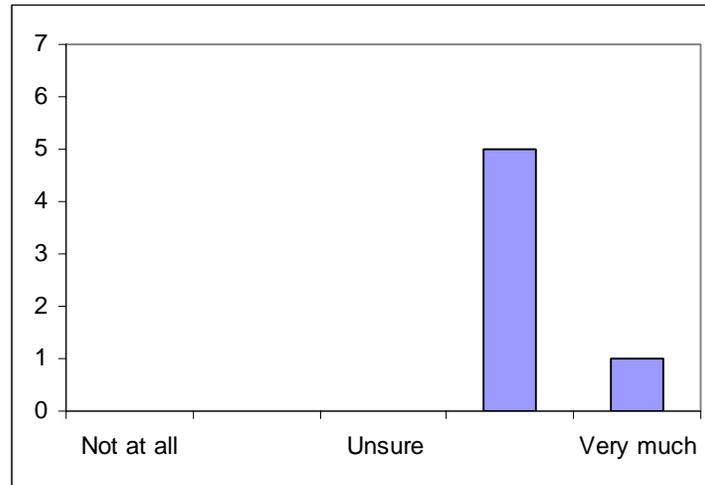
The facilitated acted professionally throughout the program



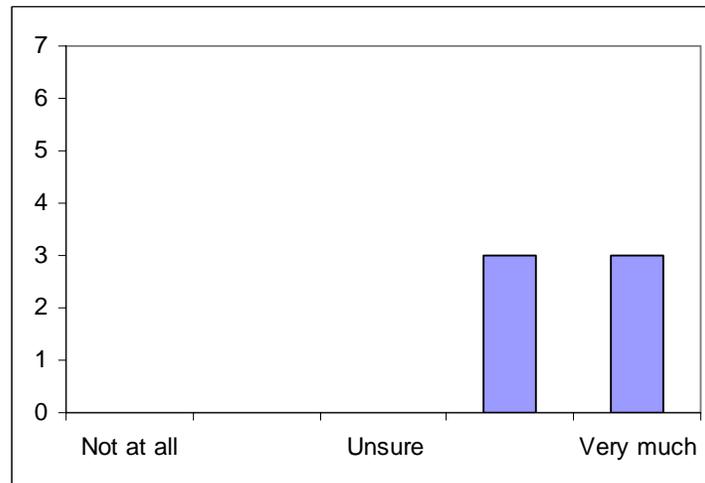
The young people who attend the Rock and Water program benefited from the program



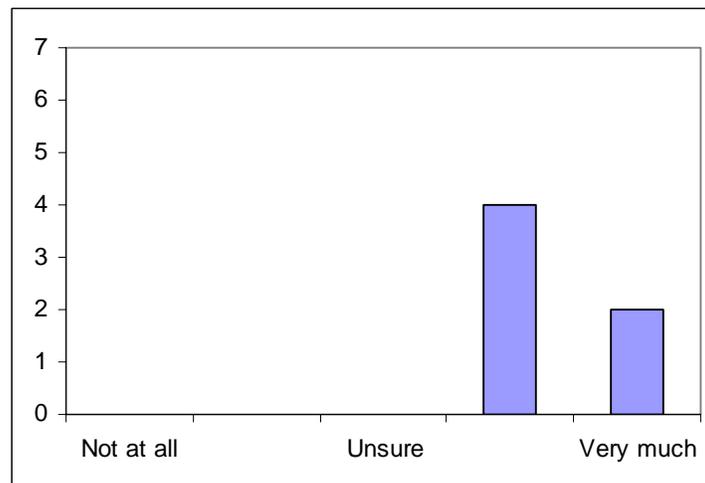
The facilitator was able to develop positive and trusting relations with the participants



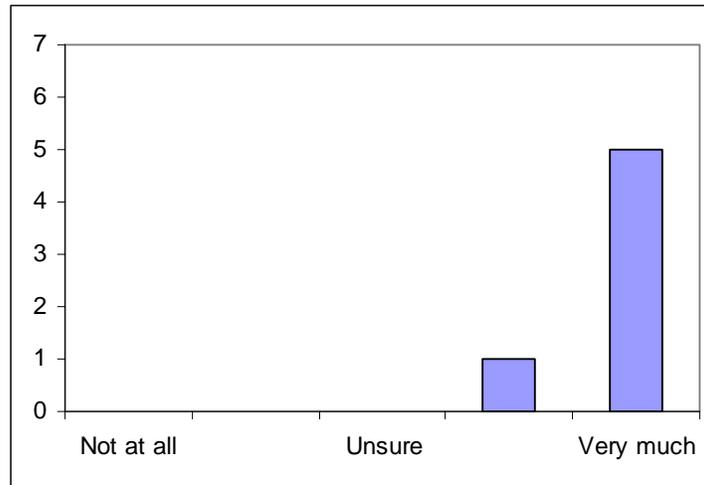
The facilitator was as a positive role model for the participant group



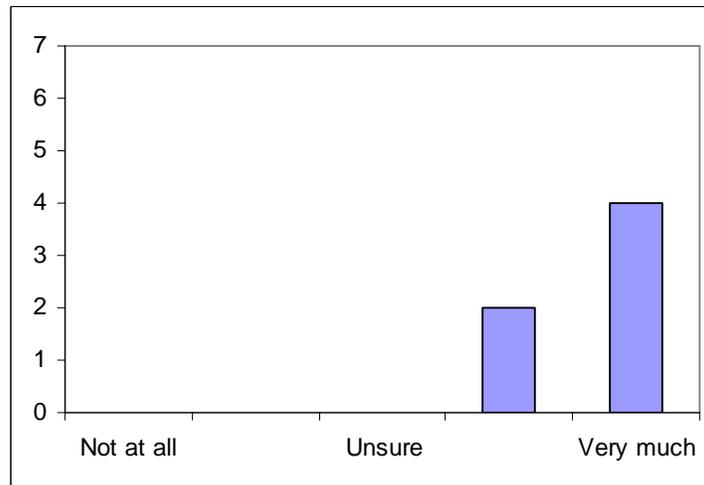
The facilitator appropriately managed the behaviour of the group



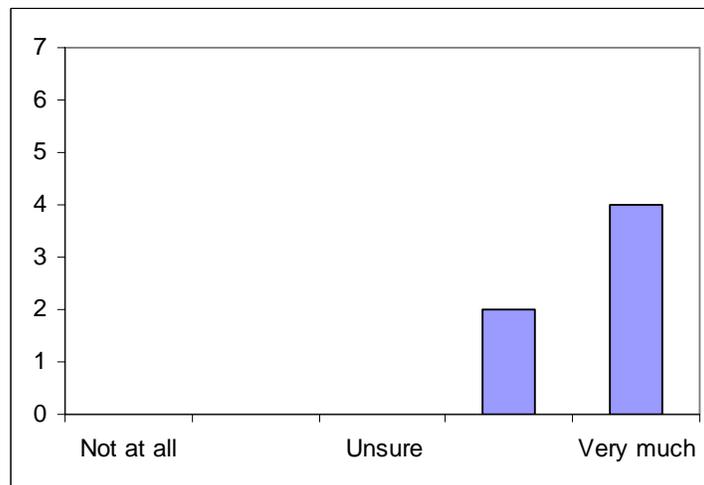
The facilitator was able to respond to the changing needs of the participant group



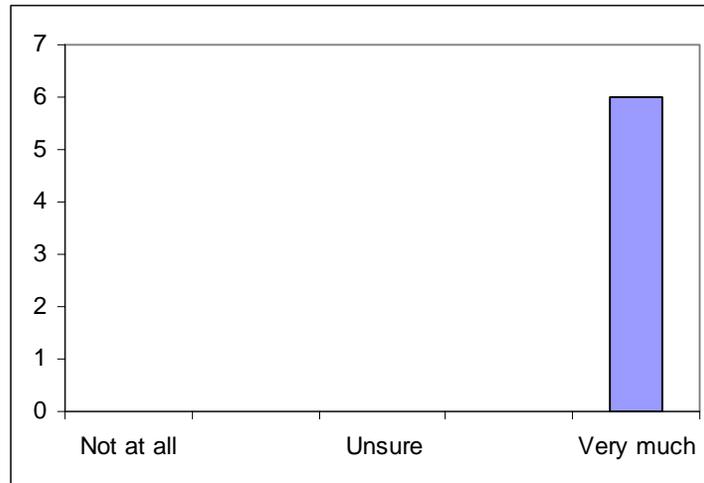
I felt that I was able to approach the facilitator if I had any concerns with the program



The participants felt safe around the facilitator



The facilitator had a sound knowledge of the Rock and Water program



The support staff were also asked to respond to a number of open-ended questions. The responses were as follows:

What were the highlights of the last Rock and Water program for you?

Boys' Program

- I liked to see the boys having fun and the opportunity to express themselves. I liked the Rock and Water concept
- Seeing some of the kids you wouldn't expect to be involved get involved and take part in the exercises
- Building relationships with the youth

Girls' Program

- Watching the participants' faces whilst watching the DVD of the entire Rock and Water – the girls felt a sense of achievement
- Building relationships with the youth
- I liked the Rock and Water concept because a lot of the kids do have to act as water because they are only used to being a rock

Please list any outcomes (positive or negative) the participants gained from the last Rock and Water program

Boys' Program

- Good positive participation and regular numbers with a large number of boys
- The opportunity to learn how to relax, some young guys showed and developed leadership skills, had their self-control tested and did not always react

- Creating opportunities for youth to access other services providers

Girls' Program

- Reflection over the past 10 weeks and discussion of what they have learnt
- Creating opportunities for youth to access other services providers
- Gaining opportunity for youth and good to see positive participation

Please list any concerns you had with the delivery, facilitation or conduct of the last program

Boys' Program

- Bit repetitive
- None

Girls' Program

- No concerns
- None
- The last program was fine, wonderful workshop, things maybe repeated a bit too much

In what areas could the Rock and Water program be improved for the future?

Boys' Program

- I think the kids would have benefited more if the environment and facilitators had been more consistent
- Not to be so repetitive

Girls' Program

- Maybe not to repeat activities from week to week, but I realize that this specific group was a little harder to engage. Fresh and new activities each week may have engaged the group more positively
- Not to be so repetitive
- Just found that some things were very repetitive which made times feel a bit dry

Please feel free to make any final comments in relation to the last program

Boys' Program

- I think this is a valuable workshop/program. Very well done Ivan keep up the good work

Girls' Program

- Ivan is a great facilitator and the program very beneficial to young people. I hope the Rock and Water program continues.
- I think this is a valuable workshop. Ivan you do a great job delivering the program

Facilitator Qualitative Observations

As the facilitator of both programs, I drew the following observations from the programs:

- The level of program participation was very high. The participation rate differed across (1) program sessions, (2) participants and (3) times of the day. All young people who attended the programs participated in at least one activity.
- Over the course of the program, the rate of program attendance of the young men significantly increased, and support staff reported that they "were easier to find".
- Both the male and female groups were notably heterogeneous, with there being significant variations in needs, interests and motivation within the groups. This impacted upon participant engagement and resulted in both programs needing to be delivered in a fast and dynamic manner to maintain participant interest. During the boys' program it was noted that the participation rate of the younger participants increased when the older boys were not present.
- The learning components of the boys' program largely restricted itself to experiential exercises that included a range of simple metaphors (e.g., "rock" and "water"). The boys showed significant engagement with the physical aspects of the program. Over the course of the boys' program, the level of self-control demonstrated by the boys with the experiential activities significantly increased. At the end of the program the boys were able to conduct physical and competitive activities (e.g., peer wrestling) with one another with minimal supervision. The boys enjoyed the opportunity to be competitive.
- The girls' group included a higher level of group discussion. Despite this, the girls reported that they enjoyed the self-defence exercises, and in hindsight, more emphasis should have been placed on this within the program.
- The location of the program had a significant impact on program outcomes and group cohesion. During occasions when either the boys' or the girls' program were conducted in areas of increased stimulation (e.g., gym), the cohesion of the group decreased and this was negatively correlated with group outcomes.

- Both the boys' and girls' groups provided overwhelming positive reports to the "fun and playful" elements of the program. The use of water balloons (which is not part of Rock and Water but was used to practice "grounding" skills) was universally reported as fun and exciting.
- The adult staff team was inconsistent in their attendance and participation, and staff program participation was positively correlated with program outcomes.
- There was a fluctuating group of young people who attended both programs. Young people who joined the program during the second half of the term found it more difficult to understand the program concepts. As the Rock and Water program is based upon the scaffolding of concepts, owing to the fluctuating participant group, there was a need to continually repeat earlier foundational concepts and exercises. As previously reported, this was evaluated negatively by the young people and staff whom attended the program.
- The two programs being conducted on the one day was logistically difficult and physically challenging for the adult team.
- The high level of inter-agency liaison and collaboration was a significant outcome of the program.
- Smaller group sizes led to increased participant engagement and associated program outcomes.
- The programs were conducted on a local court day and this impacted on the consistency of program participation.
- Over the course of the programs, the young people became more familiar with respective supporting agencies (Lower Murray Nungas' Club, Headspace). Reports provided to the author indicated that there had been an increase in Aboriginal young men frequenting the Lower Murray Nungas' Club over the course of the program.
- While the participants provided positive reports to the relaxation sessions, the degree they were conducted with full participation differed between participants and program sessions.
- Over the course of the programs a number of support staff reported strengthened relationships with the young people.
- The initial engagement and then behaviour of the boys increased when they were provided lunch prior to the program starting.
- A small number of participants had a negative impact on the group dynamics and showed the capacity to cause significant disruption to the group at large.
- A DVD presentation, covering the young people's achievements during the program, was provided to all young people. While this was universally appreciated, the young women provided stronger positive feedback for this inclusion.
- The degree the program outcomes were generalised beyond the immediate context (e.g., into the participants' schools) remains unknown.

EVALUATION SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Two Rock and Water Programs were conducted by the author for male and female participant groups in the Murraylands region. Owing to the qualitative nature of the evaluation, this summary will not attempt to draw specific outcomes from the data, but instead, combines and summarises the overall themes. Future quantitative research is required to validate the themes from this evaluation.

Overall, the evaluation showed that both participants and staff whom attended the programs reported overwhelming positive feedback. The Rock and Water program showed the potential to engage young people in a manner and style that was conducive to the achievement of a range of positive outcomes. These outcomes included, but were not limited to, improved staff-client relationships, increased engagement with service providers as well as enhanced social-emotional skill development. However, by saying this, the size and type of outcomes achieved from the programs significantly differed across participants. Like all programs, the programs were not universally successful for all young people. Program outcomes were impacted by:

- Heterogeneity of participants
- Inconsistent adult support and participation
- Challenging participant behaviour and inter-participant conflict
- Inconsistent and fluctuating participant group
- Program content and facilitation

Despite this, the programs' high level of engagement was a notable feature. In particular, the level of engagement achieved with the boys program was overwhelming, and surprised the author. Over the course of the program the rate of program engagement and participation increased (e.g., "the boys were easier to find" on the pick-up), and this also translated to the boys frequenting the Lower Murray Nungas' Club on a more regular basis (outside of the program days). From the author's experience, the level of engagement and participation demonstrated within the boys' program represents a best-practice model of intervention considering the nature and needs of the participants.

There is increasing evidence that students and young people have preferences for different learning styles (see Gardiner's Multiple Intelligences, Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Furthermore, there is evidence that Aboriginal young people have a preference for learning through (1) observation and imitation as opposed to purely verbal instruction, (2) a group process as opposed to individual learning and (3) concrete, experiential and less structured processes (Hughes & More, 1997). To this end, the Rock and Water program contains features consistent with Indigenous learning preferences. Considering the lack of engaging programs for at-risk young people within Murray Bridge (in particular boys), the Rock and Water program would appear to offer a unique opportunity to engage and work with this group of young people.

A feature of this evaluation was that the participants positively evaluated the playful and fun aspects of the programs. There is overwhelming evidence that “play” and “fun” are central components of interventions for young people with backgrounds of trauma and instability (Hughes, 1997; Perry, Hogan & Marlin, 2000). Children with backgrounds of trauma, or who show significant disengagement from the school system, have high levels of underlying shame (feelings of worthlessness). These young people’s externalising and internalising behaviours are means to cope with, avoid and displace this feeling state. When children are laughing and having fun, their ability to experience shame is inhibited. Therefore, when the Rock and Water program is delivered in a fun, playful and experiential means it has the capacity to engage and then hold young people in a medium where learning outcomes are enhanced. The program also targets a range of concepts (e.g., emotional regulation) that remain important developmental tasks for young people with complex needs.

In respect to the aforementioned points, the following recommendations are drawn from this evaluation:

1. Strong consideration should be given to delivering further Rock and Water programs to Aboriginal young men within the Murraylands region with the collaborative support of DECS, Lower Murray Nungas’ Club, ACC, Families SA and Headspace. The delivery of the program should consider:
 - Maintaining the group size to approximately 10 to 12,
 - Tailoring the program to the needs of the young people, for instance potentially two programs targeting: (1) young people aged from 10 to 13 and focusing on social skills development, and school retention and re-engagement and (2) young people aged between 13 and 16 targeting decision making, consequential thinking, empathy capacity and self-control.
 - Integrating the language and semantics of the Rock and Water program into the sponsoring agencies’ service provision and/or other programs (Journey of Sevens).
 - Delivering the program twice yearly to keep the program concepts fresh, but at the same time provide the opportunity to reinforce the learning outcomes.
 - A more intensive one-on-one intervention being embedded around the program to augment the program outcomes. This may include (1) having student support officers (SSO) support individual participants within the program or (2) embedding a mentoring intervention into the program – mentoring interventions have shown to be one of the most effective means to deliver specialised outcomes for young people with at-risk behaviours.
 - The program facilitator needs to have the “presence” and flexibility to adapt the program to the needs of the group and integrate play and fun into the learning process.

2. The effectiveness of the Rock and Water program to female young people from Murray Bridge remains less clear. Consideration should be given to delivering a program to young women with a female facilitator with a strong emphasis on self-protective

behaviour; with the program being more strongly integrated into the Murray Bridge High School.

In summary, there is no “miracle cure” or “magic bullet” in working with young people with complex needs. Despite this, there is increasing but strong evidence that the Rock and Water program, when delivered in a flexible, playful and needs-based manner, can engage young people in a manner and style that can translate to significant outcomes. The value of this program to the Murraylands region is strongly supported.

For additional information or comment on this evaluation please contact Ivan Raymond on 0417 846 103.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivan Raymond', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ivan Raymond

Psychologist

B.S.Sc., B.Psych.(Hons). M.Psych.(Clinical)

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