



Evaluation of the CARTWHEELS Cathedral Ranges Project

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March 2012



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Introduction

On the 7th February 2009, a day of extreme bushfire conditions, with temperatures of 46 degrees and wind speeds in excess of 100 kilometres per hour, Victoria experienced bushfires that became the nation's worst peace-time disaster. One hundred and seventy three people lost their lives. Added to this, more than 414 people were injured, over 1700 homes destroyed with an estimated 7000 people left homeless, loss of stock and native animals and destruction of farmland and forests. ¹

Murrindindi Shire, in north-eastern Victoria was one of the worst affected local government areas in the state, on the day now called 'Black Saturday'.

After the devastation of these fires, Berry Street Victoria approached the Royal Children's Hospital to explore the possibility of collaborating to assist in the recovery process in the Murrindindi Shire. The Integrated Mental Health Program of the Royal Children's Hospital runs a creative, mental health promotion program for schools and communities, which goes under the banner of 'The Festival for Healthy Living'. Berry Street Victoria was interested in the option of running a 'Festival for Healthy Living' project in the region. A scoping study was undertaken which concluded that this would be both feasible and a positive response to the trauma experienced by the small rural communities. The two strategic partners, Berry Street Victoria and the Royal Children's Hospital, agreed to implement a 'Festival for Healthy Living' project working with the schools and communities in what is known as the Cathedral Cluster in the eastern half of the Murrindindi Shire. The majority of funding for the project was provided by the Victorian Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, with additional support from the Dara Foundation, the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Berry Street and assistance from the North East Victorian Division of General Practice.

The aim of the project was to assist with recovery, and develop mental health and social-emotional wellbeing, through the medium of visual and performing arts. For this project, the definition of mental health promotion was expanded from that of '*enabling people to increase control over their own mental health and improve their state of wellbeing*' to include assisting in the process of psychological recovery for those directly affected by the fires and for the community as a whole.

This project was given the name of 'CARTWHEELS – The Festival for Healthy Living in the Cathedral Ranges' or CARTWHEELS for short. The acronym stands for: **C**onnecting **C**ommunity, **A**rt, **R**esilience, **T**ribes, **W**ellbeing, **H**ealth, **E**mpathy and Engagement, **E**ducation, **L**earning and **S**chools.

The work was facilitated by professional artists with the support of teachers and health, youth and welfare professionals, with an emphasis on building the local capacity in the arts, education and health sectors. ²

Given the special circumstances in the region, it was agreed that some particular features would need to be addressed:

¹ Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission Final Report, State of Victoria, July 2010 <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Commission-Reports>

² Festival for Healthy Living Program CARTWHEELS Progress Report, 2010



- ◆ Each of the school communities required special attention to be paid to their unique needs.
- ◆ Major initiatives in the region needed to be part of longer-term strategic response.
- ◆ Linking in to existing resources was important, given the strain placed on resources by the disaster.
- ◆ The initiative should support and complement existing initiatives.
- ◆ The initiative would need to consider existing school collaborations and partnerships, and how it could strengthen these.³

About the Project Partners

Berry Street

Berry Street is the largest independent not for profit child and family welfare organisation in Victoria. Berry Street works with children, young people and families with the most challenging and complex needs. The organisation runs community programs, education, training and employment, family services, foster and kinship care, residential care, therapeutic and youth services. With its central office located in Melbourne, Berry Street has offices across metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. Berry Street's Alexandra office managed the CARTWHEELS project.

The Royal Children's Hospital's Festival for Healthy Living Program

Now in its fourteenth year of operation, the Royal Children's Hospital's Festival for Healthy Living Program (FHL) is a collaborative strategy developed to promote mental health and emotional wellbeing in primary and secondary schools and their communities.

Supported by professional learning from the FHL Statewide Coordination Team, and a range of community-based services, the strategy is a creative opportunity for schools to review and develop their commitment to student wellbeing policies and programs, and enables students to explore issues associated with mental health and emotional wellbeing. This exploration is achieved through a range of performing and visual arts workshop techniques. Students develop solution-focused performance pieces, artwork, multimedia and written work facilitated by their teachers in partnership with professional performing artists and health professionals.

Participating Schools

Seven schools in the Cathedral Ranges cluster participated in the CARTWHEELS Project:

School	Year Levels
Alexandra Primary School	Grades 5 and 6
Buxton Primary School	Whole school
Eildon Primary School	Whole school
St Mary's Primary School	Whole school
Taggerty Primary School	Whole school
Thornton Primary School	Whole school
Alexandra Secondary College	Years 7 and 8. Some students, Yrs 9 – 12

³ ibid



Schools range in size from over 300 students at Alexandra Secondary College to small rural schools with a total student population of less than 30, such as Thornton, Taggerty and Buxton Primary Schools. Eildon Primary School has around 55 students and St Mary's and Alexandra Primary School have over 100 students.

The CARTWHEELS partnership and management of project activity

The CARTWHEELS project was based on the development of partnerships between schools – teachers and principals; school communities – students and parents; performing and visual artists; health professionals; community development workers and the broader community.

Management and coordination of the project was shared by the project partners. While there was some crossover of roles and duties, the primary focus for Berry Street was the local coordination of the project and support for the project, schools and participants from the organisation's clinical psychologist, social worker and youth support workers.

The Festival for Healthy Living's Statewide Professional Learning Coordinator and Statewide Artistic Coordinator, were responsible for coordination with schools and management and coordination of the artists, arts workshop and activity in schools and a range of small and large performances conducted during the project. Festival for Healthy Living staff travelled to the local area on a regular basis.

The Implementation Team

The project was managed by an Implementation Team, with representatives from Berry Street and the Festival for Healthy Living. The Implementation Team was responsible for the overall planning, coordination and evaluation of the program.

Steering Forum

Throughout the project the monthly meeting of cluster principals was used as a forum to inform and guide the program. In the second year of the program (2011) a more formal forum was held about once a term with all participating schools, the Department of Education and other key stakeholders, including the Shire of Murrindindi, Alexandra Hospital, community service providers and local artists and the project partners – Berry Street Victoria and the Festival for Healthy Living. Participation in forums varied, depending on the key agenda items. The purpose of the forum was to develop community ownership of the project; to provide a place for regular updates and discussion; to plan and coordinate future activities and to raise issues for joint consideration.

The Artist Team

Twenty-four artists overall were involved in the CARTWHEELS project. Of the 24 artists, 18 were 'local', either living in, close by or with strong connections to the local area and six artists were from Melbourne.

The Festival's Statewide Artistic Coordinator was actively involved in the selection and development of the artists' group. Most of the local artists were recruited to the project in early 2010, with the Festival for



Healthy Living providing induction training prior to commencing work with the schools. Five of the experienced artists from Melbourne had previously undertaken specialised training around mental health and mental health promotion for artists working in schools, provided by the Festival for Healthy Living.

Some artists had a short-term involvement with the project, running specific workshops. The majority of artists worked with the project and specific schools over the two years, usually on one or two days a week.

The Artist Team and the Implementation Team met monthly to share experiences, swap ideas about artistic approaches and artforms. Facilitated by the Festival for Healthy Living Statewide Coordinators with help from Implementation Team members, these meetings were informal and allowed the group of artists to maintain regular contact, to have informal peer and professional support, and receive regular updates about project activities. Health professionals attended meetings when possible.

The Health Professionals

Health and welfare professionals from Berry Street, The Festival for Healthy Living, Alexandra Hospital, Family Care and the Murrindindi Shire Council, with professional qualifications and experience in clinical psychology, social work, education, youth work and counselling participated in the CARTWHEELS teams at each school.

The involvement of local community-based services and mental health professionals is an important characteristic of Festival for Healthy Living projects. While the type and level of health and welfare professionals varies with Festival for Healthy Living projects generally, involving health professionals was the intent of the CARTWHEELS project from the start, given the mental health promotion needs and context for this project. It was expected this could be challenging, as limited resources in this rural environment meant there were few professionals working with children. Relevant agencies such as Alexandra Hospital, Berry Street, FamilyCare, Goulburn Valley Area Mental Health Service (GVAMHS), Goulburn Valley Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (GVCAMHS), Mitchell Community Health Service (MCHS), Murrindindi Shire Council, Primary Care Partnerships (PCP), and School Support Service Officers (SSOs) were consulted during the project's scoping study.

After scoping the needs, it was decided to appoint a clinical psychologist to the project for 0.4-0.5 EFT to act as a clinical consultant. All of the relevant local services and agencies took an interest in the project, and provided secondary consultations when required. However, for many their capacity to provide ongoing classroom involvement was limited.

The CARTWHEELS Process

CARTWHEELS teams ran workshops at the schools on a weekly basis. Most teams comprised three professionals – an artist, a health professional and a teacher. Where resources, particularly health resources, were stretched teams sometimes comprised two artists and a teacher, or one artist and one teacher. Essentially the same key members of the team were assigned to work with a school / class, to build consistent and trusting relationships. Some interchanges of staff were inevitably required due to resource constraints or the need for a specific skill set. Each year, work with students began with a combined artist, health professional and teacher event. Weekly workshops began in five schools in March



2010, with two further schools joining by July of that year. A wide range of artforms were employed in the workshop program, from writing, drama, circus, music, movement and dance, to film-making, mosaics, sculpture and other visual arts. The classroom workshops also focused on exploring opportunities for social-emotional learning, for children and adults alike. Developing these classroom workshops required regular planning meetings between artists, teachers and health professionals. The alignment of the program with mental health promotion principles was led by the clinical consultant from Berry Street and the Statewide Professional Learning Coordinator from the Festival for Healthy Living.

In 2010, the classroom workshops led to performances and exhibitions at each individual school. In this first year after the bushfires, it was recognised that students and adults were emotionally and physically exhausted. Thus it was necessary to take a gentle approach, and adjust the pace and scale of activity to the needs of the community. During 2010 the schools reported appreciating the support in getting these types of experiences into the schools and receiving anecdotal positive feedback about the performances and exhibitions from parents, teachers and community service organisations.

In 2011, CARTWHEELS teams continued working in each school through workshops with a creative or a mental health promotion focus. The key difference between the two years was that culminating events in 2010 were run on an individual school basis and in 2011, these were run as two combined-school celebrations, responding to the participant's and community's readiness for events on a larger-scale. Both 2011 events, held in October, involved performances, exhibitions and workshops. One event was for schools and students and the second, the CARTWHEELS festival, held in the evening, was a community-wide event.

Communication with families

Information newsletters were sent to parents, via the schools, about once a term to keep them informed about activities and provide tips and information on mental health promotion. Schools also provided information separately through their own newsletters.

Parents with time and interest were invited to participate in any aspect of CARTWHEELS activities, as a helper, an artist or an organiser. A limited number of parents were able to take up this offer on a regular basis, although there was clearly support and interest in children's activities provided from the home. The CARTWHEELS festival day however required considerable volunteer input to organise and set up, supplying food, manning stalls, setting up, cleaning up and dismantling everything after the festival.

Other project stakeholders and interested parties

In addition to the project partners and participating schools, other project stakeholders and interested parties included:

- ◆ Families, friends and local community members
- ◆ Alexandra Hospital
- ◆ Catholic Education Office
- ◆ Country Women's Association
- ◆ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)



- ◆ FamilyCare
- ◆ Goulburn Valley Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (GVCAMHS)
- ◆ Goulburn Valley Community Mental Health Service
- ◆ School Focused Youth Service (SFYS)
- ◆ Lions Club of Marysville
- ◆ Murrindindi Shire Council

CARTWHEELS evaluation

The purpose of the CARTWHEELS evaluation was to focus on four key aims. These were:

- ◆ To evaluate the effectiveness of the CARTWHEELS project as a whole of community approach, working cross-sectorally in the communities of the Cathedral Ranges. This aim focussed on the level of engagement of, and promotion of connectedness between, all sections of the diverse communities.
- ◆ To evaluate the broad effectiveness of CARTWHEELS as an integrated, arts-based, mental health promotion strategy to enhance resilience and wellbeing of children and young people of the Cathedral Ranges communities. This aim focussed on the implementation of CARTWHEELS with school communities in 2010 and 2011.
- ◆ To evaluate the effectiveness of CARTWHEELS' capacity-building approach and its potential for sustainability of activity and impact beyond 2011. This aim focussed on what has been learnt by local professionals and community members, on how the community has resourced the project, and on what other options are available to it in the future.
- ◆ To evaluate the key outcomes as documented in the program plan and to identify other unanticipated outcomes of significance.

Effective Change was engaged in January 2011 to conduct an evaluation of the project with the final report due in April 2012. Clare Keating from Effective Change was the principal evaluator, with assistance from Debra Barrow (to April 2011) and Pia Smith (from July 2011). The evaluators reported to the Implementation Team, with day-to-day management undertaken by Rick Harrison and Nicola Woolford of Berry Street.



Context

The context for the CARTWHEELS project is both highly specific and complex. It is important that this context is understood in order to appreciate the work of the project and the findings emerging from the evaluation. These learnings are of particular importance when considering the place of collaborative creative and mental health promotion strategies in contributing to community recovery responses to communal trauma.

The context of the 2009 Victorian bushfires

The scale of the disaster

As one of the most bushfire-prone areas in one of the most bushfire-prone countries in the world, Victoria has had its fair share of catastrophic fires, such as Ash Wednesday in 1983, the Black Friday fires of 1939 and Black Thursday fires in 1851. While the fires of 1851 burnt an estimated 5 million hectares and in 1939, 2 million hectares, in terms of loss of life, Black Saturday 2009 eclipsed them all. The majority of the fires ignited and spread on a day of some of the worst bushfire-weather conditions ever recorded (though with strong parallels to the conditions of 1939) - ten years of drought, almost two months of little or no rain and an exceptional heatwave in the ten days before the fires with much of Victoria experiencing three consecutive days above 43°C. On the day the bushfires commenced, temperatures reached 46°C. Melbourne and many localities across the state recorded their highest temperatures since records began in 1859. The hot dry winds on the day were in excess of 100 km/hr. A cool change in the evening brought lower temperatures but gale-force southwesterly winds in excess of 120 km/hr, which should have brought relief from the heat, cruelly caused the eastern flanks of the fires to become massive fire fronts that burned with incredible speed and ferocity towards towns that had earlier escaped the fires.

This was not a single fire on a single day – as many as 400 individual fires were recorded on the day. While the extreme devastation occurred on one day, ten days later six fires were still burning out of control and other fires were still burning within containment lines well into March 2009. Flare-ups and new fires continued for weeks.

The subsequent 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission showed the failure of information and communication systems to keep pace with the event. On the night of the 7th February, Victoria Police announced an initial estimate of 14 fatalities. The official death toll was 173, with 120 lost in a single firestorm. Information emerged days and weeks after the event, as the state and the nation tried to come to grips with what had happened, while in Victoria, fires continued to burn and the state remained on bushfire alert. That the event is the eighth deadliest bushfire/wildfire event in recorded history and Australia's worst natural disaster in terms of loss of life are further statistics that speak to the scale and impact of these fires.

It is not the place of this evaluation report to document the tragic history of the fires, but understanding the scale of the disaster is vital for understanding the context for CARTWHEELS. Those living outside the areas directly impacted struggled in the subsequent days and weeks to process the information, statistics



and personal stories about what had happened. Those living in the Murrindindi Shire, where 95 lives were lost and 40% of the shire was burnt lived through an event that is unimaginable to others.⁴ This, more than anything else, is the context for the CARTWHEELS project.

The response to the disaster

The Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (VBRRA) was established on the 10th February 2009 –three days after Black Saturday, in recognition that the scale of the disaster exceeded the capacity of existing emergency management provisions. These were set out in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria and were based on the worst disasters already experienced in the state. It was evident immediately after the disaster that the state was dealing with a recovery operation on an unprecedented scale.⁵ VBRRA reviewed national and international disaster recovery models and developed its strategic recovery framework based on a New Zealand model which comprised four pillars of recovery: People, Reconstruction, Economy and Environment.⁶ Short, medium and long-term activities were addressed in the Rebuilding Together Plan, the overarching plan for restoration and recovery of regions, towns and communities affected by the bushfires. The plan was implemented through partnerships with the Commonwealth, Victorian and local governments, as well as non-government partners, with strong support for community engagement in the process.

The need for individual and community support was recognised immediately, but, again, developing the response was complicated by the unprecedented nature of the disaster. Some of the key structures either developed or enhanced for the Victorian psychosocial response are outlined below.

- ♦ The Department of Human Services was delegated a key role in leading the recovery work with people. New structures were required to coordinate the response. The DHS established the Bushfire Recovery Services Unit; the Bushfire Case Management Service, providing case management to more than 5,500 households over two years and working with 4,365 families and Community Service Hubs. In addition, there were major community development programs, outreach services provided by the Australian Red Cross and psycho-social support services including specialist mental health services, non-specialist counselling services and targeted responses to specific needs. These services, designed to reduce the need for trauma services included grief and bereavement supports, community information sessions, mental health counselling services for children and adolescents, special programs in schools and targeted supports for men, women and older people.⁷

As outlined in the *Evaluation of the Psychosocial Response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires*⁸, other supports included:

- ♦ The Bushfire Psychosocial Recovery Team, established within the Mental Health Branch of the Department of Health to provide policy leadership on the psychosocial responses to the 2009 Victorian bushfires. This team also had a budget to fund activities such as coordination of service networks and workforce capacity building.

⁴ http://www.murrindindi.vic.gov.au/Your_Council/About_Murrindindi_Shire

⁵ Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, Legacy Report, Overview, State Government, Victoria, June 2011 pp. 6 - 8

⁶ *ibid*, p. 9

⁷ *ibid*, p. 48

⁸ Australian Healthcare Associates *Evaluation of the Psychosocial Response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Final Report*, November 2010



- ◆ The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Bushfire Psychosocial Response and Recovery Unit within the Student Wellbeing Division to work with regional offices to coordinate psychosocial support for children, young people and families in bushfire-affected areas.
- ◆ The Office for Youth with the Department of Planning and Community Development provided advice, outreach services and participation projects for youth, working with local service providers.

In addition to work undertaken through the above structures, recovery support to communities was provided by core primary care services, such as general medical services or family services; a plethora of non-government agencies; churches as well as support provided through informal community networks and structures.

In evaluating the CARTWHEELS project, it is important to understand that a wide range of immediate and more sustained psychosocial supports were provided to bushfire-affected communities, on individual, family and community levels, including supports provided to schools. It also underscores the importance of Berry Street's role as a strategic partner in the project, given that it was one of the key local agencies providing psychosocial supports to young people and families in the community.

The context of disaster recovery

Impacts of disaster

A body of knowledge on the impact of disasters (ranging from natural to man-made disasters) exists which could be drawn on in planning the psychosocial response development. Key points on the expected impacts of the fires on health identified in a rapid review⁹ conducted in the aftermath of the event included:

- ◆ increased mental health problems,
- ◆ prolonged stress over a long period,
- ◆ differential impacts – worse among people with lower socio-economic status, migrants and marginalised ethnic groups, the old, the young and women
- ◆ as social networks account for a lot of the differential impact and recovery, debilitation of some people's networks compromise their crucial role of social support in recovery.

In addition to identifying immediate needs for support, the research points to the need for sustained support. The World Health Organisation estimates that 12 months after an emergency, the prevalence of severe mental health problems will rise from two to three per cent to three to four per cent and moderate mental disorders will increase from 10 – 20 per cent.¹⁰

Citing research conducted by Oxfam¹¹ after the 2004 Tsunami, the review cautioned that disasters are '*profoundly discriminatory wherever they hit, pre-existing structures and social conditions determine that (in the long run) some members of the community will be less affected, while others will pay a higher price.*'

⁹ Hawe, P. *Community recovery after the February 2009 Victorian bushfires: An Evidence Check rapid review* brokered by the Sax Institute for the Public Health Branch, Victorian Government Department of Health, 2009

¹⁰ Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOS) *IN SIGHT Emergency Management Trauma and Resilience*, Issue 5, December 2011, p. 6

¹¹ Oxfam *The Tsunami's Impact on Women* Oxfam International 2005



The literature also refers to the constant evolution of disaster response and recovery work and research in response to unprecedented events.

Impacts of disaster on children and young people

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress following exposure to a disaster and also particularly susceptible to secondary trauma. Rather than their own exposure to the disaster, the mental health of parents, separation from parents in the immediate aftermath and disturbed family functioning may be more important determinants of a child's response. Failure to intervene early with children and young people affected by disasters may result in significant increase in demand for tertiary, specialist mental health service for children and young people in the medium and long term.¹²

Australian disaster research, prominent in the field internationally¹³, has shown significant impacts on children and adolescents. Research following fires in NSW in 1994 found younger children to be more vulnerable to depression than older children. Depression scores were also influenced by the evacuation experience and emotional distress was significantly related to damage to their home and the perceived threat to their parents and themselves. Research conducted after the Ash Wednesday fires found that problems for children aged 5 to 12 were not obvious in the first couple of months but became manifest over the following 26 months.¹⁴ It was found that children 'postpone' their responses until they get the 'all clear'...Failing to see the connection between the disaster and later problems lead parents and teachers to misunderstand the behaviour and treat it in ways that make matters worse.¹⁵

Principles of successful recovery

While the rapid review found that there is no evidence-based consensus on immediate and mid-term mass trauma interventions, an international review panel has concluded that, taking an *evidence-informed* approach, there are five essential principles of successful recovery:

- ◆ Safety
- ◆ Calming
- ◆ Hope
- ◆ Connectedness
- ◆ Self and collective efficacy.

In addition, strategies are recommended:

- ◆ for "community" as an entity in addition to the more traditional focus on victims, survivors or service providers.

¹² Australian Healthcare Associates, op cit, pp. 8-9

¹³ Dr Rob Gordon and Dr Ruth Wraith, for example, are acknowledged internationally for their work on psychosocial impacts of disaster and psychosocial recovery. Both have provided advice to the Victorian government in the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

¹⁴ Hawe, P. op cit, p.3

¹⁵ Wraith R & Gordon R *Human Responses to natural disasters* Macedon Digest, 1986-87, v.1, no.1-4



- ♦ in social network building, reconnecting people to place, and empowering residents to play leading roles in the recovery process¹⁶.

Emergency Management Australia endorses the role of community as one of their key principles: *Management of disaster recovery is best approached from a community development perspective and is most effective when conducted at the local level with the active participation of the affected community and maximum reliance on local capacities and expertise.*¹⁷

Critical success factors in community-based recovery strategies relevant to the CARTWHEELS project identified in the rapid review include:

- ♦ Providing resources to enable release of community members to take part
- ♦ Recognising that different people will be at different stages
- ♦ Diverse cultural roles and activities have to be restored (play is an important as work)
- ♦ Being pro-active in particular settings (schools) with evidence-based approaches known to create a sense of safety and security
- ♦ Consciously creating and building resources for recovery, be these physical, economic, social, psychological or spiritual¹⁸

Research also identifies that interventions for children and young people should be age-appropriate and focus on practical problem solving and coping with the stresses after the emergency. Opportunities to promote constructive activities, particularly with peers are also highlighted as useful for recovery.¹⁹ Experts advise that as part of their recovery, children and young people 'need to be able to be children / adolescents, not burdened with worry or responsibility beyond their age and capacity, and they need to participate in everyday activities, which can be both healing, reduce stress and give pleasure.'²⁰

The evaluation of the Psychosocial Response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires also found that '*Community development activities were reported... to play a critical part in the spectrum of service types that assisted individuals and communities in their recovery following a disaster.*'²¹

The context of the Festival for Healthy Living project in the Cathedral Ranges

The disaster recovery literature reinforces the importance of community-based responses, but also cites gaps in terms of knowledge about these responses. In this context, it is important to acknowledge the six-month planning and preparation phases, the issues raised and the responses developed through the CARTWHEELS work, so that this work can contribute to our knowledge of disaster recovery responses.

¹⁶ ibid, p.1

¹⁷ cited in Hawe, P, p. 5

¹⁸ ibid, p.1

¹⁹ Australian Healthcare Associates, op cit, p.8

²⁰ Dr Ruth Wraith The Changing Experience of Grief over Time – Children and Adolescents http://www.grief.org.au/grief_and_bereavement_support/bushfire_support/children_grief

²¹ Australian Healthcare Associates, op cit, p.41



The work of the Festival for Healthy Living

The Festival for Healthy Living has extensive experience and expertise working in a psychosocial recovery and rehabilitation context, undertaking creative arts projects with young people where events may be impacting on sections of a **community** or student body, or where the impacts of long-term issues may be emerging. Fundamental principles of its work include working in partnership with schools and existing mental health and health services and taking a long-term approach to the work – ideally looking at a timeframe of three years. Located within the Royal Children’s Hospital’s Integrated Mental Health Program, the FHL team combines arts, education and mental health promotion expertise. ‘What that looks like on the ground is an intensive and long-term program commitment where visual and performing arts meet education and health, using everything from stilt-walking to making films to identify, explore and address mental health and wellbeing issues facing children and their families in particular communities.’²² A critical difference between the work of the FHL and more generalised arts or community arts projects in schools is that the artists engaged to work on the project have received training on mental health and mental health promotion and how that translates to working on a specific FHL project.²³ Festival for Healthy Living artists require a clear understanding of the links between mental health promotion **and** their own artistic practice; knowledge, understanding and skills to work effectively within schools and communities in partnership with teachers and health professionals. This specialised combination of skills and knowledge is beyond arts practice, formal arts or teaching qualifications.

Existing work in the region

The CARTWHEELS project built on well-established relationships between schools that had been fostered since 2001 by Berry Street’s Connect for Kids program, and through other initiatives such as those organised by the Police and Community Consultative Committee (PCCC). Amongst these initiatives was a five-year effort to train all the teachers in the cluster in the Tribes Learning Communities²⁴ approach. This project had brought a common language of social-emotional learning into all the schools in the cluster, with a specific intent of promoting the development of positive and safe school communities. The ‘T’ in CARTWHEELS stood for TRIBES and provided the message to all involved that this was an extension of previous work.

The history of the CARTWHEELS project

The CARTWHEELS project commenced with a phone call from Berry Street’s Director of Services, Ric Pawsey to Harry Gelber, Manager Community Development of the Royal Children’s Hospital’s Integrated Mental Health Program in May 2009. At this point, Berry Street was already heavily involved in providing services to the community from the initial psychological first aid to case management. Three months after the event, Berry Street was ready to think about creating other options for longer-term and multi-school recovery work with young people. The Festival for Healthy Living program provided a developed, tested and evaluated strategy. It fulfilled a range of fundamental requirements: mental health and wellbeing expertise; an approach of working in partnership with local schools and mental health and wellbeing agencies and a long-term focus for the work. As the Festival’s work in schools and communities is undertaken through facilitating creative arts workshops and projects, it could offer a psychosocial

²² VCOS 2011 op cit, p.23

²³ This occurred through the FHL Artists Training Program which was funded from 2008 – 2010 by the Australia Council’s Community Partnerships

²⁴ www.tribes.org



response that was both complementary yet significantly different to therapeutic services in place to assist after the bushfires.

In principle, both organisations agreed that there was potential for undertaking a Festival for Healthy Living project in the region. However, recognising the scale and affects of the disaster on the community, the level and extent of need and the complexity of the range of services and service providers already responding to the community, the organisations initiated a scoping study, which involved consulting the eight schools in the Cathedral Cluster, community organisations, mental health services, artists, health workers, case managers, community workers and members over a period of two months.

Work undertaken to create the partnership and develop the CARTWHEELS project

Reflecting on the work that was done at this time, it is important to recognise that:

- ◆ Almost six months work went into careful planning and preparation for the CARTWHEELS project.
- ◆ The consultation process needed to create as little imposition on schools as possible.
- ◆ As part of this work, the FHL learnt about the common and unique impacts of the bushfires on each school and consequently developed a project that would respond to and respect the unique situation of each school.
- ◆ Developing relationships with, and understandings of the local schools, agencies, artists, and individual professionals across mental health, health, community development, case management and local government, was an important aim and consequence of the planning activity.
- ◆ The pace of engagement and willingness to engage had to be dictated by schools.
- ◆ School resources and capacity were stretched on every level by the disaster. In many cases, schools were the community gathering places during and after the emergency. Many schools had been on high alert and ready for evacuation for up to four weeks after the fire. Staff as well as students were directly affected by the loss of life, injury, loss of homes and workplaces, damage to property and community infrastructure. Despite this, schools were central to supporting staff, students and their families through the emergency and recovery response. The FHL observed that schools were 'doing their utmost to sustain a semblance of normalcy.'
- ◆ Five to six months after the disaster, all schools were observing trauma-related incidents in their communities, escalation of behaviour problems and family crisis situations. Most schools were hosting a range of professionals, support workers and volunteers involved in school-based recovery initiatives, but were also relying on very stretched services to respond to their needs. Some initial response services were also at the point of winding down. Schools could not 'do' any more than they were already doing. Six months after the event, people were starting to feel their exhaustion.
- ◆ The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was concerned that attention to literacy and numeracy had suffered since the bushfires.
- ◆ Most schools were willing and keen to participate in a cluster-based FHL project, but required that wherever possible, this activity be coordinated with other initiatives to reduce demands on school resources.
- ◆ The school that suffered the greatest level of devastation, Marysville Primary School, reported that it was not in a position to participate in the project. Given its level of need, a range of specific supports was put in place at this school and there was no capacity to engage in another initiative.



The FHL has worked with disadvantaged and traumatised communities from its inception in 1998, but not on the scale that emerged after the bushfire disaster. While its processes were based on sound principles of community development, the specific circumstances in the post-disaster environment required the FHL to reflect on and adjust its processes to the needs of this community. For example:

- ◆ While the FHL strives to establish a steering committee comprising representatives of local schools and agencies in keeping with good community development approaches, this was not feasible for the CARTWHEELS project. Schools and agencies were stretched to the limit – participating in another committee structure was not an option. Governance and steering of the project was therefore undertaken collaboratively between the FHL and with Berry Street as the auspice agency.
- ◆ It was critical to listen to schools and understand that they did not have the capacity – physically, psychologically or emotionally, to work across the cluster in the first year of CARTWHEELS. At that point, each school required a tailored response to the specific needs of their own student and staff bodies.
- ◆ While FHL projects usually take on the name of the Festival within that community, it was important that this project had its own identity: CARTWHEELS in the Cathedral Ranges.
- ◆ The project partners recognised the need to work slowly and systematically over a period of at least two and a half years. A memorandum of understanding was developed to outline respective roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ The project partners invested as much as possible in staff dedicated to supporting the CARTWHEELS project in order to reduce the burden on schools. Berry Street, resourced the project coordination and provided a Clinical Psychologist to work within teams, be available for secondary consultations or to provide advice to the project. The FHL allocated both the Statewide Artistic Coordinator and the Statewide Professional Learning Coordinator, to ensure that the project was well-resourced and that extra demands were not placed on schools.
- ◆ Schools required the work to be coordinated with other initiatives and resources, to reduce pressures on the school. CARTWHEELS, for example, explicitly linked its work with that of the Tribes Learning Community work, thus reinforcing this important groundwork on mental health promotion for both teachers and students.
- ◆ Given the scale and depth of the disaster, and the recovery needs of the community, the project chose not to use formal mental health language. It was thought that local sensitivity to the term 'mental health' in a population that was experiencing normal trauma responses to an abnormal event required careful use of language. However, the principles of mental health promotion were embedded in the approach, informed by such resources as KidsMatter and whole school, health promoting school frameworks, with a focus on reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors with the school community.
- ◆ The project partners identified the need for training and professional learning and mental health supports for school communities and the FHL artists.



Methodology

Evaluation framework

The following broad evaluation framework guided the evaluation of the CARTWHEELS project.

CARTWHEELS EVALUATION FRAMEWORK				
	participants	project / partnership	community	
process	how participants are involved in the project	how the project is managed	how the community is involved in the project	Process
impact	what happens to, or for, participants through the project	what happens as result of the project	what happens to or for the community through the project	Impact
outcome	what happens to, or for, participants in the long term as a result of the project	what happens in the long term, as a result of the project	what happens to, or for, the community in the long term as a result of the project	Outcome
	participants	project / partnership	community	

This framework²⁵ enabled the project to be evaluated in terms of:

- ◆ processes for participant involvement; project management and community involvement;
- ◆ the impact of the project for participants, the project / organisation/schools and the community;
- ◆ outcomes of the project for participants, the project / organisation/schools and the community (including the longer term issues of sustainability and whether CARTWHEELS contributed to personal and community recovery from the 2009 bushfires and encouraged the building of resilience and wellbeing).

The goals of the CARTWHEELS strategic workplan were mapped against this broad framework to identify the process, impact and outcome foci.

Evaluation focus	Target group	CARTWHEELS Project Goals
Process	Participants	<i>Participation in a school-based public event demonstrating new skills learned that support mental health promotion.</i>
	Project / partnership	<i>Coordinated strategic response to the project, involving a partnership between schools, health agencies, artists and Berry Street as lead.</i>
	Community	<i>Participation in whole school community public event.</i>
Impact	Participants	<i>An increase in student's emotional literacy.</i>
	Project / partnership	<i>Advance the understanding of arts as a vehicle to promote wellbeing.</i>
	Community	<i>Broader school communities empowered and supported to share with others individual and/or community stories that celebrate social connectedness.</i>
Outcomes	Participants	<i>An increase in the presence of protective factors in students' wellbeing.</i>
	Project / partnership	
	Community	

²⁵ Keating, C *Evaluating Community Arts and Community Wellbeing Guide*, prepared for Arts Victoria, VicHealth, the City of Darebin and Whittlesea Shire Council, 2002



Although longer-term outcomes had not been specified as part of the CARTWHEELS project goals, the project and the evaluation had an explicit interest in exploring:

- ♦ the effectiveness of the whole of community approach, looking at the level of engagement of, and promotion of connectedness between all sections of the diverse communities
- ♦ the effectiveness of the capacity building approach and its potential for sustainability of activity and impact beyond 2011.

Information collection

Consultation

Consultations were conducted with school principals prior to information collection phases to identify, from a schools perspective, some of the key elements of the CARTWHEELS work in schools, including benefits and challenges. These discussions also sought information on the most appropriate ways to consult students, teachers and principals. Consultations were conducted with all schools through the Cathedral Ranges Schools cluster forum and individually with two primary schools and Alexandra Secondary College.

Development of information collection tools

Information collection tools were developed under the management of the Implementation Team. Principals were keen to be involved in the development of tools for students to ensure that they were age-appropriate and suitable for these school populations. Given that primary school students from Prep classes (average age of 5 years) were involved in CARTWHEELS, there was discussion about creating a two-tiered approach to survey. However, it was decided that a single primary school survey would be developed, but only implemented with students from Grades 3 and up. The language of this survey tool was checked by teachers for ease of understanding.

In addition to self-reported data from students about the impact of participating in CARTWHEELS, information from teachers, artists, health and community welfare professionals was collected to validate self-reports. In order to use objective measures of development in terms of:

- ♦ skills, survey questions were based on the relevant dimensions of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards²⁶
- ♦ health and wellbeing, survey questions were based on Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning, an initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 - 2019²⁷

Surveys from artists, teachers and health and community professionals also sought information about professional learning, working in partnership and perceptions about how families viewed CARTWHEELS to evaluate some of the project's broader community impacts.

²⁶ <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/overview/>

²⁷ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/health/mentalhealth/default.htm>



Information collection tools

The following information collection tools were developed:

Target group	Survey tool	Administered
Primary school students	Pre and post-activity surveys	Beginning and end of Semester 2
Secondary school students	Pre and post-activity surveys	End of Semester 1 Beginning and end of Semester 2
Teachers	Post activity surveys	End of Semester 2
Principals / Assistant principals	Post-activity survey	End of Semester 2
Health professionals	Post-activity survey	End of Semester 2
Artists	Post-activity survey	End of Semester 2
Parents / carers / community	Post activity / festival survey	End of Semester 2

All surveys were developed as electronic surveys, using SurveyMonkey. Student surveys were sent, via school principals, for distribution to teachers onto students. An information sheet was developed for teachers to assist with any questions, but it was found that the tools were easily understood and completed by students.

Electronic surveys were distributed to teachers, principals, health and welfare professionals and artists at the end of Semester 2 activities and after the CARTWHEELS festival in October 2011.

A hard-copy version of the survey for parents / community members was distributed at the CARTWHEELS festival. A longer version of this survey was also available and was promoted through school newsletters and through Berry Street staff.

Participation

Primary school participation in the evaluation

A total of 131 primary school students participated in the survey, comprising:

- ◆ 60 boys (46%)
- ◆ 70 girls (54%).

The table below shows primary school participation by school and grade breakdown.

Grade	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Total
School					
Alexandra Primary School	0	0	0	19	19
Buxton Primary School	*	7	*	*	12
Eildon Primary School	5	10	7	11	33
St Mary's Primary School	15	14	11	12	52
Taggerty Primary School	*	0	*	*	4
Thornton Primary School	*	4	*	*	11
Total	25	35	22	49	131

Table 1: What grade are you in? * Numbers total less than four respondents



Secondary school participation in the evaluation

A total of 89 secondary school students participated in the survey, comprising:

- ♦ 38 boys (43%)
- ♦ 48 girls (54%)
- ♦ unstated – 3 (3%).

The table below shows secondary school participation by year level breakdown.

	Year	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Total
School					
Alexandra Secondary School		32	43	14	89

Table 2: What year are you in?

Professional participation in the evaluation

Professional participation in the evaluation included:

- ♦ Sixteen (16) teachers and four (4) principals / assistant principals, with responses from every participating school
- ♦ Eleven (11) artists, with responses from artists who had worked at each participating school, and a number who had worked at multiple schools
- ♦ Five (5) health / community professionals, from disciplines of psychology, social work and youth work.

Community participation in the evaluation

A total of 75 community members, primarily parents or family members participated in the evaluation, responding to short and long CARTWHEELS surveys and vox pop interviews.

Data analysis and reporting

Data was collated and synthesised from the range of sources and analysed against the evaluation framework. The consultants prepared a draft report which was circulated to the Implementation Team for comment. Feedback was discussed and the report finalised and presented to Berry Street. An important modification that occurred in the final stages of the evaluation was reference to external literature to inform the contextual understanding and analysis of the project.



Key Findings

This section of the report provides a summary of the key findings from the evaluation.

Participation in the CARTWHEELS project

Working through a partnership between Berry Street and the Festival for Healthy Living of the Royal Children's Hospital's Integrated Mental Health Promotion Program, in 2011 the CARTWHEELS project in the Cathedral Ranges has involved:

- ◆ a team of 24 artists and
- ◆ eight (8) health and community professionals
- ◆ working with seven (7) schools - Alexandra Secondary College and six primary schools
- ◆ with five principals, three lead teachers, approximately 30 other teachers, and
- ◆ approximately 450 students and
- ◆ a total 132 volunteers (comprising students, parents, teachers, local emergency services, the Country Women's Association (CWA) and community volunteers) working at the CARTWHEELS festival

The process has been managed by the key project partner agencies, Berry Street and the Festival for Healthy Living of the Royal Children's Hospital, working closely with the schools and artists. Other community agencies with a link to the project included the Alexandra Hospital, FamilyCare and Murrindindi Shire Council.

Students participated in weekly workshops at each of the seven schools with the CARTWHEELS team comprising of an artist, a health professional and their teacher. Artforms ranged from writing songs, pottery, mosaics, music, sculpture, dance, circus skills, painting, writing a play, performance and many more. In-school performances and exhibitions were held.

Work in 2011 included schools combining in workshops and the CARTWHEELS Festival, both held at the Alexandra Secondary College. At the festival, performances were staged simultaneously on the evening across five performance areas. In addition two exhibitions of work created during the year were displayed. The crowd was estimated at between 1200 – 1400 people.

Overall, the CARTWHEELS project's reach across 2010 and 2011 was both wide and deep within the communities of the Cathedral Cluster of schools.

The impact of the CARTWHEELS project

For the students

Having fun and feeling happy

I always go home with a smile on my face on a CARTWHEELS day and tell my family what I have done.

Primary school student

It helped me keep my mind off bad things. It was just a good fun time.

Secondary school student



After everything's that's happened in the last couple of years, the kids really needed it and we needed to see them do it – you know, to have fun. We needed to see the community have fun.
Parent

At its essence, CARTWHEELS has been about the students having fun and feeling happy.

Around 90% of primary students and 80% of secondary students enjoyed CARTWHEELS activities. Most students (60%+ primary students and 70%+ secondary students) enjoyed CARTWHEELS simply because they 'had fun'. Students also enjoyed the creative activities and secondary students were proud of their work. However, having fun was the key source of enjoyment.

Ninety-two per cent (92%) of primary students felt happy when doing CARTWHEELS activities.

Families, teachers, health professionals and artists validated these results. From their observations of children at home or school, they all agreed that 'having fun' was the key reason students enjoyed CARTWHEELS and that they felt happy when they were involved.

Having fun and feeling happy is both a simple and exquisitely profound result for the students in this project, given the context of the work in a community that had been devastated by disaster and trauma.

Excitement and pride

Wow! What an amazing evening, something that has been a work in progress throughout the year. The atmosphere was electric and the kids were brilliant. Seeing the glow in our students and the bounce in their step as they marched in for the closing ceremony made me very proud to be Principal of Alexandra and Thornton Primary School.
David Perlosi, Principal, Alexandra and Thornton Primary Schools.

What a tremendous evening and fantastic conclusion to a two-year project. We are amazed at how far we have come since the first meeting two and a half years ago...We were honoured to have the celebration at our College and thrilled to see so many of our community attending and performing...It was a great evening not only for the schools in the cluster but all members of our community.
Andy Johnston, Principal, Alexandra Secondary College

Congratulations on a fantastic community celebration. Thanks to everyone...Last night was a credit to you all and to the children...rest assured your efforts will have a lasting impact in our community.
Maureen Cowan, St Mary's Primary School
As a parent – felt very proud. Just stoked, seeing them happy and working together, so it's brilliant.
Parent

The sense of joy students felt through CARTWHEELS activities in schools was also felt at the CARTWHEELS festival. After the festival students felt happy, excited and proud. Parents felt proud, happy, excited and amazed. Artists, educators and health professionals felt happy and proud. When 1200 people leave an event with that level of collective, positive emotion, it must reverberate into the community. Equally, to reach that level of emotion – particularly that sense of pride – it is inevitable that much hard work and effort sits behind the achievement.



What else did students enjoy about CARTWHEELS?

Other feelings evoked by CARTWHEELS for primary school students were confident, relaxed and safe. Secondary school students enjoyed being creative, working with artists, doing something different and discovering new things they can do. All reported that it 'made them feel good.'

Did all students enjoy CARTWHEELS?

At both primary and secondary levels, a small cohort of students did not enjoy CARTWHEELS. The secondary students found CARTWHEELS boring or thought it was a waste of time. The equivalent primary student cohort thought it was a waste of time or that they just 'didn't like it.' At the secondary level, while the group was small in number, their comments were consistently vehement – *I hate it, I just hate it*. It is important to acknowledge that, while the results are primarily positive, they were not universally positive.

Skill development in Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Most primary school students reported getting better at teamwork, 'doing my best', performing and 'taking a risk – having a go.' Most secondary students reported improving in teamwork, performance and listening to others. They also reported improving their confidence, perseverance and concentration.

Artists, teachers and health professionals judged that most students had developed new skills. They were asked to report in more detail against 21 areas of student skill development aligned to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), with areas such as 'generating ideas' 'creating and making' 'testing and exploring ideas' 'team work' and 'physical skills such as balance and coordination'. In the majority of VELS skills areas, at least half and up to 100% of the arts, health and education professionals observed students' skill development.

Learning about wellbeing

Be proud of yourself.

How to look after each other, to work with people we don't like.

How to calm down when you are angry.

Primary students' learnings about wellbeing

1. *Even a simple smile can change someone's day.*

2. *Put downs hurt.*

3. *Putting yourself out there can be very rewarding in the end.*

Secondary school student

CARTWHEELS explicitly aimed to enhance student wellbeing and increase student's emotional literacy. Half or more primary students report learning about their own and others' wellbeing. On average, around 45% of secondary students learnt something about looking after their wellbeing and other people's wellbeing through their work with CARTWHEELS.

All professionals reported observing significant development in the areas of relationship skills and social awareness through participation in CARTWHEELS (more than 75% in all cases and up to 100%), areas that align with the *Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning*, an initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019²⁸.

Working from the elements that 'CARTWHEELS' stands for:

Community Arts Resilience Tribes Wellbeing Health Education Engagement Learning Schools

²⁸ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/health/mentalhealth/default.htm>



secondary school students in semesters one and two ranked **resilience** as the most important aspect of CARTWHEELS.

Do secondary students think that CARTWHEELS 'makes a difference'?

*I think it makes kids feel great.
It makes you feel confident and get along with students you might not usually talk to.
Well I reckon it was a great experience and not many people get that opportunity.
It brings a community together.
We do get a lot of experience out of it whilst learning it was still great fun!
Secondary school students*

Student comments indicated that they believe CARTWHEELS has made a difference. Interestingly, most students identified some aspect of the multi-layered approach: learning and having fun, confidence and getting to know other students, the fact that everyone gets something from it, impacts on individuals and communities.

The majority of professionals, including all artists and health professionals observed *increased confidence* and *happier mood* in students, as a result of CARTWHEELS. Most professionals saw an *increased sense of resilience, acceptance of others, capacity to solve problems and resolve conflicts through talking*.

For the schools

Was CARTWHEELS a positive?

All artists, health professionals, teachers and most principals believed that, on balance, running the CARTWHEELS program had been a positive for the school.

All teachers and principals believed that CARTWHEELS had been a positive for the cluster of schools involved. Parents and families interviewed for 'vox pops' supported this view, with many indicating that they were particularly pleased that the project 'brought all schools together' and that there was a connection between the primary schools and the secondary college through the festival performance.

Teachers and principals were asked to think back to when they first encountered CARTWHEELS and indicate what they thought of the approach, on a continuum from 'sceptic' to 'true believer', and to repeat the exercise, 'now that you have been through the CARTWHEELS experience'. While six per cent of respondents were 'true believers' at the beginning of the project in 2009, 71% were 'true believers' after the festival in 2011. At the beginning of the project, 18% of teachers and principals were self-described sceptics about the approach. After the CARTWHEELS festival, there were no sceptics.

Impacts on the school community

Nine out of ten community members believed that CARTWHEELS helped to bring the school community together.

The majority of professionals observed that families were pleased with their child's involvement in CARTWHEELS and that CARTWHEELS had helped bring the school community together.



Capacity building through CARTWHEELS

The Cathedral Ranges cluster

While there were regular professional, departmental and training networks where principals and teachers intersected, this group of schools had not worked together on a project that involved many of the students from each of the schools spending time together. Some of the schools had been linked through special arrangements, geography or similar characteristics. However, the Alexandra Secondary College and St Mary's Primary School had worked less with the other schools. Throughout the process and by the conclusion of the festival evening, it was evident that the strong, partnerships between these schools had strengthened in positive and natural ways.

Professional learning through CARTWHEELS

The majority of professionals reported learning new skills and approaches from their professional colleagues. Artists, who participated in a range of training sessions facilitated by the Festival for Healthy Living, were more likely to report this (82%). Most health professionals (80%) and teachers (70%) felt that they had learned more about *supporting students through CARTWHEELS* and most principals (67%) felt that they had learned more about *health and wellbeing generally*.

One of the aims of the CARTWHEELS' strategic plan was to advance the understanding of the arts as a vehicle to promote wellbeing. Sixty seven per cent (67%) of teachers and principals reported learning about '*creativity and wellbeing*' through their involvement in CARTWHEELS. Teachers reported learning about the application of creative approaches for a range of aims in the classroom:

*Using something hands-on as a metaphor for learning more abstract concepts.
The many different ways to involve students in creativity that extend thinking and working together.
CARTWHEELS approach...created a relaxed learning atmosphere in the classroom while maintaining respect and stimulating creativity.
Performances – when well guided and everyone feels safe – as they mainly do in the FHL activities increase self-esteem. Didn't know that before.*

Cross-sectoral development

Artists, health professionals and teachers reported improved or new relationships across professions and sectors, as a result of CARTWHEELS.

Sustainability

All principals and teachers were keen for local schools to continue to work with artists.

All parents / community members were keen for local schools to continue to work with artists.

Benefits for the wider community

Almost all artists, teachers, health professionals and community respondents thought that CARTWHEELS provided the wider community with the benefit of an 'opportunity to come together and celebrate.' Three quarters of principals agreed with this. Sixty per cent or more of artists, educators, health professionals and community members thought that CARTWHEELS provided other benefits for the wider local



community including sense of pride in young people, sense of pride in schools, sense of working together, sense of achievement and sense of pride in the local community.

Standing out from the overall positive results from all groups, only 44% of the community members felt a sense of what can be achieved in the future and 13% of community members felt that there were no benefits observed for the wider community.



Survey and Interview Results

Primary school students

What did the primary school students do?

- ◆ Primary school students undertook a wide range of creative activities as part of CARTWHEELS, from circus activities to mosaics, drumming, sculpture, performing in a play, making a CD or a film.
- ◆ Most primary school respondents (84%) did circus activities as part of CARTWHEELS, which involved different activities such as plate spinning, juggling, pyramids or gymnastics.
- ◆ Other activities undertaken by one third or more of participants included: performing a play (49%), drawing (49%), dancing (40%), painting (40%), mosaics (38%), writing songs (36%), drumming (36%), sculpture / wire sculpture (32%) and singing (31%). Making a CD or film, making things, such as a rainmaker, storytelling, 'improv' activities, pottery and totem poles were other activities undertaken by smaller numbers of students. As some of the school populations are quite small (three schools have fewer than 30 students), in some cases these activities were undertaken by the whole primary school and in larger schools by combined classes.

Did primary school students enjoy CARTWHEELS?

- ◆ The overwhelming majority of primary school students (87% - 97%) reported that they **enjoyed CARTWHEELS activities** most of the time. Across all schools and both semesters, an average of 92% of primary school students enjoyed CARTWHEELS activities.

	% of respondents		
	Sem 1 (n=130)	Sem 2 (n=86)	Average
Yes, I enjoy CARTWHEELS activities most of the time	97%	87%	92%
No, most of the time I don't enjoy CARTWHEELS activities	3%	13%	8%

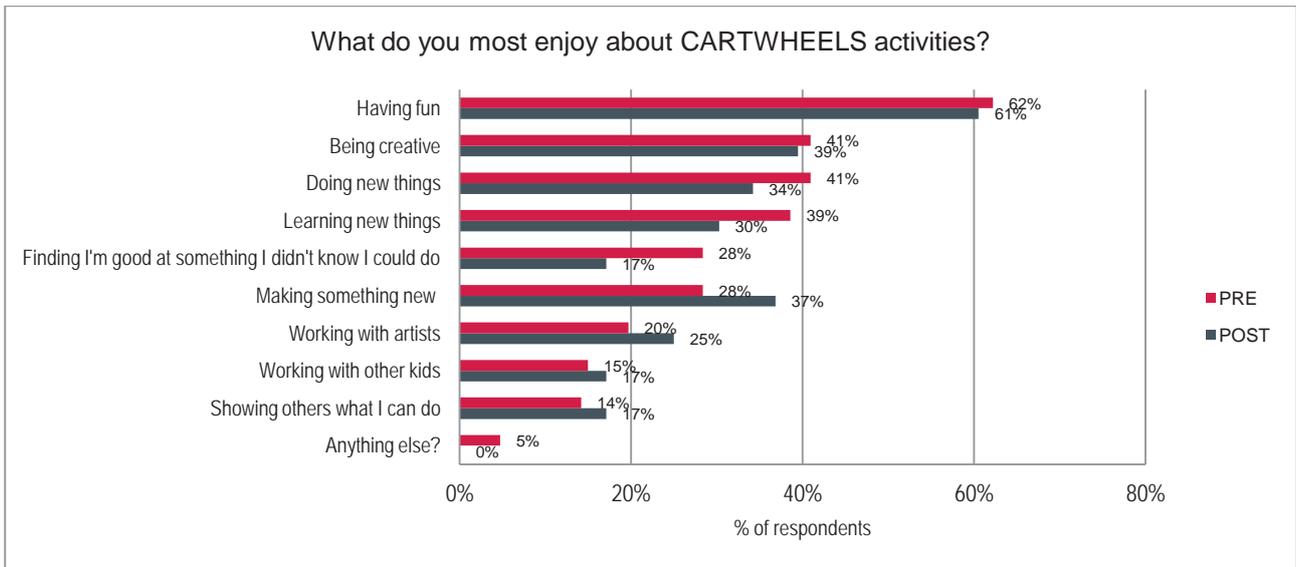
Table 3: Did primary school students enjoy CARTWHEELS?

Students who enjoyed CARTWHEELS activities were asked 'What do you most enjoy about CARTWHEELS activities?'

- ◆ **Having fun** the most enjoyable aspect of CARTWHEELS for primary school student, both in semester one (62%) and semester two (61%).

The creative activities (doing new things, learning new things, making something new and being creative) were the next most enjoyable aspects of CARTWHEELS (for 30 – 40% of respondents). Around one quarter or less nominated *finding I'm good at something I didn't know I could do*, *working with other kids*, *working with artists* and *showing others what I can do*. The results show a change in emphasis for a couple of options across the two semesters. *Learning something new* and *finding I'm good at something I didn't know I could do* fell around 10% from semester one to semester two while *making something new* rose by around the same amount.





Graph 1: What do you most enjoy about CARTWHEELS activities?

Between semester one and semester two, the percentage enjoying the activities fell by ten per cent (and those not enjoying the activities, rose by ten per cent). Further analysis shows that the 13% of respondents who did not enjoy CARTWHEELS activities in semester two comprised students from two schools:

- ♦ 70% males and 30% females
- ♦ 40% from grade 3; 10% from grade 4; 20% from grade five and 30% from grade 6

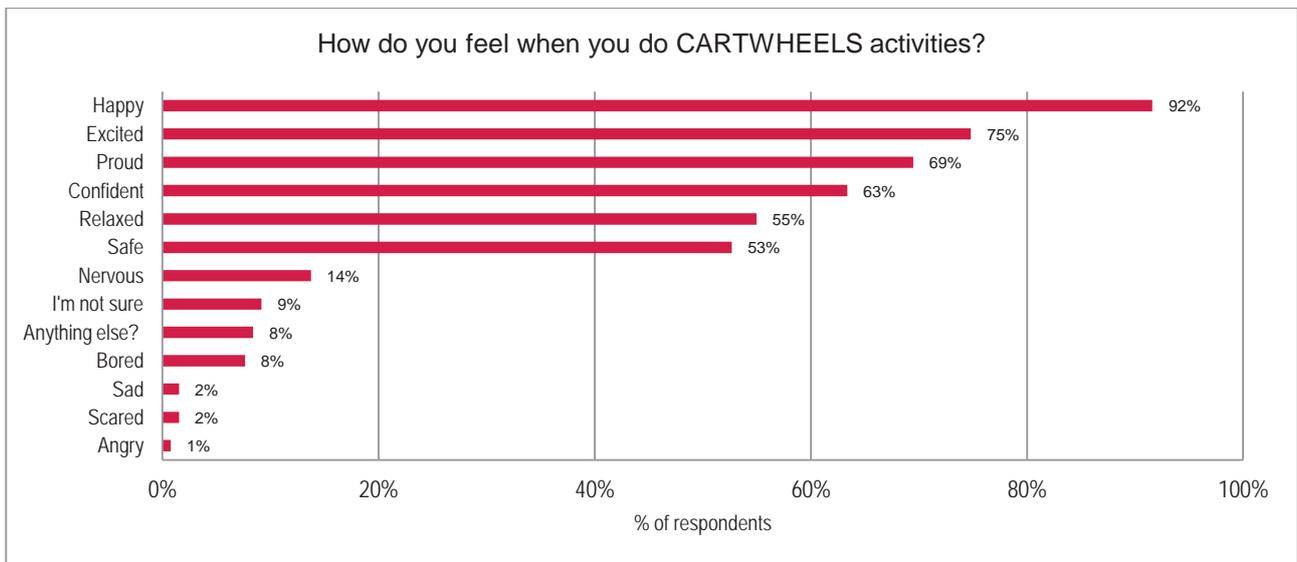
Of this group, half (50%) did not perform in or attend the CARTWHEELS festival. The other half, who did perform in the CARTWHEELS festival, reported feeling bored (60%), proud (20%), happy (20%), frustrated (20%) and confident (20%) when performing at the festival.

More than half of these students (55%) did not enjoy CARTWHEELS activities because they thought it was 'a waste of time' and 27% 'didn't like it.'

How did primary school students feel when doing CARTWHEELS activities?

- ♦ Overwhelmingly, students **felt happy (92%)** when doing CARTWHEELS activities.
- ♦ Half to three quarters of the students reported other positive emotions, from **feeling safe (53%)** to **feeling excited (75%)**, when doing CARTWHEELS activities.

Around 14% of respondents felt nervous and eight per cent felt bored. Fewer than five per cent reported feeling scared, sad or angry. The eleven additional comments provided were positive: *Awesome, I feel at home, Super super super excited!* (sp). A couple of comments indicated feeling challenged: *A little bit hard, Stepping out of my comfort zone.*



Graph 2: How do you feel when you do CARTWHEELS activities?

Skill improvement / development

- ◆ Most students reported getting better at **teamwork** (semester 1: 80%, semester 2: 55%) through CARTWHEELS activities.
- ◆ This is followed by improved skills focussing on individual development – **Doing my best, Performing in front of a group, Taking a risk – having a go.**

	Top 5 responses	
	Semester 1	Semester 2
Did you develop or improve skills in the following areas?	Team work (80%)	Team work (54%)
	Doing my best (79%)	Performing in front of a group (46%)
	Performing in front of a group (64%)	Taking a risk – having a go (43%)
	Taking a risk – having a go (61%)	Doing my best (31%)
	Helping other people (57%)	Sticking with something until I can do it (29%)

Table 4: Did you develop or improve skills in the following areas?

Semester two results indicate that students prioritised their performance skills and taking a risk, over *Doing my best*, most likely as a result of the Festival day held in semester two. Perseverance – *sticking with something until I can do it, even if it's hard* – is ranked around the middle. Students then report improvements in skills which focus on interaction with other people – *helping other people, listening to other people, accepting other people, understanding other people's feelings*. The lowest response is for *understanding my feelings*.

Learning about wellbeing

- ◆ Across both semesters, combined *yes* and *maybe* results show that fifty per cent or more students report learning about their **own and others' wellbeing**.
- ◆ Students reported a stronger sense of learning about own or others' wellbeing in semester one (with 55% to 62% reporting this) compared to semester two results (36% - 49%).



- ♦ In semester two, more students felt that they learnt about looking after others' wellbeing (49%) compared to learning about their own wellbeing (36%).

	Response	% of respondents			
		Semester 1 (n=130)	Semester 2 (n=86)		
		Combined (yes, maybe)	Combined (yes, maybe)		
<i>CARTWHEELS is about arts for wellbeing. Are you learning // did you learn anything // about looking after your own wellbeing?</i>	Yes	62%	76%	36%	52%
	Maybe	14%		16%	
	Not sure	21%	30%		
	No	4%	17%		
<i>Are you learning // did you learn anything // about looking after other people's wellbeing?</i>	Yes	55%	71%	49%	65%
	Maybe	16%		16%	
	Not sure	26%	26%		
	No	4%	10%		

Table 5: Are you learning // did you learn anything // about looking after your own/other people's wellbeing?

Students provided 128 responses, showing examples about what they learnt about wellbeing. These comments emphasised *being nice, not being mean, listening to others*. Other comments showed interesting insights gained about looking after their own and others' wellbeing, from children whose ages ranged from eight to twelve years. These included understandings about concepts such as the importance of perseverance, self-belief and self-care, self-expression, respect for others and management of emotions:

- ♦ *If I tri I get it right lots of times*
- ♦ *Be proud of yourself*
- ♦ *Don't put yourself down and believe in yourself*
- ♦ *You can express your feelings in different way.*
- ♦ *I learnt to work with people that I barely know*
- ♦ *How to look after each other, to work with people we don't like.*
- ♦ *I learnt that the arts has lots of impact on wellbeing .I learnt that diferant people have difrant wellbeing needs.*
- ♦ *That everyone has their own talent*
- ♦ *That you need to treat every one the way you want to be treated.*
- ♦ *That we are not the same as each other.*
- ♦ *How to calm down when you are angry.*

...sometimes you have to take risks for the whole group.

You have to be careful...when you lift people up in a pyramid and like when you do anything with peoples body's because you could hurt them.

We can do new things if we have support and we keep persevering. Helping each other is important

Primary school students



Secondary school students

Did secondary school students enjoy working with CARTWHEELS artists?

- ♦ At the end of the semester of work with the artists, on average 80% of students **enjoyed** the experience. An average of 20% of students **did not enjoy** the experience.

Did you enjoy working with a CARTWHEELS artist?	% of respondents		Average
	Sem 1 (n=45)	Sem 2 (n=27)	
Yes	90%	70%	80%
No	11%	30%	20.5%

Table 6: Did you enjoy working with a CARTWHEELS artist?

It was not possible to survey students at the beginning of Semester 1, but at the beginning of Semester 2:

- ♦ 64% of students were looking forward to working with a CARTWHEELS artist
- ♦ 36% of students were not looking forward to working with a CARTWHEELS artist.

- ♦ Secondary school students enjoyed working with CARTWHEELS because **'it was fun'** (Semester 1: 73%, Semester 2: 79%).

After 'having fun', selected by more than 70% of respondents, the next reason for enjoying CARTWHEELS (*I feel proud of my work* (Semester one) and *I enjoyed being creative* (Semester 2)) were selected by around 32% – 35% of respondents. This difference of around 40% between the top response and the second highest response shows emphatically how important the 'fun' aspect of CARTWHEELS was to their enjoyment. Other top reasons students enjoyed CARTWHEELS across the two semesters (ranging between 26%- 35%) were:

- ♦ feeling proud of my work
- ♦ enjoyed working with artists
- ♦ enjoyed being creative
- ♦ discovered new things I can do
- ♦ it made me feel good

I learnt how to gain courage and sing in front of a lot of people and not be so shy. I learnt how to dance. I made new friends. It helped me keep my mind off bad things. It was just a good fun time.
Secondary student

Students were asked 'What was the best part for you about working with an artist (or artists)?' Their responses fell into the following themes:

- ♦ having fun
- ♦ developing confidence, especially to perform
- ♦ learning new things
- ♦ doing something different
- ♦ working with artists and learning from their expertise
- ♦ working with students they would not usually work with



A selection of comments from students show, in their words, the 'best part' about working with the artists:

- *Having fun and looking back at the end result.*
- *I just loved it, and every single bit. I want to do it again.*
- *They helped my confidence and realise what I wanted to do with my life.*
- *Well we got to be with other people in other grades and we had a lot of fun. We got to do something we don't usually get to do...*
- *Getting back on the drums after about 2 years*
- *The best part was getting on stage, knowing what to do and feel great after it :)*
- *Getting to have the experience of working with people so talented.*

- ♦ A smaller cohort of students (11% in Semester 1, 30% in Semester 2) did not enjoy working with CARTWHEELS. These students primarily found CARTWHEELS **boring**. Fewer thought it was a waste of time, or '*just didn't like it, not sure why*'.

Skills development

- ♦ More than two-thirds of students reported that they developed or improved in **teamwork, performance and listening to others** which are all important requirements of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
- ♦ More than two-thirds of students improved their **confidence, perseverance and concentration**.

	Top 5 responses	
	Semester 1	Semester 2
Did you develop or improve skills in the following areas?	Working in a team (88%)	Working in a team (71%)
	Performing (86%)	Listening to others (71%)
	Confidence (84%)	Confidence (71%)
	Perseverance (84%)	Perseverance (68%)
	Listening to others (81%)	Concentrating (68%)

Table 7: Did you develop or improve skills in the following areas?

Learning about wellbeing

- ♦ On average, around 45% of students learnt something about **looking after their wellbeing and other people's wellbeing** through their work with CARTWHEELS

	Semester One	Semester Two	Average
Did you learn anything about looking after your own wellbeing?	Yes	39%	46.5%
	Maybe	27%	17%
	Not sure	23%	24%
	No	11%	12.5%
Did you learn anything about looking after other people's wellbeing?	Yes	46%	45%
	Maybe	27%	17%
	Not sure	14%	20%
	No	14%	18%

Table 8: Did you learn anything about looking after your own/other people's wellbeing?

Things that secondary school students learnt about wellbeing focused on the importance of 'having fun', looking after one's own health, acceptance of self and others. For example:



- *I learned that enjoying yourself is important*
- *I learnt that I don't need to look the best, I just have to be myself.*
- *That it's good to be healthy. And being healthy is an important part of life...*
- *That if you're confident other people will start to be too and don't be scared to stand out*
- *That you must respect others before they respect you*
- *How to co-operate with other students and working with people I never worked with*
- *To calm down and the five senses.*
- *That even if you don't like someone you have to work with them and to be positive*

One student summed up their learnings in three simple messages:

1. *Even a simple smile can change someone's day*
2. *Put downs hurt*
3. *Putting yourself out there can be very rewarding in the end*

What was the most important part about CARTWHEELS?

Students were asked to rank in order of importance to them, the elements that 'CARTWHEELS' stands for:

Community Arts Resilience Tribes Wellbeing Health Education Engagement Learning Schools

- ♦ Secondary school students ranked **resilience** as the most important aspect of CARTWHEELS.

	Top 5 responses	
	Semester 1	Semester 2
CARTWHEELS is about:	Resilience	Resilience
	Community	Engagement
	Schools	Schools
	Engagement	Learning
	Arts	Education

Table 9: CARTWHEELS is about:

Does CARTWHEELS make a difference?

Students were asked whether the CARTWHEELS experience 'makes a difference' in their end of Semester One survey. From their comments, it was clear that students believed it *made a difference*, primarily because it was fun and a great experience.

	Do you think the CARTWHEELS experience makes a difference?
It was fun	<i>Just having a good time</i> <i>It does because it makes you happy</i> <i>I think it makes kids feel great</i>
It gave people confidence	<i>CARTWHEELS makes a lot of a difference because they have lots of confidence which gives us confidence</i> <i>It makes you more confident and get along with students you might not usually talk to</i> <i>CARTWHEELS is a great experience it fun and helps you get out of your shell</i>
It was a 'great experience'	<i>Well I reckon it was a great experience and not many people get that opportunity</i> <i>CARTWHEELS is an amazing experience. Everyone gets something out of it weather it be performing or watching.</i> <i>I think its good that we do CARTWHEELS. We do get a lot of experience out of it and whilst learning it was still great fun!</i> <i>I think that CARTWHEELS does make a difference because you are putting yourself in the light where you can</i>



Do you think the CARTWHEELS experience makes a difference?	
	<i>do a lot of stuff like Acting, Shows and more. I think everyone got some enjoyment out of it. The program helped me get to know people I wouldn't really talk to otherwise.</i>
Community values	<i>We get to learn the value of hard work and community It brings a community together Some of my friends might think its boring but most of my family will like it</i>
Other benefits	<i>CARTWHEELS gets boring when its african dancing but when you're on stage it changes. Yeah and it also means you get outa class</i>

Table 10: Do you think the CARTWHEELS experience makes a difference?

Benefits for the wider community

In the survey at the end of semester two, secondary school students were provided with a list of 'wider' community benefits and to select any that applied. The wider community benefits selected by secondary school students were:

- ◆ Sense of pride in young people (64%)
- ◆ Opportunity for the community to come together and celebrate (59%)
- ◆ Sense of what we can achieve in the future (46%)

Artists, health professionals and educators

The CARTWHEELS teams comprised artists, health and community professionals and teachers. This section reports on their views and includes the views of principals who were not regularly involved in the CARTWHEELS workshop sessions, but had the overarching perspective of the work in their school and management of the project.

Did students enjoy working with CARTWHEELS artists?

- ◆ All artists, health professionals and educators (100%) reported that students **enjoyed working with CARTWHEELS artists.**

	Artists	Health Professionals	Principals	Teachers
Mostly yes	100%	100%	100%	100%
Mostly no	0%	0%	0%	0%

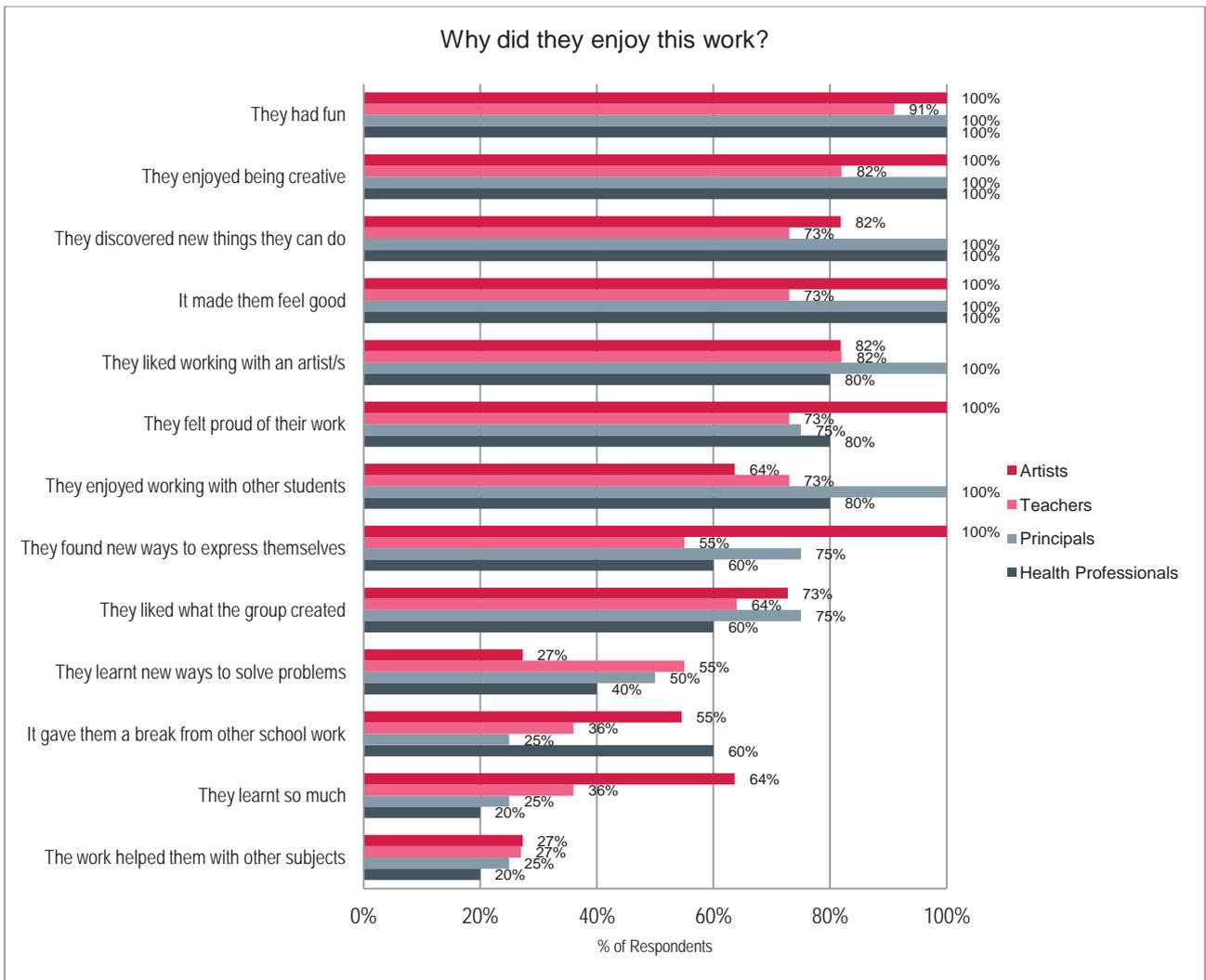
Table 11: Did students enjoy working with CARTWHEELS artist(s)?

Why did students enjoy working with CARTWHEELS artists?

- ◆ Artists, principals and health professionals were unanimous that students enjoyed CARTWHEELS work because they **had fun, enjoyed being creative and it made them feel good.**
- ◆ The majority of teachers (73% - 91%) also believed that students enjoyed CARTWHEELS work because they **had fun, enjoyed being creative and it made them feel good.**
- ◆ All principals thought that students enjoyed working with CARTWHEELS artists because they **discovered new things they could do, they liked working with artists and they enjoyed working with other students.**



- ◆ All artists thought that students enjoyed working with CARTWHEELS artists because *they felt proud of their work and they found new ways to express themselves*.
- ◆ All health professionals thought that students enjoyed working with CARTWHEELS artists because *they discovered new things they could do*.
- ◆ Lower responses show some variations in the perceived reasons for students enjoying the work across the professions – all artists felt that students enjoyed the work because they found new ways to express themselves but only 56% of teachers did and 60% of health professionals thought they enjoyed the work because it gave them a break whereas only 25% of principals agreed with this.



Graph 3: Why did they enjoy this work?

While the perspectives of the various professionals vary on some points, potentially reflecting differing professional perspectives or emphases, or differing relationships or time spent with the students, the results show agreement on the sense of fun, enjoyment and ‘feeling good’ that students experienced through CARTWHEELS work. This strongly validates the self-reported data from students – that they had fun and felt happy working with CARTWHEELS artists.

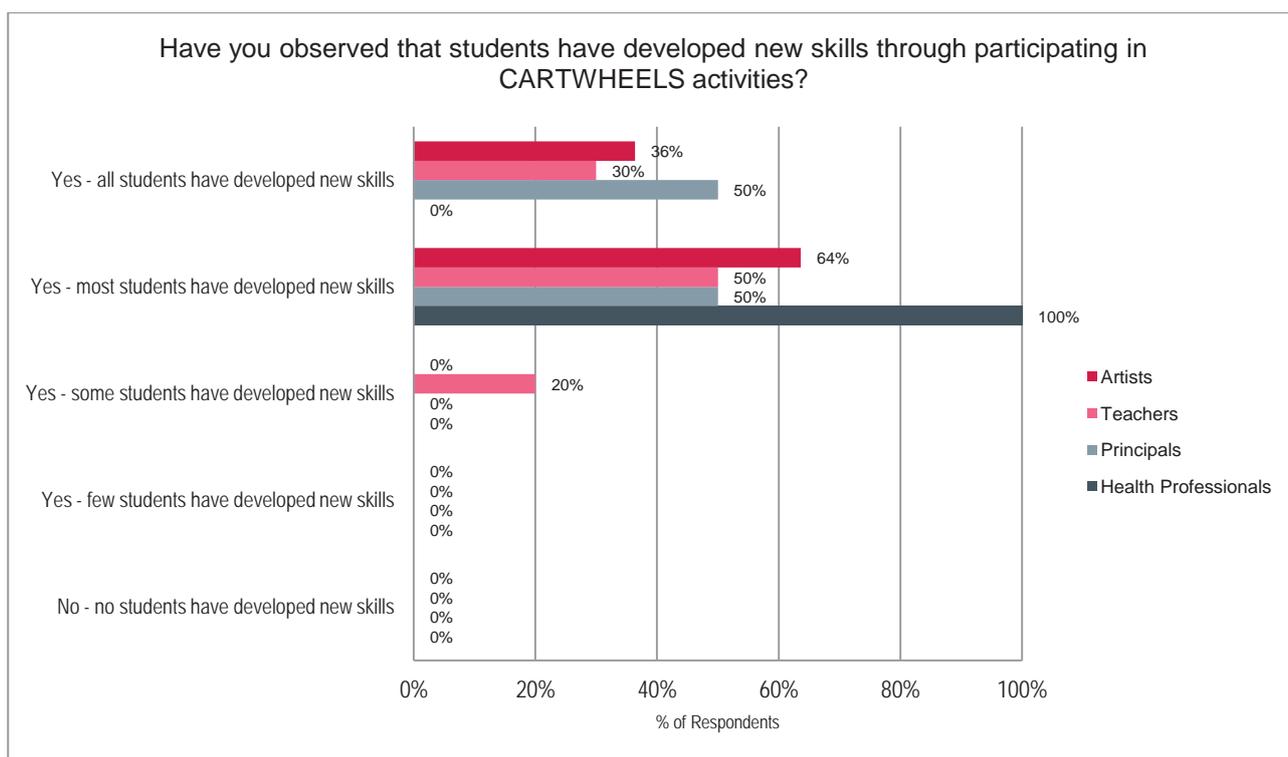
One of the principals explained in interview that after the fires, schools received many offers of help and they needed to be judicious in their acceptance. School-based programs had to be beneficial for all



students, as every student in the school community had been affected by the fires. The broad popularity base of the program was a key reason for feeling confident to commit to the program for two years.

Student skill development

- ◆ All artists, teachers, principals and health professionals have observed **new skill development** for students through their CARTWHEELS participation.
- ◆ Most professionals, including all principals, observed that *most students* had developed new skills.
- ◆ Around one third to half of the other professionals observed that *all students* had developed new skills.
- ◆ A minority of teachers (20%) felt that only *some students* had developed new skills.



Graph 4: Have you observed that students have developed new skills through participating in CARTWHEELS activities?

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) outline 'what is essential for all Victorian students to learn during their time at school from Prep to Year 10. They provide a set of common statewide standards which schools use to plan student learning programs, assess student progress and report to parents.'²⁹ The standards are organised into three broad categories:

- ◆ Physical, social and personal learning
- ◆ Discipline based learning
- ◆ Inter-disciplinary learning

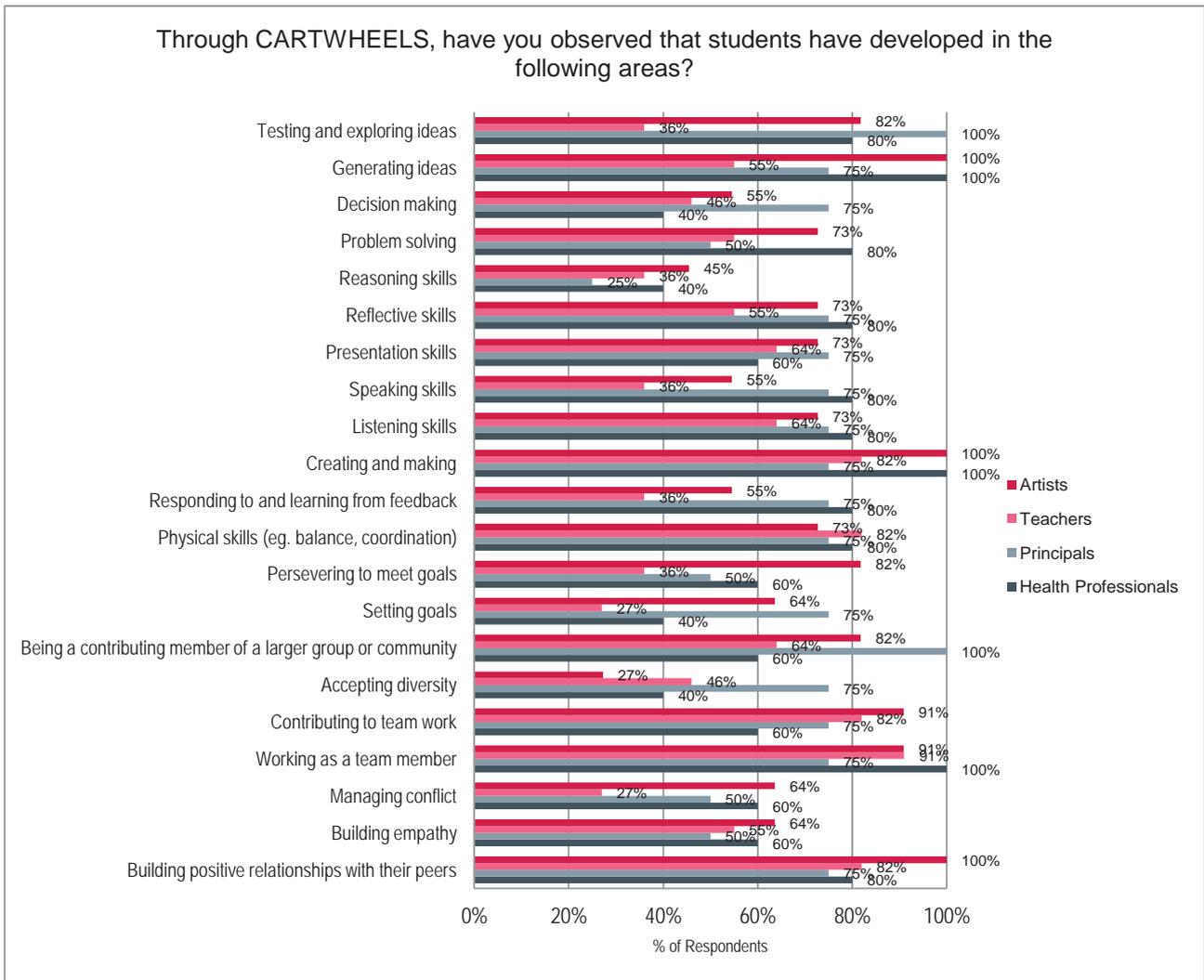
The CARTWHEELS survey question lists 21 areas of student skill development from across these three broad categories, selected from the relevant dimensions from the Essential Learning Standards. This question sought to identify whether students' work in CARTWHEELS was relevant to the curriculum.

²⁹ <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/overview/>



The following graph provides these results, and shows that:

- ◆ In the majority of VELS skill areas, at least half, and up to 100%, of the arts, health and education professionals observed skill development.
- ◆ Less than half of the professionals had observed development in *reasoning skills* (25% of principals).
- ◆ In a further six skill areas, fewer than 50% of teachers had observed skill development (for areas such as *managing conflict*, *accepting diversity* and *responding to and learning from feedback*).
- ◆ Overall, there is a strong report from professionals that the CARTWHEELS work in the classroom leads to, or supports skill development in the key areas required by the Victorian curriculum.



Graph 5: Through CARTWHEELS, have you observed that students have developed in the following areas?

During interviews with principals, they reported that teachers were supportive of CARTWHEELS, because of the value it added to the curriculum. Unless that was the case, it would be too difficult to make the long-term time commitment to the project. Skill development in essential learning standards was a key example of how the CARTWHEELS project 'added value' for schools.



Professionals provided a range of examples from their observations of the classes to illustrate this skill development in areas such as teamwork, listening, perseverance and being a contributing member of a group:

- *Working on human pyramids needs co-operation with each other to work as a team to achieve their goal. They need to listen to instructions, persevere, and reflect on what works or doesn't work.*
- *Students at our school work in TRIBES group which have been carefully selected as multi age, multi academic, groups with diverse interests and needs. The artists have helped to nurture this cooperative approach to learning and we have seen students who do not believe themselves to be creative, produce amazing works of art or demonstrating amazing talents, that are accepted and celebrated by students who would not normally reach outside of their comfort group.*
- *Our Technical Production students... attended CARTWHEELS meetings, were given roles & responsibilities, discussed and planned their activity, kept notes and made a journal of their achievements and a reflective report.*
- *Improved listening skills and a better understanding of HOW to listen well.*
- *Three of the dance performances were based on the group contributing their creative ideas into the piece. They were then able to see how it worked in practice and how it fitted in with others' ideas. They were also able to add/change ideas in the early stages.*

Professionals were able to provide a range of individual examples to further illustrate this skill development. A selection of these is provided below.

- *Student with no confidence to present initially, able to hold centre position (at our school) celebration.*
- *The oldest child in a group of three designing and creating... had to learn to get input from the others rather than just imposing his ideas.*
- *Quiet secondary student took on the role of group manager when no one else volunteered. Thoughtfully assigned roles to each member of the team and stood firm on her decision. By the end of the Fest she achieved the respect of her team*
- *Some students who displayed patience and tolerance of other students' behaviour early on in the program gained other skills of assertiveness, creativity, showing initiative and leadership.*
- *One young boy ... who is not academically suited and from a home life that is not encouraging. Excelled at art and found his hidden talent. He...wanted to work through lunch on a regular basis. He was openly joyous at coming to create art.*

A young girl who was struggling with learning a circus skill (spinning a plate) and persisted and persisted. Her excitement a few weeks later when she mastered it was palpable

In one grade, there was a boy who was too shy to talk in front of class. He always passed or the teacher spoke for him...UNTIL one day in CARTWHEELS class he spoke on his own. It was a magic moment.

Improvements in students' social and wellbeing development

Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning is an initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019.³⁰ This initiative aims to 'build a common understanding of mental health promotion strategies to create environments that support mental health in schools and early education and care settings'³¹, focusing on three areas: safe and empowering environments, social and emotional learning, family, community and service partnerships.

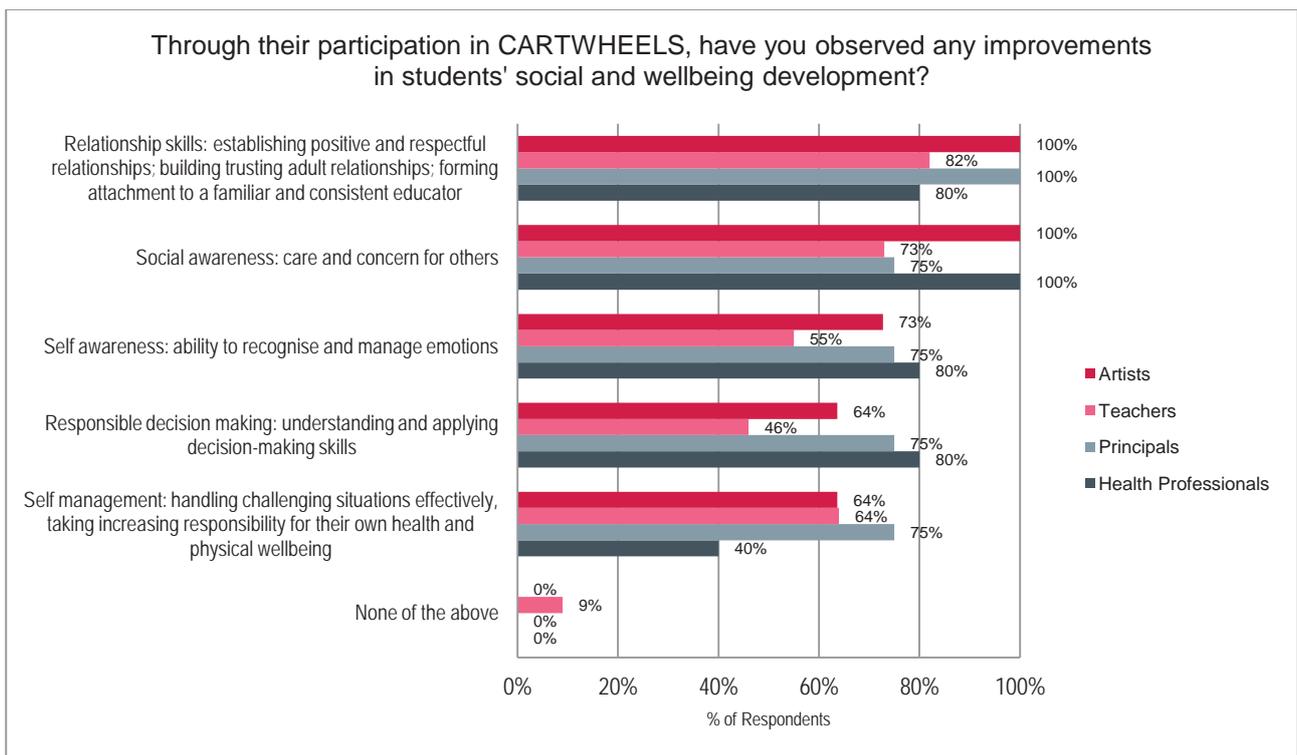
Concentrating on the area of social and emotional learning, professionals were asked whether they had observed any improvements in students' social and wellbeing development areas outlined in the strategy. These results are outlined in the following graph.

³⁰ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/health/mentalhealth/default.htm>

³¹ *Promoting mental health for living and learning, flyer*



- ♦ All professionals reported observing significant development in the area of relationship skills and social awareness (care and concern for others) through participation in CARTWHEELS (more than 75% in all cases and up to 100%).
- ♦ Most professionals reported observing development in the areas of self-awareness and responsible decision-making, however results from teachers were lower (55%, 46%) than the other professions, which ranged from 64 – 80%.
- ♦ Most professionals reported observing development in self-management, however results health professionals were lower than other professionals (40% compared to 64% – 75% of other professionals).



Graph 6: Through their participation in CARTWHEELS, have you observed any improvements in students' social and wellbeing development?

Professionals' observations of improvements in social and wellbeing development in the class or group include:

Improvements in social and wellbeing development	
Relationship skills	<i>Conflict management in team situations has improved</i>
Social awareness	<i>Reluctant children participating in rock climbing, getting further than they imagined possible, using persistence, being coaxed by peers. Individual children feeling nervous, other children helping by prompting positive self talk, reinforcing that they were well prepared, just do your best, we can be proud of our progress During our acting sessions Same Sex Attracted and Alc. Consumption were discussed. These issues were explained as much of the class ridiculed people who are same sex attracted. At the conclusion of the discussion they learnt and empathised with the class.</i>
Self awareness	<i>Increased ability to talk about emotions and verbalise how they feel in adult-managed conflict management Being able to talk about when things haven't gone right etc. openly. Wellbeing is increased by talking about moods & feelings. One day we picked images of photos and talked</i>



Improvements in social and wellbeing development

about why we had chosen the image and what it meant to us.

Self-management

Altercations seem to be able to be resolved faster with less, or more often - no, residual ill feeling.

We have a number of students with what is considered 'a short fuse'. Through the ARTs and acceptance of everyone's abilities I have watched students with little confidence in their creative abilities produce amazing art works with persistence.

Our students practiced breathing techniques and yoga tie ups to calm themselves back stage while waiting to begin their performance. They recognised the need for quiet while other groups were performing and gently sought to calm nervous and energetic members of the group.

Table 12: Improvements in social and wellbeing development

Professionals' observations of improvements in social and wellbeing development at an individual level include:

- *A (primary school) boy who has low self esteem... has loved the drumming sessions and has been able to learn some measure of self control and order so that he can participate in the drumming sessions and witness his own improvement.*
- *Primary school boy last year refused to participate in any physical activity. Now enjoys it with no self-consciousness. Able to handle performance pressure.*
- *Primary school girl going over to another child, encouraging, offering support with sensitivity*
- *Primary school boy began to open up during circle time*
- *Primary school boy who had a lot of difficulty containing his disruptive behaviour in the classroom, was able to hold it together to perform on stage.*
- *Very nervous on day of performance and dissolved into tears and was comforted by girl who told him he was very good at playing Ukes.*
- *A great many students who initially would duck for cover in the street, now smile and say hello and will chat about our art projects or their pony, their mum's art or their part time job. Year 7 to 12*

(Primary school boy)...Often unsettled but sat quietly in a wrapped hands yoga position and whispered 'I'm good at quiet'

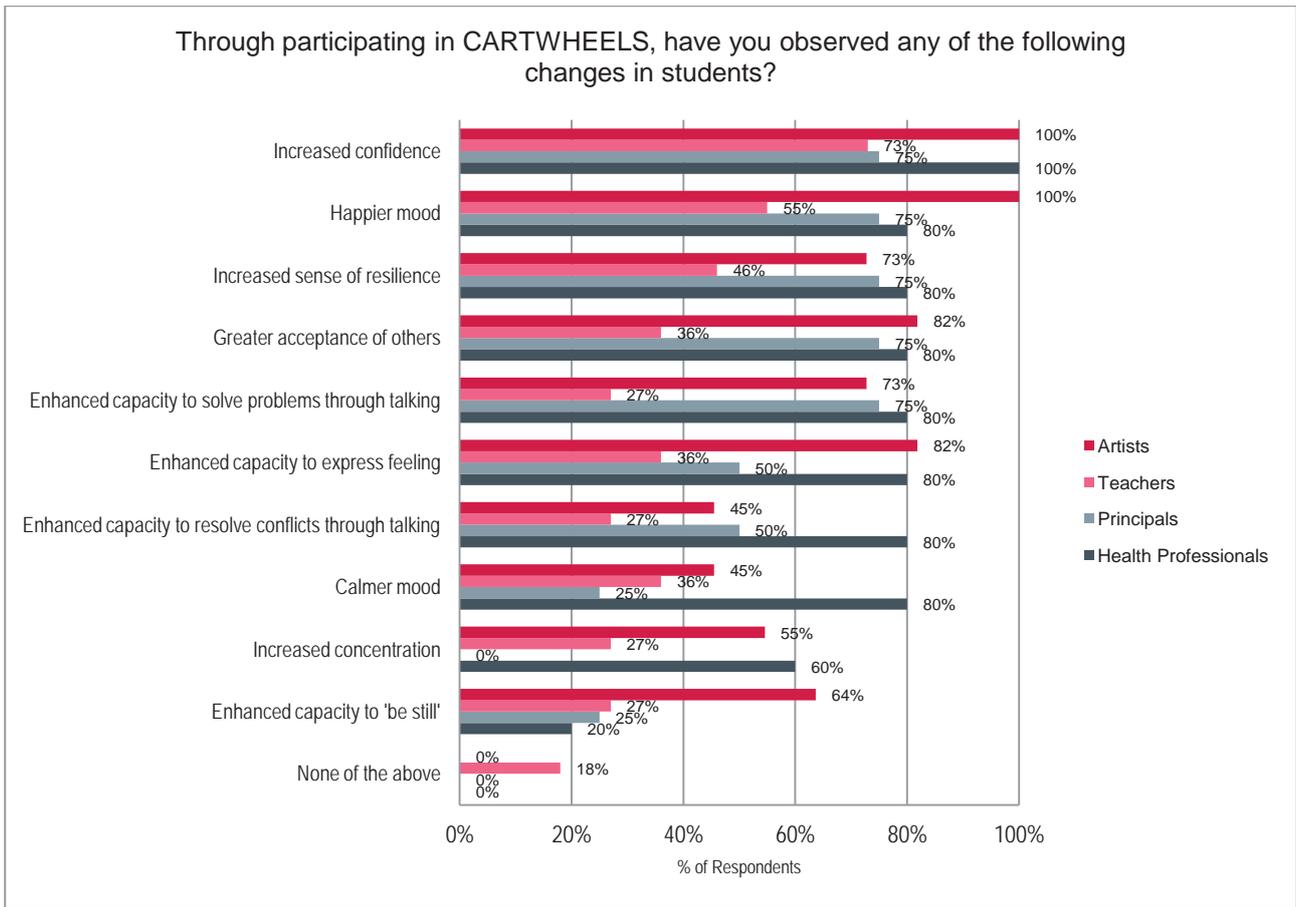
(Secondary school) female found she was very creative in dance. She also discovered in teaching and mentoring the primary students that she had natural leadership qualities. This boosted her self-esteem.

Changes in wellbeing

- ♦ The majority of professionals, including all artists and health professionals observed that through CARTWHEELS, students had *increased confidence* and *happier mood*.
- ♦ With the exception of teachers, most professionals saw an *increased sense of resilience, acceptance of others* and *capacity to solve problems and resolve conflict through talking*.
- ♦ Health professionals and artists reported consistent, positive mood changes for the students in most areas. However, while 60% of artists observed that students had an *enhanced capacity to be still*, only 20% of health professionals observed this change.
- ♦ Teachers were less likely to have seen progress in many of these changes in mood or capacity to solve problems through talking or increased concentration.

These results are presented in the following graph.





Graph 7: Through participating in CARTWHEELS, have you observed any of the following changes in students?

Capacity building through CARTWHEELS

Professional learning through CARTWHEELS

Through the collaborative approach adopted for CARTWHEELS, teachers, health professionals and artists were each exposed to different practical and professional approaches. This is explicitly part of Cartwheel’s capacity building approach.

- ◆ The majority of professionals reported learning new skills and approaches from their professional colleagues. Artists were more likely to report this (82%) and health professionals less likely (60%).

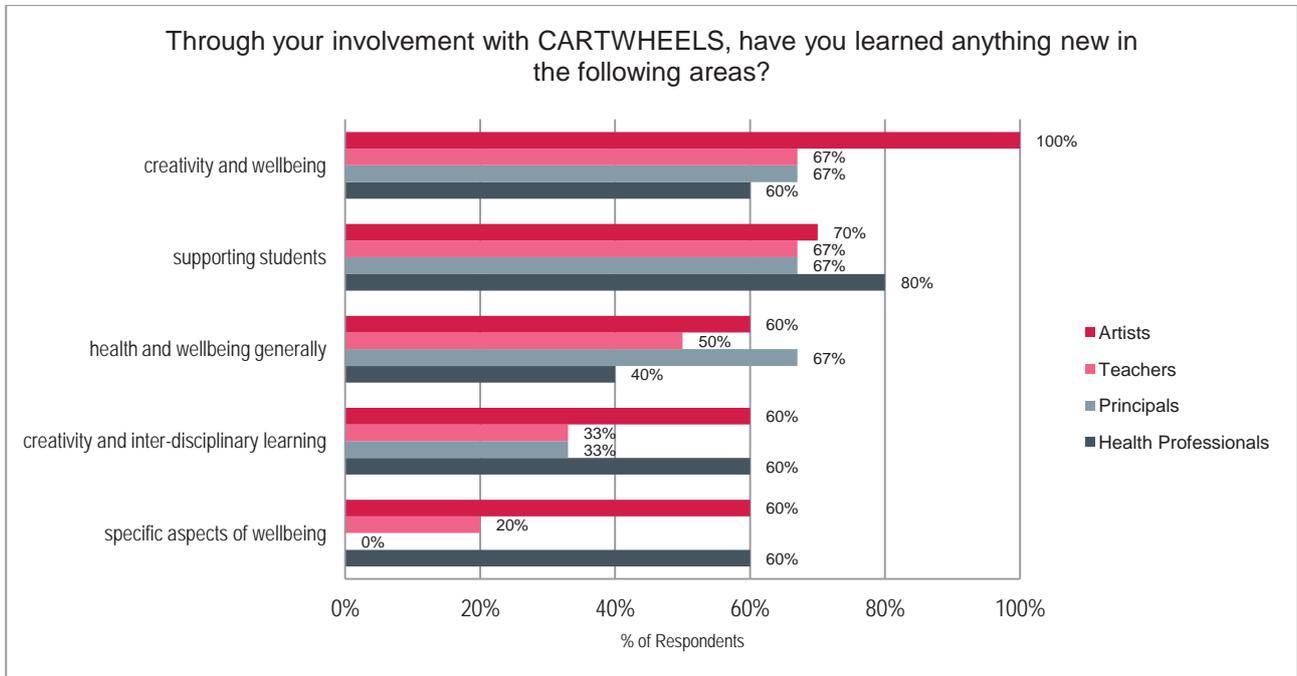
	Artists	Health Professionals	Principals	Teachers
Yes	82%	60%	73%	75%
No	18%	40%	27%	25%

Table 13: Have you learnt new skills or approaches through your work with CARTWHEELS?

- ◆ All artists felt that they had learned more about *creativity and wellbeing* through their involvement in CARTWHEELS. Through the program, artists participated in formal and informal professional development provided by the Festival for Healthy Living.



- ◆ Most health professionals (80%) and teachers (70%) felt that they had learned more about *supporting students* through CARTWHEELS and most principals (67%) felt that they had learned more about *health and wellbeing generally*.
- ◆ The results indicate participation in the two-year project provided significant opportunity for incidental professional development.



Graph 8: Through your involvement with CARTWHEELS, have you learned anything new in the following areas?

Teachers learnt a lot from the artists about integrating the arts into the classroom and the use of creative techniques and approaches in their day-to-day teaching:

- ◆ *I have learnt to not under-estimate the value of the arts for children and to push for other educators to see their value. CARTWHEELS has reinforced what I always believed. Thanks.*
- ◆ *Using something hands-on as a metaphor for learning more abstract concepts*
- ◆ *The value of social and emotional learning can be discovery through the arts. Am already building on this approach*
- ◆ *The many different ways to involve students in creativity that extend thinking and working together*
- ◆ *Performances - when well guided and everyone feels safe - as they mainly do in FHL activities - increase self-esteem. Didn't know that before.*
- ◆ *Using more of the arts in the classroom to address student issues.*
- ◆ *I would like to continue using the CARTWHEELS approach which created a relaxed learning atmosphere in the classroom while maintaining respect & stimulating creativity.*
- ◆ *I have learnt the importance of exploring creativity.*
- ◆ *Being more mindful of the artistic nature of a lot of my students. I will integrate these into my teaching practice and it coincides with other programs that we run at school*
- ◆ *Moving breaks - brain gym, listening games etc*

Rather than learn new approaches I think I have learnt different ways to help students in areas that I personally have difficulty with, eg. art, drawing. Our artist has helped to show how to guide students to achieve outcomes in areas which may be challenging...It can be easy to forget the arts are a wonderful way of expressing ourselves and that learning and growing and education should not always be about academic achievement. There are many ways to achieve...we just have to help our children believe in themselves...

Teacher



Health and community professionals provided examples of learning from artists and teachers:

- *Have found the artists have provided a "trojan horse" of fun, that allowed opportunities to connect with the kids and teachers.*
- *Not being able to do things created an equality between adults and kids.*
- *Have a much more profound sense of the importance of promoting positive school environment and the skills of social emotion learning for promoting long term mental health"*
- *Tribes practice. This is a particular way of communicating to students in a positive but direct manner.*
- *Observing the way the teacher interacts with the students is most admirable, the way he communicates with students is an example of how I can use in my practice. To encourage and adopt a further person centred / strength based approach and to encourage open ended questions.*

Artists emphasised learning techniques about classroom management and interaction from teachers and health professionals:

- *Class management - I am more confident in managing large groups of children with being still and quiet - have learnt techniques from teachers and health staff*
- *Using ritual and sitting in a circle to begin the journey and calm the students...*
- *Clapping my hands rhythmically to get students to repeat and then gain their attention.*
- *Raising my hands and "twinkling" my fingers in silence to gain students' attention prior to starting. ringing a bell at the end of class, asking students to put their hands up when the bell has stopped ringing. - to gain silence before the class ends.*
- *The importance of ritual and creating magic in the beginning of class to hold the space for students.*
- *Involving students in their own planning and evaluative processes*
- *When a student puts up their hand I say " thank you for your hand" and encourage the other students to pay "kind attention"*
- *Find a balance of project boundaries and project freedom that doesn't over-power the student's imaginations & over-challenge their taught in-school restrictions.*

Cross-sectoral development

Cross-sectoral work and collaboration within the community was an aim of the CARTWHEELS project. Professionals involved in the project were asked whether relationships had improved with other organisations and sectors.

- ◆ Considerable connections had been made across professions and sectors, as a result of CARTWHEELS.
- ◆ Connections have been considerably improved between artists, health professionals, teachers and schools.
- ◆ Teachers and schools have also improved their relationships with community organisations, such as Berry Street and the Festival for Healthy Living.
- ◆ Schools have improved relationships with local health organisations, but this was less the case for artists. Health professionals also reported a low level of improvement with local health organisations, but this may be masked due pre-existing good relationships.
- ◆ Artists improved relationships with arts organisations, but this was less pronounced for health professionals and educators.
- ◆ Relationships between professionals and local government and state government departments did not show any significant improvement, especially in relation to state government.



As a result of working with CARTWHEELS, have you improved relationships or built new positive working relationships with any of the following:	Artists Yes – I have	Health Professionals	Principals & teachers Yes – I have	Principals & teachers Yes – the school has
Teachers	100%	100%	76%	53%
Local schools	100%	80%	29%	35%
Local health professionals	91%	-	24%	29%
Local health organisations	18%	20%	41%	53%
Community organisations, eg. Berry Street	91%	40%	71%	59%
Arts organisations, eg. Regional Arts Victoria	36%	20%	18%	24%
The Festival for Healthy Living at the RCH	100%	60%	47%	59%
Local government	9%	20%	6%	6%
State government departments	0%	0%	6%	6%

Table 14: Have you improved relationships or built new positive working relationships?

Community impacts

Was CARTWHEELS a positive for the school?

- ♦ All artists, health professionals, teachers and most principals believed that, on balance, running an arts and wellbeing program such as CARTWHEELS had been a positive for the school.
- ♦ All principals and teachers believed that it had been a positive for the cluster of schools involved.

	Artists	Health Professionals	Principals	Teachers
On balance, think it is a positive for school/s	100%	100%	75%	100%
On balance, think it is neutral	0%	0%	25%	0%
On balance, think it is a negative for school/s	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 15: In general terms, do you think running an arts and wellbeing program with this sort of approach and structure has been a positive for the school/s?

Impacts on the school community

Professionals and community members were asked whether they had observed any positive impacts on the school community through CARTWHEELS. The results are presented in the table below.

- ♦ The majority of professionals (60% - 90%) had clearly observed that **families were pleased with their child's involvement in CARTWHEELS** and believed that **CARTWHEELS had helped bring the school community together**.
- ♦ This assessment is validated by the community results, which show that 90% of community members were pleased with students' involvement.
- ♦ Nine out of ten community members believed that **CARTWHEELS helped to bring the school community together**, a higher response than the professionals (60% - 77%).
- ♦ Most principals (75%) and nearly all of the teachers (92%) believed that families were **proud of their children's performance** – a result also validated by the community feedback.
- ♦ All principals and most teachers believed that **CARTWHEELS helped bring all school communities together**.



	Artists	Health Prof's	Teachers	Principals	Community
Families were very involved with CARTWHEELS work	40%	20%	46%	50%	
<i>Opportunity for families to be involved at the school with CARTWHEELS work</i>					69%
Families were pleased with their child's involvement in CARTWHEELS	90%	80%	85%	75%	
<i>Great to see the students' involvement in CARTWHEELS</i>					90%
Families could see positive changes in their children	90%	60%	31%	50%	
<i>Great to see positive changes in students</i>					62%
CARTWHEELS helped bring the school community together	70%	60%	77%	75%	
<i>CARTWHEELS has helped bring the school community together</i>					90%
No positive impacts observed for the whole school community	0%	20%	0%	25%	
<i>No benefits observed for the whole school community</i>					3%
Families were proud of their child/ren's performance			92%	75%	
CARTWHEELS helped bring all school communities together			92%	100%	

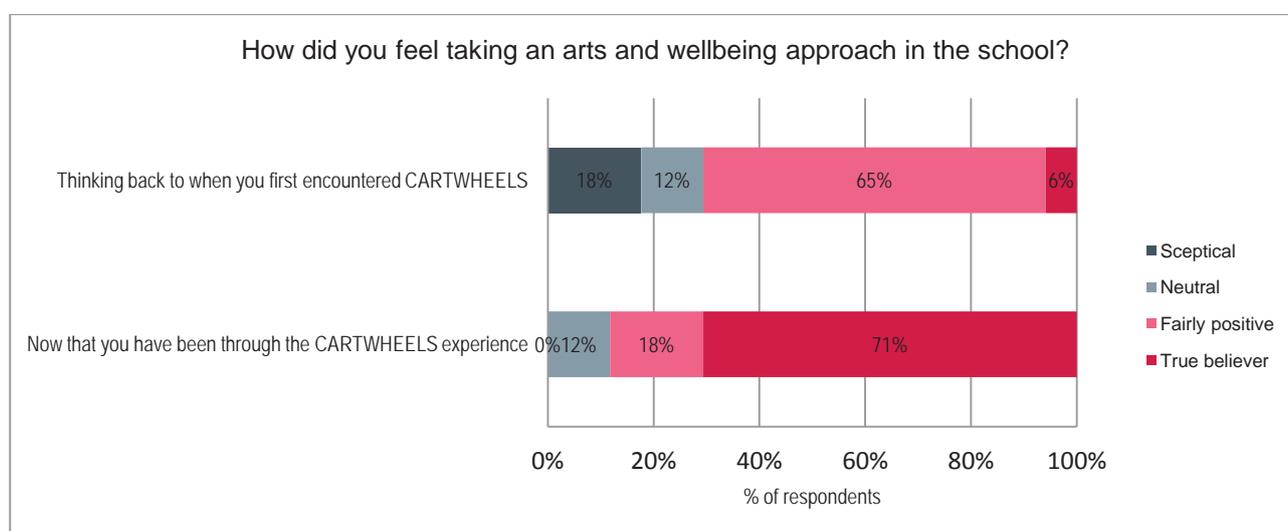
Table 16: Have you observed any positive impacts on the school community through CARTWHEELS?

During the vox pop interviews held at the 2011 CARTWHEELS Festival, many parents spontaneously raised the point that the CARTWHEELS festival helped bring all school communities together with comments such as: *'Very good idea to have all the schools, that's what we need. All the schools – like they never get to actually be together and do stuff. Each school does their thing individually. This just brought them together, as a community.'* *'Good to get all the schools, the classes together. Great to get everyone together. Heap of people that we never see and yet also people you do see, but not very often.'* A number of parents also thought it was great to hold the event at the secondary school, so that primary school students had the chance to become familiar with the school and realise *'it's not a such scary place.'* *'Great to have the connection to the secondary school.'*

Schools taking a 'CARTWHEELS' approach

- ♦ All principals and teachers were keen for local schools to **continue to work with artists**.
- ♦ All parents / community members were keen for local schools to **continue to work with artists**.

Graph 9 below maps principals and teachers perceptions about the 'CARTWHEELS approach' when it first started two and a half years ago and compares it to how they felt about the approach after the festival.



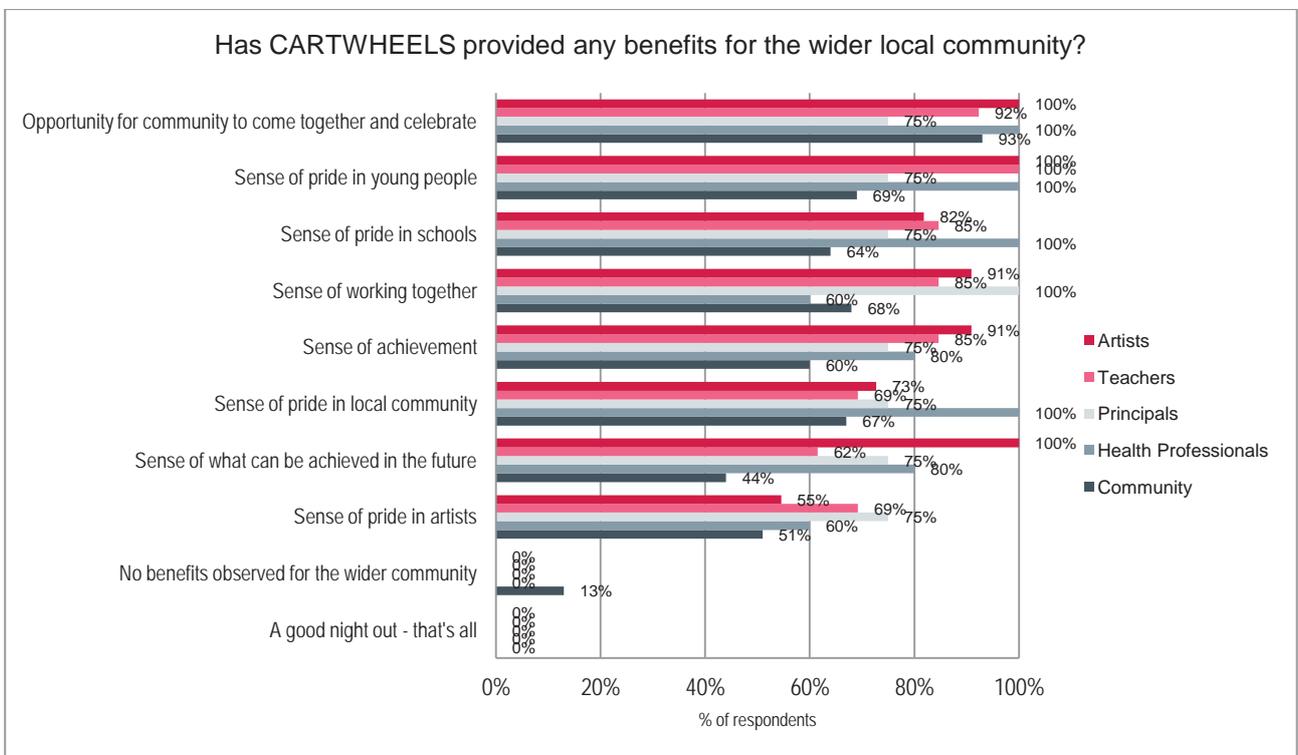
Graph 9: How did you feel taking an arts and wellbeing approach in the school?



- ◆ While 6% of principals and teachers were 'true believers' in the CARTWHEELS approach at the beginning of the program in 2009, **71% were 'true believers'** after the festival in 2011.
- ◆ At the beginning of the CARTWHEELS project, 18% of teachers and principals were self-described sceptics about the approach. **After the CARTWHEELS festival, there were no sceptics.**

Benefits for the wider community

- ◆ Sixty per cent or more of artists, educators, health professionals and community members thought that CARTWHEELS provided benefits for the wider local community including the ***opportunity for community to come together and celebrate, sense of pride in young people, sense of pride in schools, sense of working together, sense of achievement and sense of pride in the local community.***
- ◆ Standing out from the overall positive results from all groups, only 44% of the community members felt a sense of what can be achieved in the future and 13% of community members felt that there were no benefits observed for the wider community.



Graph 10: Has CARTWHEELS provided any benefits for the wider local community?



The CARTWHEELS Festival Day

About the CARTWHEELS festival

After months of creative development, rehearsals and logistical planning, the CARTWHEELS festival was held on 27th October 2011, on a beautiful balmy spring evening, in the grounds of the Alexandra Secondary College. In order to accommodate performances from the seven participating schools, a number of performance spaces were required. A giant marquee and stage was set up on the playing fields at the base of the gentle sloping grounds. Exhibitions were held in the art room and the newly opened science building. The hall, the drama room and other parts of the school grounds became performance spaces. Food and drink stalls operated from the canteen and around the school. A giant map created by the students was erected by the Information Tent. A range of teachers, students, volunteers, Berry Street and Festival for Healthy Living staff were designated Information Officers.

The local SES crew worked on traffic management. Parking spilled out from the grounds of the school, around at least three sides of the perimeter of the school grounds, at least two kilometres in length.

Games, food, and activities were in place as soon as people arrived. The 'formalities' of the evening commenced around 5.30 pm, with John Lane, from the Festival for Healthy Living, dressed in his white tuxedo and top hat, welcoming everyone to the festival. Outside the marquee, a large ceremonial space had been marked out with hay bales and bunting. Uncle Roy Patterson, from the local Aboriginal community performed a smoking ceremony to welcome the community onto the land. Sprays of gum leaves were distributed and the children and others were invited to imbue these leaves with a wish for the future and throw them onto the fire.

Performances then commenced, across the various stages. Some were in large spaces, and others, such as the 'unplugged' performances, in a smaller, more intimate space on the quadrangle. The crowd was made up of the students, their family members, including older and younger siblings, grandparents, members of the local community and people who had travelled from other towns or Melbourne to attend. Emcees directed the events at each stage and artists directed and supported the groups they had worked with. Students had worked on their performance over several terms, but this was always only a part of their CARTWHEELS activities.

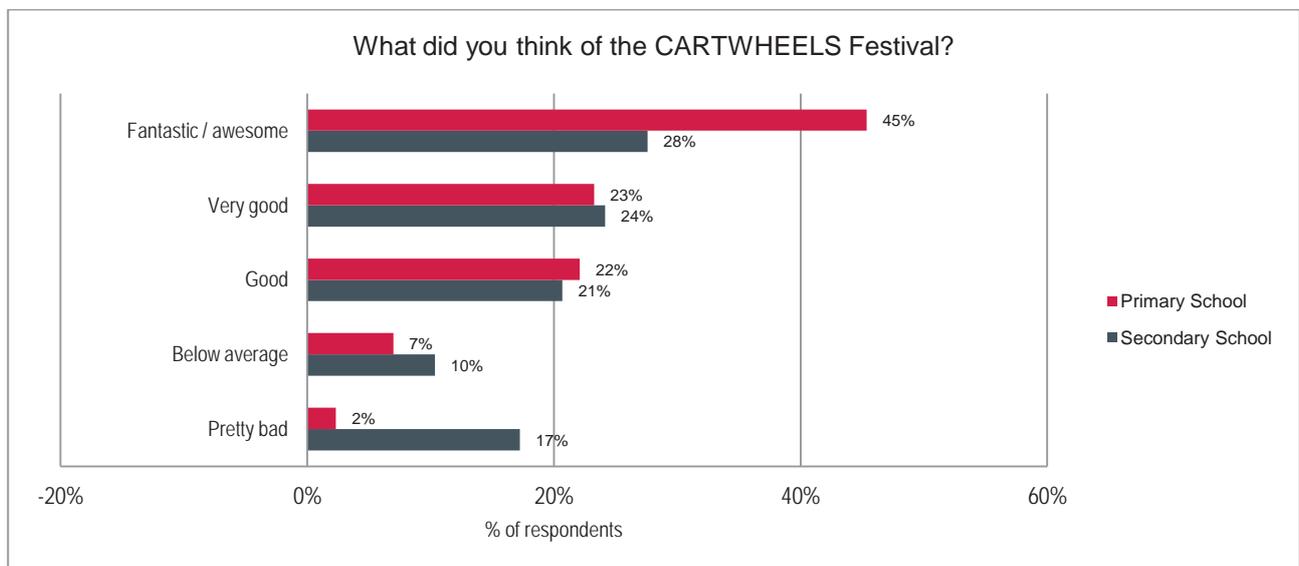
The multiple, simultaneous performances meant that there was steady traffic from venue to venue, as everyone went to catch events featuring their friend or child. Along the way, when time allowed, people stopped to chat and catch up or get some food from one of the stalls and have a mini picnic. When not on duty, teachers, principals, health and community workers were present with their own families and were chatting to students and audience members. Younger children were entertained on the oval with games and activities. The flash mob dancers came out between events and performed in the large open spaces, much to the surprise of the audience. People could wander in and out of the art exhibitions as they wished. The Mookie Bookie – a special recipe book created by the secondary school students was on sale from the canteen.



When all the performances had finished, as the light slowly faded, everyone gathered on the oval for the closing ceremony, again presided over by John Lane. To formally close the event, each school – students and their teachers – marched, skipped and ran, with their CARTWHEELS banner, into the enclosed circle, to the sounds of a recorded soundtrack featuring the songs and sounds of each community, accompanied by live drums and whistles. The line of students snaked in to form a circle within the circle. The audience symbolically encircled the performers, clapping and cheering their final ceremony – a premiere performance of an original anthem in three part harmony and combined chant. The size of the audience meant that many perched up on the gentle slope of the school grounds to get a view of the event. For the participants and their families, the event concluded around 8.00pm. This was particularly to suit those with younger children or early starts the next morning – on the farm or to catch the school bus.

What did the participants think of the festival?

- ◆ Most primary school survey respondents (84%) performed in the CARTWHEELS festival.
- ◆ The majority of secondary school survey respondents (65.5%) also performed in the festival, however around one third (34.5%) did not perform in the festival.
- ◆ The majority (91%) of primary school students thought that the CARTWHEELS festival was good, or better – 45% thought it was *fantastic / awesome*.
- ◆ The majority of secondary school students thought that the festival was good or better (73%), but around one quarter (27%) thought it was *below average or pretty bad*.



Graph 11: What did you think of the CARTWHEELS Festival?

Most of the secondary schools students who thought the festival was *below average* did not perform at the festival (88%). These students were both male and female, and were from the same year level.

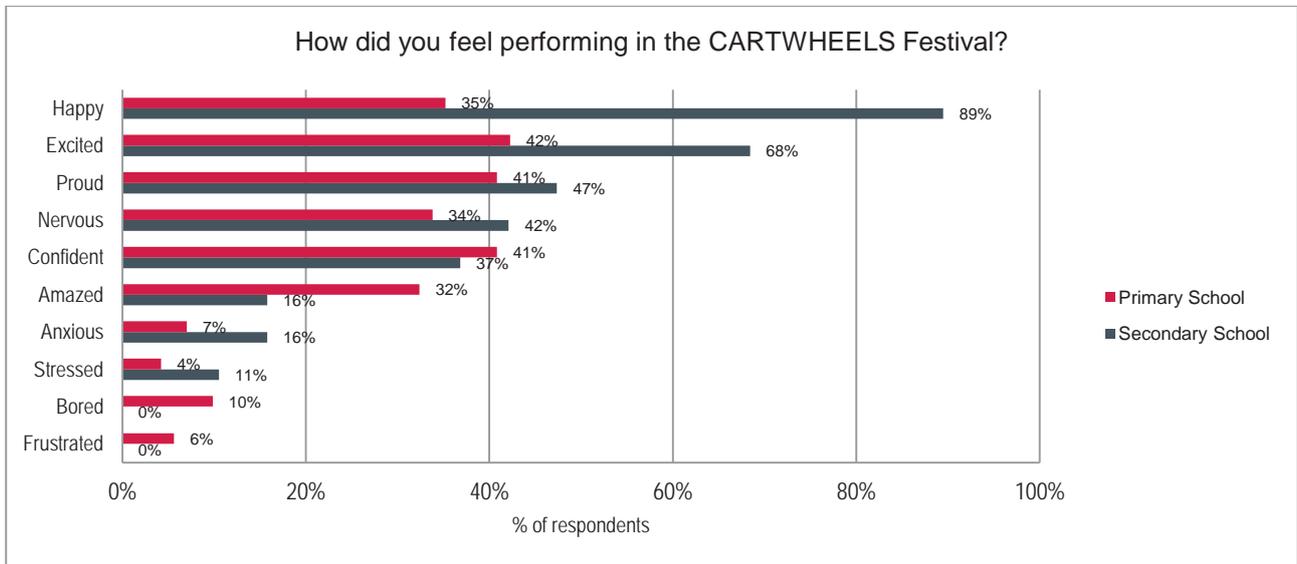
How did students feel when they performed at the festival?

- ◆ When performing at the festival, most of the secondary school students felt *happy* (89%) and *excited* (68%).



◆ Primary school students also reported positive emotions, but over a broader range of emotions: **excited** (42%), **proud** (41%), **confident** (41%), **happy** (35%) and **amazed** (34%).

- ◆ Around 30 – 40% of felt *nervous*, while others were *stressed* and *anxious*. It is likely these were mainly part of the mixed emotions associated with performing.
- ◆ A smaller cohort of primary school students felt *bored* or *frustrated*, but secondary school students did not experience these emotions.



Graph 12: How did you feel performing in the CARTWHEELS Festival?

Standout moments for the students

- ◆ Primary school students' 'best moments' fell into a few categories: performing, the flash mob dance, the closing ceremony, having fun, playing games and eating ice cream.
- ◆ Secondary school students almost unanimously nominated the flash mob dance.
- ◆ A number of students from both levels could not isolate a 'best moment', as they thought 'the whole day was great'.
- ◆ The sense of performing and celebrating with friends and family came through for some students. 'Seeing friends and family proud and confident for us all', was the way one primary school student described their best moment.

The best moment was well it was most of it until we left because mum wanted to go home and cook tea but it was a bugger that I missed the closing ceremony I bet that was cool.

Comments from the primary school students indicate their excitement, being on stage:

- *My best moment in the CARTWHEELS festival was getting up on stage and performing in front lots of people including my family and my friends.*
- *When I was on stage i love performing.*
- *When we got to perform and with all the poeple watching!!!!*
- *Performing in my group and singing the happy song*
- *Doing the pyramids!*
- *Singing and playing ukulele*

When everyone was smiling!

Eating ice-cream & running around

the whole thing was graet i cant wait for next year



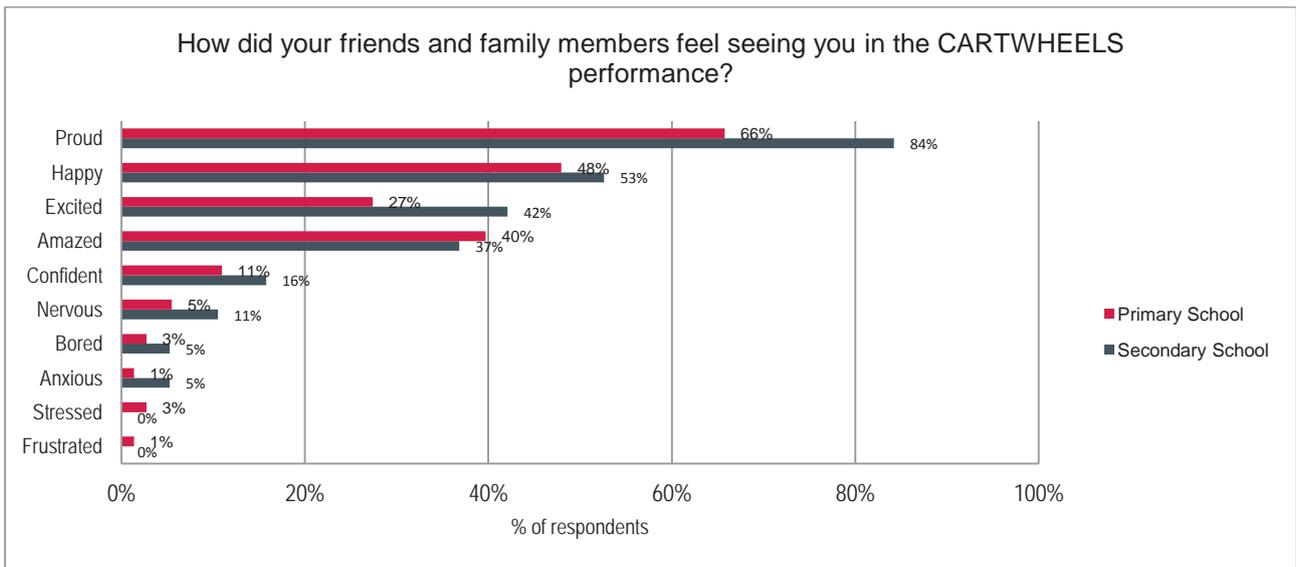
- My best moment was when me and someone else were doing a little slow motion solo act.
- Performing and having soooooooooooooooooo much fun

Secondary school students, who performed the flash mob dance, thought the dancing was the most exciting part of the festival:

- Dancing in front of people and hanging out with friends.
- Dancing and being with all my friends and the community
- The dancing and all the different food stalls, it was so much fun dancing
- When we did the first flash mob because nobody knew what to do

How did friends and family members feel watching them perform?

- ♦ Most students thought their friends and family members felt **proud, happy, excited** and **amazed**, seeing them perform at the CARTWHEELS festival.
- ♦ Others felt friends and family felt *confident* or *nervous*.
- ♦ A small proportion of students thought friends and family members felt *bored, anxious, stressed* or *frustrated*.

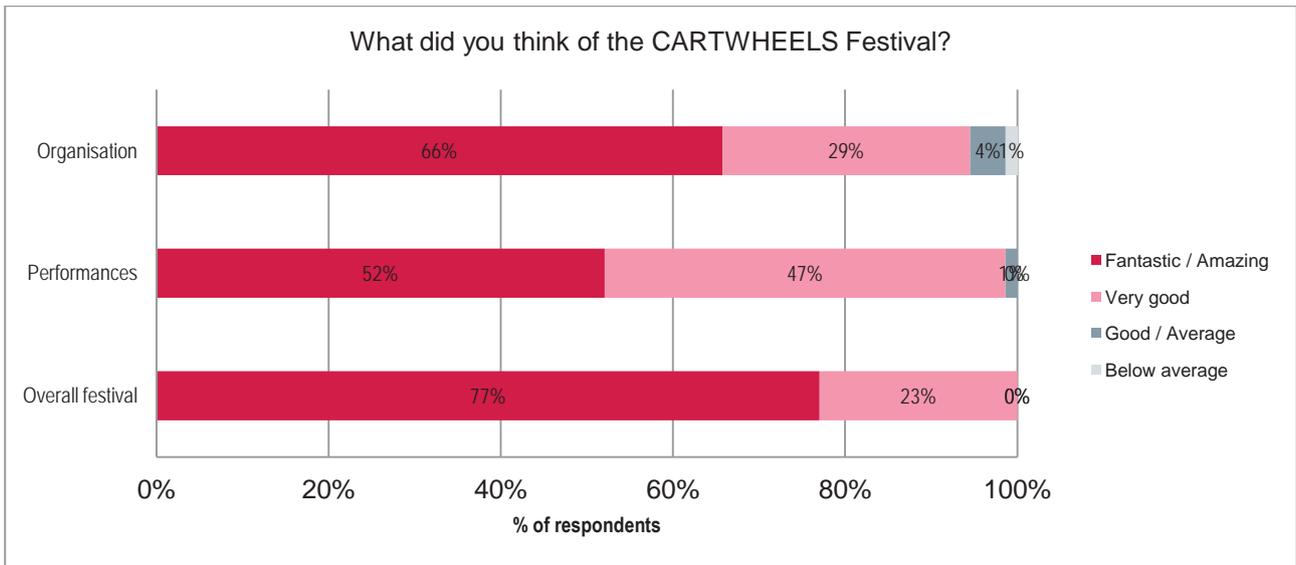


Graph 13: How did your friends and family members feel seeing you in the CARTWHEELS performance?

What did family members think of the CARTWHEELS festival?

- ♦ Parents, guardians and family members were even more enthusiastic than their children about the festival, with 77% rating the overall festival as **fantastic / amazing** and 23% as **very good**.
- ♦ Virtually all community members (99%) thought the performances were **fantastic / amazing** or **very good** and 95% thought that the organisation was **fantastic** or **very good**.





Graph 14: What did you think of the CARTWHEELS Festival?

How did family and friends feel watching the performances?

- ◆ Parents and relatives reported feeling **proud, happy, excited** and **amazed**. Secondary school students accurately observed that their families felt this way, with the same results and ranking.
- ◆ While a small cohort of students thought that their parents felt stressed, bored or frustrated, none of these feelings were reported in the community survey.

	% of respondents
Proud	85%
Happy	69%
Excited	39%
Amazed	34%
Confident	10%
Nervous	2%
Frustrated	0%
Anxious	0%
Bored	0%
Stressed	0%
Other (please specify)	0%

Table 17: As a parent/relative/friend, how did you feel seeing your child/ren in the festival?

Feel really good and so happy. After everything's that's happened in the last couple of years, the kids really needed it and we needed to see them do it – you know, to have fun. We needed to see the community have fun.

As a parent – felt very proud. Just stoked, seeing them happy and working together, so it's brilliant.

Good to see them bring out their creative side. All kids are different and they're good at different things – they've got to have that opportunity to find their little niche in the world. Anything like this that can be offered to them... it's an opportunity for them to see that maybe the performing arts might float their boat.



How did parents and family members think their children felt when performing?

- ♦ Parents and family members reported that their children / relative felt **proud, happy** and **excited** performing in the festival. This corresponds with the children's 'top three' feelings, but students ranked these in the order of **happy, excited, proud**.

	% of respondents
Proud	82%
Happy	71%
Excited	64%
Confident	27%
Nervous	16%
Anxious	13%
Amazed	4%
Stressed	2%
Frustrated	0%
Bored	0%

Table 18: How did your child/ren feel performing in the festival?

Really good, he had a really good role, he took on a leadership role, it was available to him and his friends, they embraced it, as 14 year olds. I remember being 14 myself here, and there was nothing to embrace; so this is fantastic.

Standout moments for the community

The smoking ceremony, the flash mob, the closing ceremony and the sense of community spirit were the most frequently mentioned 'standout' moments for parents. A number of parents felt it was particularly important that all schools worked and performed together, and that the event provided an opportunity for primary school students to 'get used to' the high school. Parents naturally highlighted the items that their children or relatives participated in as their standout moments from the festival ('Seeing my son sing on stage' 'My niece singing' 'Watching my grandson dance'). The comments below are indicative of the feedback from the community.

- *All children had a wonderful time. There were smiles everywhere*
- *The great crowd and festive feel*
- *Viewing new facilities. Young and old involved.*
- *Seeing the kids Art Works all together*
- *The big fish!*
- *Seeing our local communities gather for the purpose of celebrating our youth and valuing their input into our communities and really enjoying it.*
- *Just the fact that all kids came together, was a really nice experience especially for smaller schools.*
- *Seeing the community together united for all the children of the cluster. The joy was palpable!*
- *All the children congregating at the closing ceremony and spontaneously moving up and down to the beat of the drums.*
- *(Aside from my own kids) The parade at the end, with all students the centre of attention, their banners, the drumming which made it feel like carnivale; and the looks of pride on their faces*
- *The closing ceremony - I can't believe our community could come together in such a positive way*

The finale – really – you could see how the community all came together and the way every single child was involved in some way, no matter how small.

There was no standout moment for me, I was so pleased with the entire festival. The community support and attendance was amazing. I believe that this festival was a brilliant way to bring everyone in the community together in a positive way.

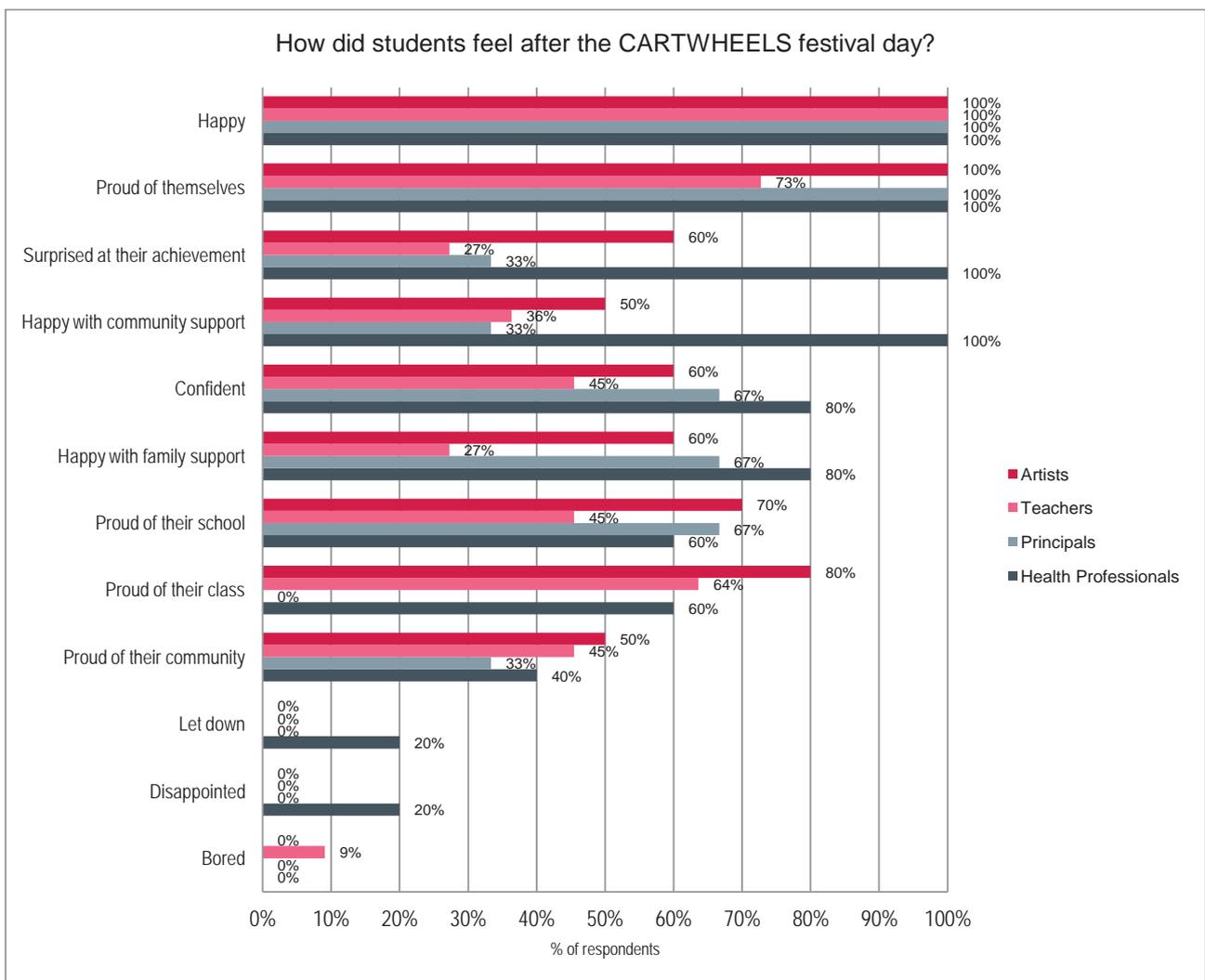
The finale AND the song celebrating ALL the schools as ONE community...brilliant and much needed.



What did the professionals think of the CARTWHEELS festival?

How did the students feel after the CARTWHEELS festival day?

- ◆ All of the professionals working with the students – the artists, teachers, principals and health professionals – observed that the students felt **happy** after the festival day.
 - ◆ Most thought that they felt **proud of themselves** (73% of teachers, 100% of other professionals).
 - ◆ Most thought that students felt **confident, happy with family support, proud of their school and proud of their class.**
- ◆ Results from the artists and health professionals were generally higher than those from teachers and principals, although teachers posted a strong result for students feeling *proud of their class* and principals posted a strong result for students feeling *proud of their school*.
 - ◆ The greatest variation found was between the observations of teachers and health professionals. For example, 100% of health professionals felt that students were *surprised at their achievement*, compared to only 27% of teachers. Similarly, 80% of health professionals felt that students were *happy with family support* compared to 27% of teachers.

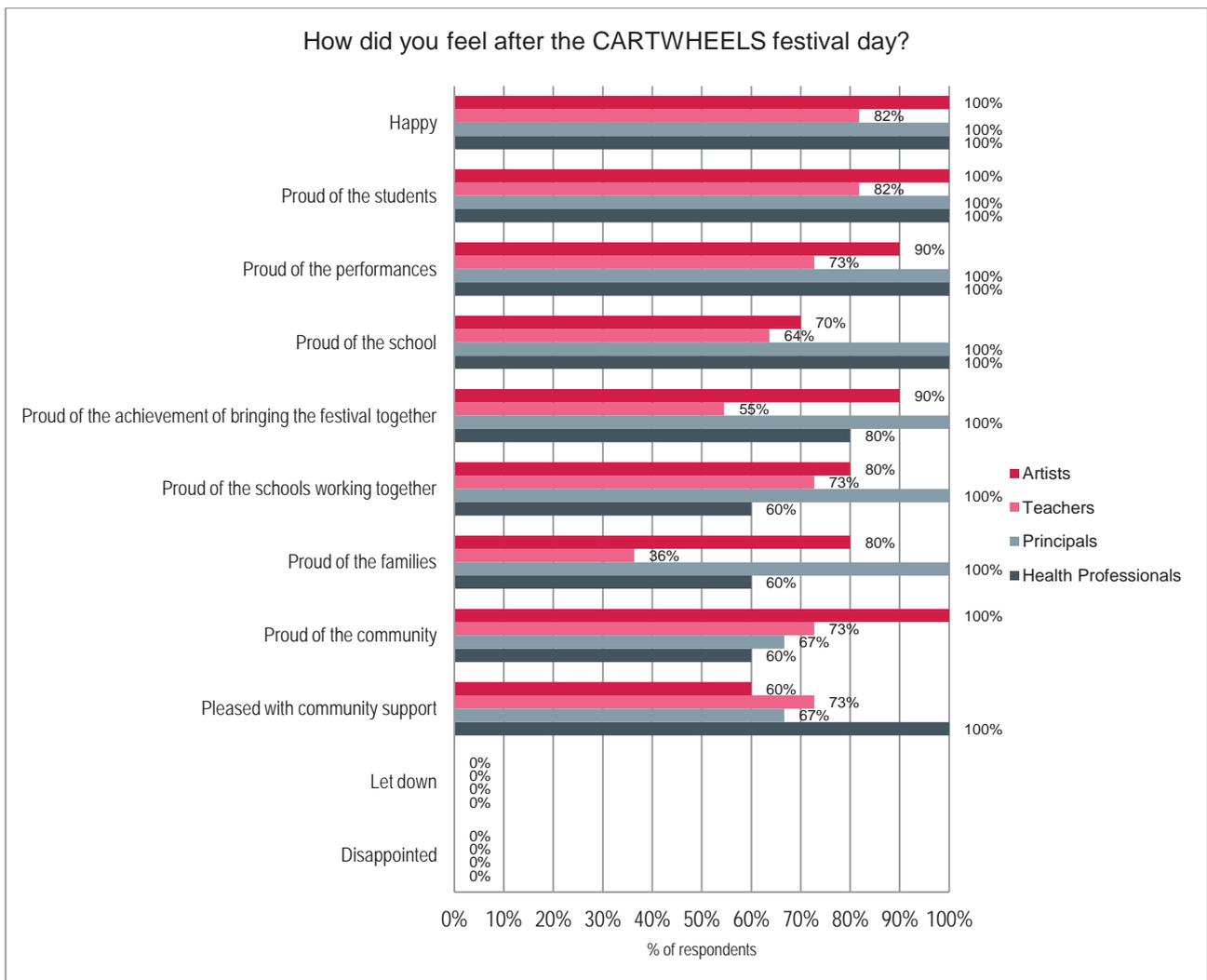


Graph 15: How did students feel after the CARTWHEELS festival day?



How did the professionals feel after the CARTWHEELS festival day?

- ♦ Artists, teachers, principals and health professionals had all worked for months in various capacities supporting the participants. After the CARTWHEELS festival day, the outstanding emotions for these professionals were happiness and pride. Nearly all reported feeling **happy** and **proud of the students** (82% teachers, 100% other professionals).
- ♦ Professionals also felt *proud of the performances, the school, the achievement, the schools working together, the families, the community* and *pleased with community support*.
- ♦ None felt *let down* or *disappointed*.
- ♦ Teachers' results were generally lower than other professional's, with the exception of *feeling proud of the community* and *pleased with community support*, where teachers' results were generally higher.



Graph 16: How did you feel after the CARTWHEELS festival day?

Standout moments for the professionals

The closing ceremony and the flash mob dance were standout moments for many of the professionals, as with other respondents. Professionals also emphasised the community spirit, the high level of attendance and community involvement at the festival. Selected comments from the professionals involved with CARTWHEELS below show their 'standout' moments from the festival.



- *The different schools parading with their theme songs and banners*
- *I thought the whole festival was great. The final 'act' where everyone got together was the 'standout' moment. The community spirit, interest and enthusiasm was terrific.*
- *The flash mob dance - fun, community, excitement*
- *I loved seeing all the schools get together. I especially loved seeing how my class was able to put their piece together...and really show that they enjoyed it. It made me proud to show my mum all the hard work that we have done over the year.*
- *Watching the students from Eildon school do a remarkable job at the closing ceremony.*
- *Getting the snake puppet from the storeroom just as it was beginning and the Buxton students rushing up to be a helper and then proudly carrying it through the crowd who pointed in admiration. The students were so excited, they were beaming - they had such ownership of their snake and the myth we had created over the 2 years.*
- *The grade 3/4 class of St Mary's performing their happy song- they really went for it and let their joy shine so bright, and the feeling in the group afterwards was so magical*
- *Creating a large image to represent the school and having parent and student involvement to make it a reality. It looked fantastic and the students were very proud.*
- *The Year 8 Rap, and the ASC students during the closing ceremony 'the kids were happy crazy and electric'*
- *When the shiest boy I have ever known stood up and yelled "what do you wanna do with your life!"*
- *The primary schools art display*
- *The level of positive response from community members otherwise not involved with CARTWHEELS.*
- *Overhearing happy and enthusiastic responses to the art displays and feelings of inclusion and sharing.*

People saying it was great to be on the oval doing something fun. It had been so associated with fire recovery, and this was creating different memories, and was joyous.

The coming together of the community while seeing the pride in each student as they represented their school.

The fact that 2 boys from one of the schools weren't coming to the festival day...but due to the rehearsal workshop day, they changed their minds. They came to the show...they participated with the grade 6 performance...they were awesome.



Conclusions

This research has evaluated the CARTWHEELS in the Cathedral Ranges project. It has examined the process, impacts and outcomes of the project. It has found that the project has involved:

- ♦ around 450 students from seven schools
- ♦ working with 24 artists and eight health and community welfare professionals, and
- ♦ at least 30 teachers, three lead teachers and five principals.

The project was successfully managed by Berry Street and the Festival for Healthy Living working in partnership. Other stakeholders, from schools through to local government and health and community services, were consulted and able to contribute their ideas. In a typical 'Festival for Healthy Living' project, these organisations would be involved at a Steering Committee level, but this approach was modified, in recognition that organisations and individuals were stretched to their limit in other bushfire recovery work.

The evaluation has found there to be significant impacts for students participating in the project, from skills development through to emotional literacy. This is evident not only in feedback from students, but validated by teachers and other professionals working with them. From the perspective of students, the overwhelming feedback is that they 'had fun' and 'felt happy' when involved in CARTWHEELS activities, and through their performances felt 'happy, excited and proud'. These sentiments were echoed by teachers and families.

Students also developed skills and abilities that are consistent with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, such as testing and exploring ideas, creating and making, being a contributing member of a larger group, working as a team member and building positive relationships with peers. Teachers, artists and health professionals reported that most students improved in their relationship skills, social awareness, self-awareness, responsible decision-making and self-management. Professionals working with students also observed students' increased confidence, happier mood and increased sense of resilience through participating in CARTWHEELS. These are positive outcomes for any school-based extracurricular activity, but are even more significant in the context of interrupted schooling and exposure to trauma amongst this student cohort.

The collaborative processes used in a Festival for Healthy Living project sees artists working with student groups. With the CARTWHEELS project, health professionals were also an integral part of the classroom team, along with teachers. All of these professionals reported that they learnt important new ways to interact with students and young people that they would integrate into their professional practice.

The care taken to structure teams with mental health professionals and artists with mental health training was extremely important, both for the students they worked with but also in their interactions with teachers, schools and community members. The project was underpinned by an understanding of the need to move gently and to let the schools set the pace. They were mindful of the recovery needs of teachers and artists, as well as students and families.



At an organisational level, the project enabled new or stronger relationships to develop across schools and health and community services.

At the community level, families reported that the project provided a much-needed opportunity to come together and celebrate as a community. They reported how proud they felt seeing their children perform, how much their children enjoyed the process and how important it was for all of the schools to work together on this venture.

The project also offered employment opportunities for local artists and opportunities for parents and community members to participate as volunteers.

The evaluation can only conclude positively about the effectiveness of the whole of community approach, the effectiveness of the integrated, arts-based mental health promotion strategy and the capacity-building that occurred through the project.

Nearly three years on from the Victorian bushfire disaster, it is apparent that the impact of the project should be viewed from a wider perspective. Disaster recovery research recognises community development activities as a critical part in the spectrum of services that assist individuals and communities in their recovery. It is known that mental health problems and stress are expected outcomes following a community disaster and that these can occur over many years. It is also known that children and young people have delayed reactions, waiting for the 'all clear' signal before these manifest. As part of their recovery, experts advise that children and young people 'need to be able to be children / adolescents'. They need to participate in everyday activities, which can be both healing, reduce stress and give pleasure.³² It is understood that some recovery processes are immediate and short-term, but psychosocial recovery needs to take place over a period of years and to be fully integrated with other recovery efforts.³³

- ◆ Most students enjoyed doing CARTWHEELS activities because they 'had fun'.
- ◆ Most students felt happy when doing CARTWHEELS activities, be that singing, dancing, making pottery or human pyramids.
- ◆ Most students felt happy, excited and proud when performing at the CARTWHEELS festival.
- ◆ Most families felt proud, happy, excited and amazed seeing their children perform at the festival.

These results are both simple and profound in the context that this work occurred in the most devastated region from the most devastating fires and natural disaster experienced in Australia's history. They meet the key principles of successful recovery of hope, connectedness and self and collective efficacy. They speak most eloquently to the project's success in allowing children / adolescents to once again be children and adolescents after the bushfires. In the words of a parent *'After everything that's happened in the last couple of years, the kids really needed it and we needed to see them do it – you know – to have fun. We needed to see the community have fun.'*

³² Dr Ruth Wraith The Changing Experience of Grief over Time – Children and Adolescents
http://www.grief.org.au/grief_and_bereavement_support/bushfire_support/children_grief

³³ VCOS, op cit, p.4



The Victorian bushfires of 2009 were unprecedented in their scale and devastation. The unprecedented emergency management and recovery responses have been reviewed and the lessons learned are shaping future emergency management arrangements and legislation in Victoria and nationally. At a national level, traditional emergency management planning is shifting to an approach focused on 'action-based resilience planning to strengthen local capacity and capability, with greater emphasis on community engagement and a better understanding of the diversity needs, strengths and vulnerabilities within communities.'³⁴ Community agencies are under-taking their own reflections, and emphasise that as people working with the human side of disaster, and often having had personal experience of the disaster, the lessons take time to fully emerge.

It is critical that the CARTWHEELS experience contributes to our thinking, knowledge and actions in disaster recovery.

³⁴ *ibid*, p.5

