

2009 Evaluation Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The 2009 SISTER2sister Program evaluation involved surveying Little Sisters, Big Sisters and relevant parent/ guardians. Additionally, interviews and regular observations also occurred to gather information across all spectrums of the program. The results have been analysed in partnership with Debra Pamula, a PhD candidate at Macquarie University. Below is an executive summary of initial indicators from the evaluation. A full copy of the report is available upon request.

For the first time in 2009 the Foundation held a Sydney program as well as a pilot program in Melbourne.

The nine workshops which comprised the 2009 SISTER2sister Program addressed the identified needs of the Little Sisters by incorporating the levels of learning in each workshop across the year. As such, the Little Sisters were made aware of issues relating to overcoming obstacles, having a healthy lifestyle, the power of choice, employment and career possibilities, relationships and friendships, accessing and utilising community resources, goal setting, self- esteem building, and acknowledging and celebrating success. As part of this learning, at each workshop, the Little Sisters were also given the opportunity to participate in a 'life changing experience', such as Butterfly Bootcamp, visiting Luna Park, and learning how to surf.

Overall, the 2009 SISTER2sister Program has achieved positive results, as summarised through the following key performance indicators.

INTAKE AND RETENTION

For the 2009 Sydney program, 50 Little Sisters were accepted in January 2009, with an average age of 13 years (youngest being 12 and oldest being 17). At the end of the program in November 2009, 43 Little Sisters remained, with seven Little Sisters leaving the program over the course of the year, resulting in a retention rate of 46 per-cent. For Big Sisters in 2009, 10 returned to participate from the 2008 program.

For the Melbourne pilot program, 10 Little Sisters were initially accepted at the beginning of the program, and eight graduated at the end. Two withdrew from the program over the course of the year, resulting in a retention rate of 80 per-cent. The average age of the Little Sisters for the Melbourne program was 15 years, (youngest being 14 and oldest being 18). For Melbourne Big Sisters, there was a retention rate of 80 per-cent.

We are continuously improving on intake and retention methods to ensure that we maintain our solid foundations which ensure the future success of the program.

ATTENDANCE

For the 2009 Sydney program, 59 per-cent of Little Sisters attended 80 per-cent or more of the workshops. On average, each Little Sister attended seven out of nine workshops over the year, with some workshops more poorly attended than others, such as Charity Day and the Gym Day. This may be due to a number of factors, including travel limitations, major personal issues occurring in their lives at the time, and the need to be more rigorous in ensuring that Little Sisters participate as much as possible to gain maximum benefit from the program. It is believed that higher attendance at outings is likely to result in better behavioural outcomes for the Little Sisters at the end of the program.

For the 2009 Melbourne pilot program, 26 per-cent of Little Sisters attended 80 per-cent or more of workshops. On average, each Little Sister attended five out of 12 workshops over the year. Again it is noted that Charity Day and Flying Trapeze were the most poorly attending outings, with similar reasons for non attendance noted.

In relation to improving Little Sister attendance, it is believed that this can be achieved by implementing a number of strategies, including having more easily accessible locations to workshops, as well as transport provided for Little Sisters at each workshop.

Big Sisters in the 2009 Sydney program attended 80 per-cent of outings, with 40 per-cent of Big Sisters attending at least 90 per-cent of outings. For the Melbourne pilot program, there were some gaps in the recording of Big Sister attendance and as such the reporting of this is not included here.

BEHAVIOUR

In assessing behavioural changes to Little Sisters over the course of the program, it is acknowledged that similar themes emerged for the Sydney program and the Melbourne pilot program.

Initial indicators noted that there had been an improvement in Little Sisters' self perception. In particular, it is noted that Little Sisters' comments made at the conclusion of the program suggested that there was an improvement in overall self regard, as well as being happier and more positive themselves. Coupled with this, it seems that the Little Sisters had changed their attitude in terms of cessation of negative talk, reduction in self fear, and perceiving the presence of better coping techniques in the face of difficult situations.

Following this, it further seems that this has also resulted in an increase in positive behaviours demonstrated by the Little Sisters, such as caring for others, treating others with respect, and having a solution focus to problems. Additionally, Little Sisters also indicated some attenuation of anti-social behaviours, such as a reduction in smoking, drinking, self harming behaviours, not swearing or being mean to others. To this end, it appears that the Little Sisters have changed the manner in which they behave around others to a more positive manner.

The role of the Big Sister – Little Sister mentoring relationship is crucial to improve behavioural outcomes for the Little Sisters. To this end, we are endeavouring to improve the relationship to ensure that the Little Sister is given the best possible opportunity to address their desired improvements in their behaviour.

RELATIONSHIPS

In assessing relationship changes to Little Sisters' over the course of the program, it is acknowledged that similar themes again emerged for the Sydney program and the Melbourne pilot program.

With respect to Little Sisters' relationships with parents/ guardians, initial indicators showed an improvement over the course of the year. Comments made by the Little Sisters explained that they were more patient with their parents/ guardians, listened more, and were less argumentative.

Regarding the Little Sisters' relationships with their peers, preliminary findings pointed to Little Sisters choosing better friends, as well as improving the quality of their relationships.

These results indicate that that the Little Sisters participation in the program has made them aware of the impact that their behaviour has on others, and how the Little Sisters are able to make choices in how they are treated as well as how they relate to others.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The assessment of education and employment changes to Little Sisters over the course of the program has also observed similar themes for the Sydney program and the Melbourne pilot program.

During the course of the year, the Little Sisters learned skills in applying themselves through setting and achieving goals. It was observed through the program that Little Sisters committed to staying in school as well as gaining employment skills.

In particular, in relation to school, the majority of Little Sisters noted having some improvement over the course of the year, from experiencing improved relationships with their peers or teachers, through to improving in their school grades.

Regarding employment opportunities, for those who were of employment age, a proportion of Little Sisters were able to become gainfully employed over the course of the year, finding part time work which allowed them to gain core life skills.

We will continue to support Little Sisters in future programs to achieve their desired educational and employment outcomes.

GOALS, AMBITIONS, AND LEVELS OF LEARNING

The outcomes for goals, ambitions, and levels of learning for Little Sisters over the course of the program observed similar themes for the Sydney program and the Melbourne pilot program.

In 2009, Little Sisters were again reinforced to set and review goals on a monthly basis. At the end of the year, Little Sisters reported that they had learned how to set and achieve goals. In particular, it seems that Little Sisters had achieved goals in the skill areas that were being developed and reinforced over the course of the program. Regarding lifestyle choices, Little Sisters noted that they had begun to engage in healthier ways of eating, some reported weight loss, whilst others noted that they had engaged in healthier lifestyles that involved regular exercise as well as a reduction in smoking and drinking.

In relation to school and work goals, Little Sisters reported achievements in completing the school year with better grades, applying for TAFE courses, as well as finding meaningful paid employment. Furthermore, regarding relationships, Little Sisters modified the manner in which they chose to engage and relate in relationships.

On the whole, initial indicators show that the Little Sisters had achieved many of their goals that they had set. This will continue to be emphasised as a key life skill for Little Sisters in future programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the initial indicators of the results from the 2009 program are positive, whereby the extent of these changes can be established upon completion of the evaluation. More details of the Little Sister outcomes from their participation in the program, as well as suggested improvements, is described in more detail in the evaluation report.