**THE BIG LIFE PROJECT: 2015 PROSPECTUS. (DRAFT ONLY)**

**Situation**.

The Big Life Project has developed out of the observations of chaplains working in Warrnambool schools over a long period of time. These observations suggest that while individual interventions to assist young people and families during a crisis are critical in supporting individuals in crisis, dealing with the broader social context from which these crises are generated may be an effective way of preparing/protecting individuals as they engage with life’s challenges.

Historical/Global:

There is clear evidence, particularly amongst Western Cultures, that material prosperity on aggregate, has increased significantly since The Second World War. There is less quantitative evidence, but a prevailing qualitative awareness, that levels of emotional well-being and happiness have been stagnant/slightly falling over the same period.

Contemporary/Local:

If we look for indicators of the effect outlined above, indicators are varied indeed. Measures like the OECD Better Life Index rate Australia’s performance very highly across a range of economic and social measures and indicate that, comparatively, Australia is a thriving and engaging nation. Yet there are indicators such as the Australian Psychological Society’s (APS) Stress and Well-being Survey Australia, 2013 that indicate that individual emotional well-being is less robust. The APS Survey indicates that there has been an almost 20% increase in the number of Australians experiencing moderate to severe levels of distress since 2011. The two biggest stressors are Financial Stress and Family Issues. At a local level the Warrnambool Health and Well-being Profile, 2013 indicates that 51% of workers in Warrnambool have “adequate” Work/Life Balance compared to a state average of 57.3%. There are 12.2 incidents of Family Violence per 1000 people in Warrnambool compared to the 9.1 incidents state average. Warrnambool has 29.5 Registered Mental Health Clients per 1000 people compared to a state average of 10.9 clients.

A Schools Context:

Evidence of the challenges in sustaining healthy levels of Non-Material Wellbeing can be picked up in data relating to Attitudes to School Survey results. This survey focuses on: STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS, WELL BEING and TEACHING AND LEARNING factors. These factors are further refined into dimensions of CLASSROOM BEHAVOIUR, CONNECTEDNESS TO PEERS, STUDENT SAFETY, STUDENT DISTRESS, STUDENT MORALE, LEARNING CONFIDENCE, SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS, STIMULATING LEARNING, STUDENT MOTIVATION, TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS and TEACHER EMPATHY.

Data from this survey for 2014 has been consolidated into a single score to give a basic insight into the attitude to school across year levels for our region and the state.

CONSOLIDATED SCORE: Attitudes to School Survey.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2014 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Trend |
| Region | 3.97 | 3.87 | 3.83 | 3.85 | 3.92 | Downward |
| State | 3.94 | 3.84 | 3.81 | 3.84 | 3.94 | Steady |

**A Big Life – Rationale, Direction and Structure.**

Recognition of the imbalance between Material and Non-material Wellbeing is the basis of The Big Life Project. It is predicated on the idea that we must engage and focus on the less tangible aspects of our lives to lead A Big Life. This process of engagement has been framed as The Big Life Questions:

1. How do I relate to people who are different to me? *(Living with difference)*
2. How can I love and be loved? *(Relationships, self-identity & sexuality)*
3. What is the meaning of life? (*Spirituality, transcendence and purposeful occupation)*
4. How do I make family work – even if I haven’t got one or don’t want mine?

*(Family in the 21st Century)*

1. What do I do when bad things happen? *(Grief and loss)*

These are big life questions because they apply to all of us, we all bring the qualities of our character to engaging with them and they apply to all of us in ways that are unique to each us.

A Big Life aims to develop a Strengths Based Model that helps individuals identify the qualities of their character, recognise how these qualities can contribute to their lives and apply them so they can meet their potential and find purpose to their lives. This model has FOUNDATIONAL, TRANSLATIONAL and INSPIRATIONAL steps. (see diagram) The role for organisations like schools differ from step to step:

* Guiding and Modelling (FOUNDATIONAL),
* Encouraging and Supporting (TRANSLATIONAL) and,
* Acknowledging and Appreciating (INSPIRATIONAL)

As a program, A Big Life is developing along the line of a whole school Preparation/Protection Strategy as a FOUNDATIONAL STEP that will attempt to engage with students based on these components:

* ENGAGEMENT BROADLY DIRECTED AT THE BIG LIFE QUESTIONS.
* ENGAGEMENT AND EMBEDDING AT STUDENT LEARNING AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT LEVELS.
* IDENTIFICATION OF POINTS AND FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT.
* LEVERAGE OFF TEACHER CAPACITY.
* A PROGRAM DEVELOPED AROUND EVIDENTIARY NEED AND EDUCATIONAL THEORY.

**Embedding A Big Life.**

Leveraging off the professional capital, intuition, responsiveness, knowledge, expertise and experience of teachers is the single most critical factor in determining the effectiveness of any approach we put inplace. Education Academic, John Hattie has conducted research to identify the factors in schools that have the most effect in creating positive outcomes for young people in schools. These factors where scored for effectiveness with any factor scoring above .4 seen as having a cumulative positive effect. Factors intended to be built into A Big Life are:

* SOCIAL SKILLS PROGRAMS: .72,
* TEACHER STUDENT RELATIONSHIP: .72,
* CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR: .80 and
* TEACHER CREDIBILITY .90.

With this in mind it is essential that we have teachers heavily involved at the formulation and planning stages of A Big Life. This will facilitate the clear identification of Points and Forms of Engagement across Student Learning and Student Engagement and assist in the development of a flexible and adaptable means of embedding A Big Life into our day to day activities. A flexible and adaptable means of embedding A Big Life is critical for maximising access to the strengths and qualities our teachers have. Supporting them with the varied resources they will need and entrusting and emboldening them to take Big Life Establishing Points and Forms of Engagement relies on leveraging off the broadest range of capabilities our teachers have and the broadest range of opportunities that present themselves. These become accessible with an adaptable and flexible framework that recognises and values the contribution all staff can make in engaging with Big Life. Embedding Big Life should be seen as a broad spectrum of opportunities:

1. DELIBERATE EMBEDDING: Creation and implementation of a curriculum or teaching resource that specifically and explicitly responds to one or more BLQs.
2. INFLUENCED EMBEDDING: Using existing resources that implicitly respond to one or more BLQs.
3. IMPROVISED EMBEDDING: Intuitively using a situation that arises to implicitly respond to one or more BLQs.

The aim would be to embed the principles underpinning A Big Life into the fabric of the schools and into the lives of the young people we teach so that these principles will have life long relevance.

**Initial Application and Roll Out of A Big Life.**

It is intended to use the Student Engagement area to begin bringing A Big Life into schools. This will allow for the development of daily Points and Forms of Engagement at Tutorial/Form Group level using Influenced and Improvised Embedding. Deliberate Embedding will be used in developing resources for the specific work on The Big Life Questions in extended Tutorial and Form Group classes. A broad outline of these measures/activities includes:

* Foundational, School/House Level introduction on A Big Life.
* Foundational, Tutorial/Form Group activities engaging A Big Life. (strengths identification, BLQ alignment, developing A Big Life Signifier)
* Establishment of a daily routine/structure implicitly underpinned by BLQ (welcome, roll, admin, engagement/reflection)
* Development and delivery of explicit program that focuses on strength recognition/development, capacity alignment/building and application to BLQ
* Application of Focus Plan/Theme model for highlighting and developing particular reflective/engagement skills to create Tut/Form Group environment.
* Development of Tut/Form Group sharing activity to engage students.

These measures and activities will be fully developed and implemented by teachers specifically responsible for Student Engagement.

**Proposed Activities.**

* Continuing development of a broad direction for A Big life.
* A focus on Student Engagement as an initial Point of Engagement for A Big Life.
* Formulating an Action Research Model to apply to both school environments.
* Developing PD based on The Skilled Helper Model and BLQ for teachers.
* Reflecting on a process for bringing A Big Life to the broader community.
* Developing “signifiers” to promote recognition and identification of The Big Life Project to be used across a range of formats. i.e online profile, visual/graphic identifiers, program livery, introduction presentation etc

A Big Life: Signifying Statement: