



Smiling Mind Impact Overview

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Research and Evaluation of Smiling Mind
programs – App and Education based



Our purpose

Smiling Mind exists to help every mind thrive. Over the past 10 years, Smiling Mind has built a strong reputation amongst Australians for its impactful and accessible mental health and wellbeing resources. Our evidence-based app and comprehensive school-based social and emotional learning programs have seen significant uptake with more than 6.5million app downloads and more than 275,000 teachers using our resources in classrooms across Australia and globally.

Our focus is to equip Australians with the skills, strategies and mindset that can support mental wellbeing, fostering a positive and proactive approach to mental health.

Our Research Approach

Smiling Minds' approach to research and evaluation is multifaceted to enable rigorous and iterative demonstration of our impacts and outcomes. We draw on a range of research and evaluation methods to ensure we have the right tools and approaches, corresponding to the stage of maturity of each program and the specific research needs. Our in-house research team designs and delivers our evaluation program and partners with external researchers as appropriate, to enhance our research capacity and capability.

Our approaches include:

1. Formative research & co-design – using a range of qualitative methods, such as focus groups, interviews and participatory design, to understand the characteristics, needs and preferences of audiences using our programs and involve them in both early and iterative design stages.
2. Program evaluation – to understand how people use Smiling Minds' programs and the resulting benefits. This may use both qualitative and quantitative methods, through a process evaluation (to understand whether the programs are being implemented as intended) or impact evaluation (to understand the extent to which the program achieved its objectives).
3. Research trials – using more rigorous research methods, often with the inclusion of a control group for comparison, to build confidence in attributing specific outcomes to the Smiling Mind program. These are often undertaken in partnership with an academic research team.
4. Population level data and big-data analysis – using large datasets captured through our digital platforms or large-scale population surveys, to understand general population characteristics, attitudes and sentiment towards mental health and wellbeing, to inform policy and program design.

Smiling Mind is committed to evaluating the benefits of our digital and in-person mental health and wellbeing programs. We undertake research and evaluation on an ongoing basis to inform the programs we develop, so we can deliver the most robust and evidence based programs for schools, homes and the general public.

Within schools, evaluation is placed at the forefront. We collect data from all members of our programs to best meet the needs of our intended audience. We also collaborate regularly with external organisations and universities to conduct research on our programs and the app.

Beyond evaluation, we strive to understand the mental health needs and trends of the population. Every year we release the State of Mind survey to explore the mental health and wellbeing of Australians, and within our app, the wellbeing index helps us best meet the needs of our audience.

Our work

- Research and evaluation within schools, at home and in the workplace
- Randomised control trials of our programs and app
- Population mental health and wellbeing
- Indexing the mental health trends of our audience



Our impact in schools

Smiling Mind uses an evidence based approach to support the mental health and wellbeing of students and teachers across early learning, primary and secondary schools. Our programs aim to train, equip and support schools to implement a whole school approach to student wellbeing through a social and emotional learning program. At each step of the way, we utilise research and evaluation to enhance processes and track the impact of our programs.

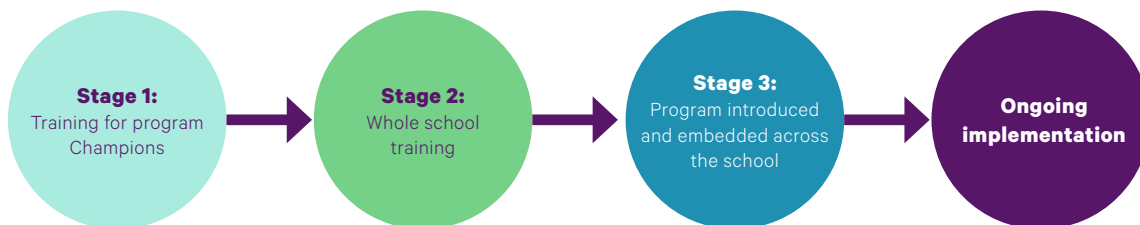


Our Schools Program

The Smiling Mind School Program is designed to inspire and equip participants with the knowledge, confidence and resources to embed mindfulness-based social and emotional learning in their school in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Schools implement the program in a staged approach over a 12 month period, in three sequential but linked stages that lead to sustainable and impactful ongoing implementation.

1. Training for program Champions
2. Whole school training
3. Program introduced and embedded across the school



Research and evaluation

Smiling Mind's school based programs have been implemented and evaluated across a range of research trials and large-scale program implementation evaluations.

In 2015-2016 Dr Peter Hart from Insight SRC and Deakin University undertook a randomised controlled trial to evaluate the Smiling Mind School program in 12 Victorian schools¹. This was the first major evaluation of our schools program. Following on from the success of this research we have implemented the Smiling Mind School program across a range of schools in many states.

In partnership with NSW Department of Education and Buildcorp Foundation we implemented the Smiling Mind School Program into 445 NSW government primary schools and engaged PWC as an independent program evaluator². In partnership with the Australian Government Department of Health we have also recently commenced implementing the Smiling Mind School Program into 600 regional and rural primary schools. We have engaged the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) to independently evaluate the impact of the program.

Based on ongoing research and evaluation we see strong signs of benefit of the Smiling Mind School Program. Below we summarise the key areas of benefit identified from this research.



School engagement

- **Schools have engaged strongly with Smiling Mind Social and Emotional Learning programs.**

- Our Schools Program has reached 15% of government schools in Australia.
- Nearly all (94%) teachers in a Smiling Mind Schools Program has implemented a component from the program in the classroom.
- Nearly all (99%) teachers in a Schools Program felt the content was useful for their role, and felt that mindfulness was an effective tool to support mental health (98%).



Teacher knowledge and confidence

- **Across all Smiling Mind programs we have helped teachers grow their knowledge and confidence around mindfulness and social and emotional learning.**

- Confidence to teach concepts of mindfulness has risen from 51% at baseline to 93% following completion of our training program.
- 99% of Mindful Champions felt more confident to undertake their role as the in-school program leader.



Teacher wellbeing

- **Smiling Mind's School programs increase wellbeing and mindfulness, whilst decreasing workplace burnout and perceived stress.**

- After completing the NSW program, 79% of teachers showed greater wellbeing and 69% reported a reduction in stress.
- In the Regional and Rural program educators have exhibited significantly higher wellbeing and mindfulness, and significantly lower workplace burnout and perceived stress.

- **In a randomised control study evaluating the effect of the Smiling Mind program on teachers, the study showed improvements in;** sleep quality, psychological distress, tension, positive wellbeing, emotion awareness and regulation, and concentration³.

- **In another randomised control study evaluating the use of the Smiling Mind app on teachers** results found a significant decrease in burnout among teachers using the Smiling Mind app, when compared to a waitlist control⁴.

As part of our **Regional and Rural Schools** program we've surveyed over **3000** students across **50** schools. The research has showed evidence of:

Significant improvements to children's **mindfulness, perseverance and optimism.**

Students who regularly do Smiling Mind activities were **more likely to be mindful, feel connected to school, engaged, persevere in their learning, feel happy and optimistic** about the future.

73%

of students **find Smiling Mind helpful**, with key benefits around:

 Being more **focussed** on schoolwork (34%)

 **Calming down** during worry (29%)

 **Feeling less worried** about schoolwork (24%)

73%

Almost three in four Mindful Champions agreed that their students have benefitted from the Smiling Mind program.

32%

Around a third of students who have done Smiling Mind in the classroom, **have taken it beyond school.**

- One in four (24%) students have done Smiling Mind meditations by themselves or with a family member.
- 17% of students have talked to their family about Smiling Mind.



Our pilot programs



Principal Wellbeing Program

Funded by Worksafe Victoria, the Principal Wellbeing program was a pilot program delivered to 29 schools. The program was a comprehensive school leadership initiative aimed at addressing the mental health and wellbeing of school principals as well as equipping school leaders and educators required to develop a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

The results of the evaluation found:

95%

Knowledge and confidence to apply mindfulness in a whole-school setting has increased with **nearly all participants (95%) feeling equipped to explain concepts of mindfulness in the school, and deliver its lessons to support student learning.**

79%

Four in five principals in the latest cohort have **established personal mindfulness practice since beginning the program.**

90%

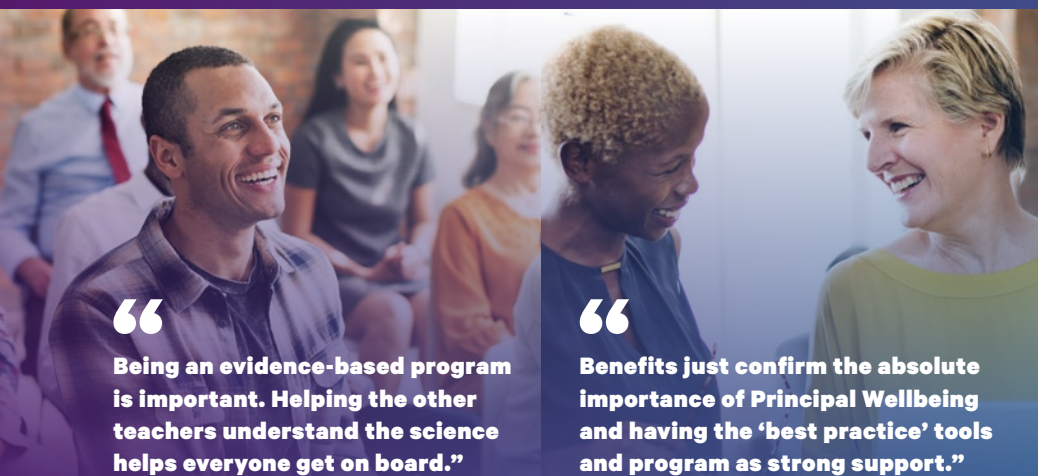
of Principals have been able to identify priority factors for wellbeing, both personally and within their school community.

81%

of Principals felt motivated and equipped with the knowledge to create a whole-school action plan

68%

While still in progress, **the majority of principals and school leaders** have reported reductions in their **stress levels (68%)**, and indicated their **general wellbeing had improved (74%).**



“

Being an evidence-based program is important. Helping the other teachers understand the science helps everyone get on board.”

— Mindful Champion

“

Benefits just confirm the absolute importance of Principal Wellbeing and having the ‘best practice’ tools and program as strong support.”

— School Principal

“

I feel more confident undertaking relevant mindfulness activities with the children in my class to support their self-regulation and wellbeing, as well as demonstrating mindfulness and undertaking my own practice.”

— Teacher

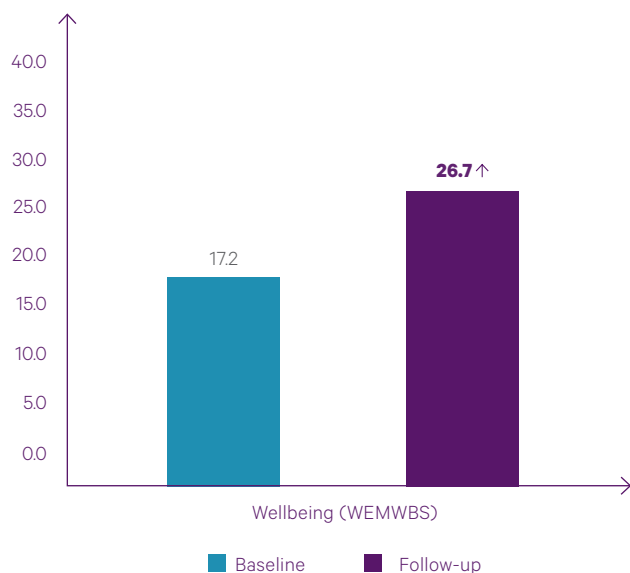
Early Learning Tools

The Early Minds program has been designed to support early childhood educators to bring mindfulness into everyday experiences with children. An initial pilot of the program was conducted in 2020⁴, and based on the findings of an independent evaluation on its feasibility and effectiveness, the program was revised for 2021. The second iteration of the program sought to specifically address the research and findings of the initial pilot, and included; meditations, mini-mindfulness movement experience, which has been created by psychologists alongside educators and reflect the developmental stage of children aged 3 to 6. An evaluation was conducted to test the impact of the Early Learning Tools program on the well-being of educators, students and parents.

The results of the evaluation found:

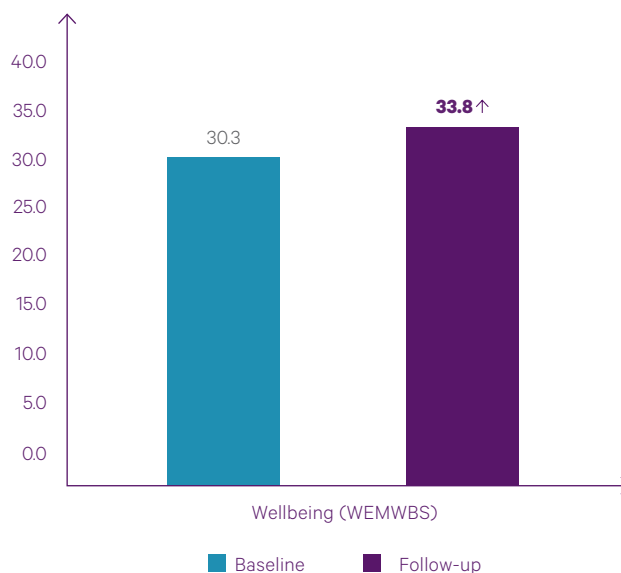
- **Significant increases in educator wellbeing** (17.2 at baseline to 26.7 post-program) and wellbeing literacy (30.3 to 33.8), with early indicators of **lower perceived stress** (6.8 to 6.1) and **increased cognitive and affective mindfulness** (30.2 to 31.8).
- **Program uptake was substantial**
 - Nearly every educator (95%) utilised at least one aspect of the Early Minds program in some way.
- **The program was effective in developing educators' skills, confidence and knowledge around implementing mindfulness in their early learning centres.**
 - Nine in ten (90%) educators agreed the program helped them in areas of wellbeing they were unsure about.
 - Four in five (80%) felt that their confidence to teach concepts of mindfulness to children was high.
- While the implementation phase of the program was shortened due to COVID lockdowns, **early indicators of impact on children were observed.**
 - Nine in ten (90%) educators indicated that the children they teach have benefited from the program, with calmness, emotional and self-regulation skills and use of language related to mindfulness being the most commonly cited changes.

Baseline and follow up comparison: Wellbeing



Note. Arrows denote significance

Baseline and follow up comparison: Wellbeing Literacy



Note. Arrows denote significance

The impact of our app



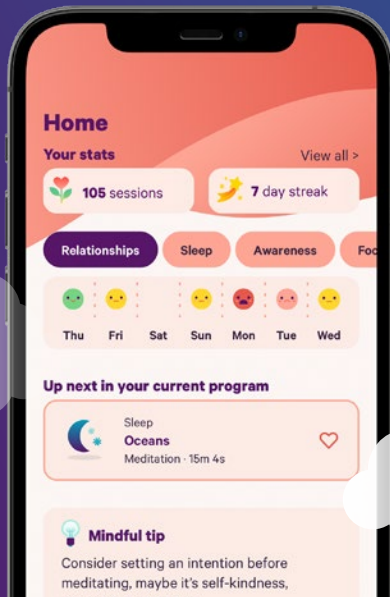
Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the Smiling Mind app across different audiences, spanning areas such as mental health and wellbeing and behaviours associated with practicing meditation.

- **Research has found that brief mobile apps that support meditation practice, like Smiling Mind, can improve important aspects of negative mental health and bolster positive mental health.**

- **In a randomised control trial, researchers found that compared to a control group, those who used the Smiling Mind app showed significant improvements in depressive symptoms, college adjustments and resilience⁶.**

→ After 10 days of app use⁶; 13% showed improvement in depressive symptoms, 6% improvement in resilience, 5% improvement in college adjustment.

- **In another study examining Theory of Planned behaviour, researchers found that intention to practice mindfulness and perceptions of social norms regarding practicing directly predicted both the number of days and number of minutes practicing mindfulness using Smiling Mind⁷.**



Our ongoing research and evaluation

01 — Regional and Rural Schools Evaluation

Evaluation of our m-SEL program in 600 rural and regional school supported by the Department of Health.

02 – New Smiling Mind schools program

Upcoming evaluation of our new SEL program to new and continuing schools, focussing on student level outcomes.

03 — Evaluating the impact of our app on the general population

Partnering with universities around Australia, the impact of our app is being assessed across a range of populations.

04 — Evaluating our new children and families program

Evaluation of an upcoming program within the app aimed to equipping children and families with skills around building resilience.

05 — The Australian Mental Wellbeing Index

In partnership with KPMG, examining the mental health and wellbeing of app users

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Research using Smiling Mind as a part of a larger program

Smiling Mind has been mentioned by numerous researchers as a useful app for practicing mindfulness for individuals, a popular way to practice mindfulness at school, and a useful app for promoting relaxation in pediatric populations.

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Research discussing Smiling Mind

Meditations from the Smiling Mind app have been incorporated into programs which promote sleep, strengthening families, and mindfulness for adolescents.

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More information can be found on the Smiling Mind website smilingmind.com.au.

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