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Adolescent Building Connections (ABC): Positive connections building thriving futures

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Background

Family violence continues to be significant issue for individuals, families and communities in Australia. This is of increasing concern in regional areas, with current overall family violence rates in Victoria reporting an 84% higher incidence of family violence incidents in regional areas compared with metropolitan areas (Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, 2025).

This is not only confined to adults' experience of family violence but extends to our young people in both an intimate partner violence context and incidences of young people using family violence within the home. The 'Growing Up in Australia' study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2023 reported that 30% of young people surveyed aged 18–19 years identified experiences of intimate partner violence (O'Donnell et al., 2023). Evidence has shown that where young people have a lived experience or are exposed to family violence in their formative years, they are more likely to exhibit unsafe and harmful behaviours themselves, perpetuating the intergenerational transmission of family violence (AIHW, 2025).

The impacts of family violence are not isolated to any single life domain, extending instead across all areas of life – impacting educational outcomes and achievements, intimate and familial relationships and physical and mental health – and there are also financial costs to the victim–survivors and broader community. To have sustained change and address the intergenerational impact of family violence, it is necessary that we intervene early and often, combining a response that traverses prevention, early intervention and response.

Action/Response

In response, Quantum Support Services developed the Adolescent Building Connections (ABC) program. This is an evidence-based, trauma-informed program developed to provide the skills and understanding to encourage adolescents aged 12–17 years to form healthy and positive connections in their lives.

The program was developed in response to gaps in supports for this cohort, with a predominately prevention and early intervention approach for young people who are using or at risk of using violence in the home, acknowledging that the majority of these young people have lived experience as victim–survivors in their own right.

The ABC program combines interactive activities specifically designed to meet the needs of adolescents, providing an open and safe discussion space to encourage peer connection and wider thinking outside what the young person may have experienced.

The program has expanded since its inception in 2016 and is now being delivered in partnership across 16 secondary schools in the Gippsland area, Victoria.

The aims of the program are to provide learning and development opportunities for young people to understand their own experiences and make positive choices for themselves moving forward underpinned by four key concepts:

1. Healthy relationships and interactions;
2. Emotional regulation and intelligence;
3. Education on impacts of family violence and gender inequality; and
4. Conflict management and positive communication.

The ABC program is unique in that delivery can be utilised to support a prevention, early intervention and/or response intervention, dependant on need.

By investing in the continued provision of this program, we position our young people to be able to break the cycle of violence and improve their connection to family, peers and the wider community while building capacity to maintain strong, connected, positive relationships in their life.

The program strengths are its partnerships and connections with education providers and approaching the support of young people through a connection-before-correction approach. This allows for open and safe discussion led by facilitators and driven by participants.

This approach further supports young people to explore their own individual journey of emotional and behavioural discovery. Facilitators provide opportunities and knowledge to support the young person to build their own individual toolbox. This, in turn, builds resilience and feelings of improved belonging and self worth.

Building on the foundations of the Respectful Relationships program currently undertaken in schools, the ABC program provides a safe space for young people to expand and deepen their understanding, particularly for those who may need additional support because of their own life experience or understanding of relationships. It also provides an additional resource for education providers to engage when necessary.

Lessons learned

The ABC program has undergone four independent evaluations and a cost-benefit analysis since inception, with the latest evaluation completed in December 2022. Each evaluation and the cost-benefit analysis consistently recognised the benefit of the program to young people, their families and the community. These evaluations highlighted the program's success in promoting strong

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2025). *Children and young people: Family, domestic and sexual violence*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people>
- Crime Statistics Agency Victoria. (2025). *Crime in Victoria*. Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Government. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au>

and connected lives for young people, supporting improved emotional regulation skills, resilience and understanding of healthy and safe relationships. The cost-benefit analysis (completed by Ernst Young in 2022) identified a \$4 benefit to community overall for every dollar invested in the program, including:

- A reduction in youth homelessness;
- Improved mental health outcomes; and
- Decreased family breakdown, with families remaining strong and connected.

Participants of the program have self reported the following program outcomes:

- Improved understanding of healthy and positive relationships;
- Improved mental health through maintaining positive and connected relationship; and
- Improved attendance and engagement in education.

Key learnings from the delivery of the program include the importance of the relationship between education providers and program staff, the need to work collaboratively to keep the young person at the centre of thinking and meeting the young person where they are at.

Evaluation data show 85% of young people believe the program has helped them to understand the impact of their choices, and between 79% and 85% of young people consistently report a positive experience of the program.

As with many programs across the sector, the main challenges or barriers to delivery of the program have been centred around securing sustainable funding and workforce capacity.

Next on the horizon for the ABC program is the exploration of a training model to allow expansion of the program, the possibility to adapt the program to meet the needs of additional cohorts, and the scope for application of the program to expand to education providers across the state and nationally.

- O'Donnell, K., Rioseco, P., Vittiglia, A., Rowland, B., & Mundy, L. (2023). *Intimate partner violence among Australian 18–19 year olds*. Growing Up in Australia (Snapshot Series, Issue No. 11) Melbourne, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). <https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/lvac-snapshot-11-intimate-partner-violence.pdf>

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