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A Wraparound Approach to Whole of Student Issues

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Research Brief

What is the problem?

Researchers partnered with the Gonski Institute to investigate the perceived wraparound support requirements of students with complex support needs attending schools in regional and rural New South Wales.

Interviews with stakeholders in regional and rural New South Wales schools focussed on:

- Types of wraparound approaches used.

- Barriers and strengths of current approaches.

- Requirements for effective wraparound support.

Historically, students attending school in rural and remote New South Wales have experienced poorer outcomes than their peers attending metropolitan schools. The lack of coordinated support services for students with complex support needs compounds this issue. Wraparound models of support have been found to be successful in improving outcomes for students with complex support needs, and the New South Wales government has prioritised the establishment of strong relationships between schools and communities to overcome the limitations of geographic isolation.

The aim of the current study was to discover the perceived wraparound support requirements of students with complex support needs attending schools in rural and remote New South Wales. Stakeholders identified barriers and needs, leading researchers to put forth recommendations that are intended enhance the capacity of rural and remote NSW schools to provide wraparound support for students with complex support needs. A Wraparound Implementation Framework (Cumming et al., 2020) was developed to support schools in the implementation of wraparound support.

What is wraparound?

- Wraparound was developed in the United States in the fields of mental health and child welfare as a team-based, collaborative process for developing and implementing individualized care plans for young people with and at-risk of emotional and behavioural disabilities and their families (Walker & Bruns 2006).

Wraparound is underpinned by a set of core principles:

- Not a single service, but a collaborative process through which specific school and community-based supports are be designed, implemented, and coordinated.

- A team comprised of the student, family members, natural supports (e.g., extended family, friends, mentors), and school and community professionals is assembled.

- The team then collaborates to develop a support plan that is student- and family-centred, as it addresses their needs and priorities in a way that is acceptable to them.

Wraparound to improve student outcomes

There is evidence in the literature that wraparound support can improve outcomes for students with complex needs.

- Schools have been successful in the use of wraparound to improve social/behavioural and school functioning of youth and to prevent more restrictive living and school placements for students with significant emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare, and special education (Olsen et al., 2021).

- Some evidence suggests that well-implemented wrap-around programs have positive effects, including decreased placements in more restrictive school environments, fewer days incarcerated and on runaway status, and less likelihood of reoffending (Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2011).

- Wrap-around systems build collaborative support networks that work together to design and implement a plan to meet a young person's needs across multiple life domains (Eber et al., 2011).

- A wraparound system was piloted with youth involved in the NSW juvenile justice system and their families in Kempsey, NSW (Nisbet, Graham, & Newell, 2011). The project was found to be moderately successful but lacked the necessary time to achieve true success. Nisbet et al. (2011) recommended that the Commonwealth and State Governments commit to funding an expanded trial of wraparound.

Our participants

- 24 stakeholders from six schools in regional and rural NSW.

- The majority of participants (71%) were female (29% male).

- Participants ranged in age from 27-63.

- Participants included principals, deputy principals, general education teachers, special education teachers, learning support officers, counsellors, and school psychologists.

- The six schools included in the project were located in four towns in inner regional and outer regional areas of NSW.

Our questions

- What approaches to wraparound support are currently being used at your school?

- What are the barriers to wraparound support?

- What are the enablers to wraparound support?

- In a perfect world, what wraparound supports would be available at your school for students with complex needs?

Enablers to Effective Wraparound Support

- Collaborative relationships between all stakeholders
- Committed stakeholders
- On-site support services
- Restorative practices
- Positive relationships with students and families

Barriers to Effective Wraparound Support

- Lack of access to medical, mental health, and other supports
- Geography
- Lack of communication between stakeholders
- Lack of funding
- Student and family issues/nonparticipation
- School issues

Recommendations

- A dedicated staff member at the school who would take formal responsibility for wraparound case management, planning, and coordination.

- Expand on-site facilities to provide space for support providers to see students at school, such as: a) after-school academic support; (b) drop-in/wellbeing spaces that included facilities (and funding) for practical support, for example showers, facilities to wash clothes and meals; (c) parent education, (d) career advisement, and (e) health care

- Timely access to health care

- Streamlined funding models

- Professional development on wraparound support for all collaborators, to provide a common understanding and language

About the Researchers

Therese Cumming

Therese M. Cumming is Professor of Special Education in the School of Education, the Academic Lead Education for the UNSW Disability Innovation Institute, and a Scientia Education Fellow at UNSW Sydney. Her research interests are centred around special education, focused on the following areas: students with emotional and behavioural disorders, social skills training, positive behavioural interventions, the use of technology in the classroom, Universal Design for Learning in schools and at the tertiary level, and lifespan transitions for people with disabilities. Her research aims to improve the experiences of students with disabilities by working with schools to reduce the research-to-practice gap through the implementation of evidence-based practices in special and inclusive education.

Iva Strnadová

Iva Strnadová, PhD, is a Professor in Special Education and Disability Studies at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. She is also Academic Lead Research at the Disability Innovation Institute at the UNSW. Her research aims to contribute to better understanding and the improvement of the life experiences of people with disabilities, especially people with intellectual disabilities. Combining research with advocacy is essential in her research program, which builds on supporting the self-determination (including self-advocacy) of people with intellectual disabilities, and is grounded in an innovative inclusive research approach. Further details are available at Disability and me blog, Disability and me Facebook page, and Twitter @IvaStrnadova.

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Special and Inclusive Education Research Group

Research into special and inclusive education aims to understand and respond to the needs of students with a lived experience of disability. An associated research team at UNSW – the Special and Inclusive Education Research Group (SIERG) – seeks to engage with the wider community of schools, people with disability, and service providers in with the goal of improving the outcomes of people with disability across at all stages of education.
SIERG membership is comprised of prominent researchers, higher degree research students, educators, and people with lived experience of disability. Much of this research is accomplished through participatory and inclusive research, action research, and community consultation.

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