



PEACEFUL SCHOOLS PROGRAM PILOT SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Monterey Secondary College

CREATING PEACEFUL SCHOOLS IS ABOUT COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP AND HARNESSING THE ALTRUISM OF STUDENTS WHO ARE 'NATURAL LEADERS'

In 2014, a group of Monterey student leaders will be travelling to the US to talk to other students about creating safe, supportive schools at an international Peaceful Schools conference. This will be the culmination of a journey that began over two years ago.

Monterey Secondary College was a public school that was at times troubled and occasionally violent. It is located within a lower socio-economic community contending with generational unemployment and poor educational outcomes. But over the past two years, under the leadership of a gifted principal and with the guidance of an innovative 'Peaceful Schools Program', Monterey has taken on a new identity.

"This school is now about building strong, positive relationships first," explained Monterey Principal, Janine Leed. "Better educational outcomes follow naturally."

Monterey is one of 12 Victorian Schools from all different sectors that have been participating in CASSE'S 3 year Peaceful Schools Pilot Program (PSP), which commenced in 2011. Having completed nearly two years of the program, all of the participating schools have reported a significant reduction in bullying and mean behaviour and greater inclusion.

While Monterey Secondary College has become one of the jewels in the CASSE Crown, it has not been an easy journey. The first, difficult step in Monterey's transformation was for staff to respond to a student survey that highlighted low levels of staff empathy for the students.

“There was a lack of engagement, not only amongst the students, but also with some of the teachers,” said Ms Leed. “One of the first things we did was to ask our CASSE Student Team what they thought needed to change.”

According to the Director of CASSE’s Peaceful Schools Program (PSP), Carolyn Aston, this was a courageous act.

“Data that could have been interpreted as shameful and potentially hidden was instead acted upon openly, constructively and collaboratively, establishing relationships based on trust,” she said. “The CASSE approach encourages shedding light on the ‘undiscussables’ – the underlying power dynamics that can cause systemic problems.”

Staff and student teams receive training in identifying and intervening effectively with bullying, conflict resolution skills and recognizing, including & caring for vulnerable members of the community. Along with greater confidence, students involved are reporting a greater sensitivity and empathy for others.

“The students are proud to be involved and helping to make a real difference,” said Ms Aston. “It is a transformative approach – everyone grows from participating.”

For Monterey’s students, the biggest challenge was overcoming the belief that poverty and where they lived meant they were ‘stuck with their lot’. CASSE Facilitators helped the students to clear this identity path and create a new identity path... and a brighter future.

That bright future now looks set to sparkle even brighter in 2014.

“Monterey Secondary College is working with us to offer a life changing CASSE Peaceful Schools Secondary Student Leaders Tour in September 2014 to promote student voice and present with others at an international Peaceful Schools Student Conference in the US,” Ms Aston stated. “Again, this will be reinforcing that they have much to offer despite their seemingly disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Ms Leed said, “Monterey today is a different school. Our students now have a sense of pride in their school, and the teachers and students share a real excitement about learning and achieving, together. CASSE is helping our students to create a much more positive future for themselves.”

This resource and further information about Creating A Safe Supportive Environment is available to download at www.casse.org.au.