

Seasons for Growth

Children and Young People's program



The Seasons for Growth Companion Story

In 2020, the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) and NSW School Link program collaborated with MacKillop Family Services to deliver programs to students in Forster and Taree, NSW. The project was made possible following the successful application for funding through the Hunter, New England, and Central Coast Primary Health Network through the Australian Government's PHN Program and Empowering Communities program. This meant that the usual challenges that schools face when seeking access and funding of resources were largely avoided.

The funding enabled 32 professionals to be trained in the **Seasons for Growth** children and young people's change, loss, and grief program.

The training was held in March 2020 and 2 participants – Lauren Vaughan School Link Coordinator in the Manning area, and Kerrie Hansen Assistant Principal at Cundletown Public School were both in attendance.

This wonderful opportunity for collaboration resulted in Lauren and Kerrie running 2 groups together... 'If Lauren hadn't offered to co facilitate I probably wouldn't have done it' shares Kerrie – who after facilitating 4 groups is now a seasoned facilitator. Having someone outside of the school was helpful as it was easier to schedule, rather than taking 2 staff members out of the day.

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The power of the program was evident, allowing a space for children to come together and share their experiences in a gentle journey that Lauren and Kerrie felt privileged to share.'

We knew the program had had an impact when I bumped into a student outside of school who had had another significant loss during the group' – the student told Kerrie he remembered what Lauren and she had taught him, and how it had helped.

Seasons for Growth is carefully planned to build supportive relationships and a confidential space and invites students to reflect on the changes that they have experienced at their own pace. The activities and discussions allow for sharing what feels appropriate at the time. One student voiced that they did not trust anyone, and would not be sharing, but with the safety of the program and the skilled support from Lauren and Kerrie they did start to explore their feelings with others during the group. This is feedback which is heard regularly and is testament to the power of the peer support aspect of the program as well as the skills of the Companion as facilitator, and the space they create.

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With so many changes occurring for children and young people the opportunity that the program presents is invaluable. For Kerrie's school the opportunity for collaboration with the School Link service means that the program is now firmly embedded in the school, with more groups planned for later this year. Lauren is in high demand to share her skills within other schools and is planning her next group with secondary aged students.

A wonderful illustration of the many agencies coming together to provide support to children and young people, from the funding through to the group implementation.

For more helpful information and resources:
goodgrief.org.au | mackillopinstitute.org.au

