

What the research says about MIEACT

Rickwood, D., Cavanagh, S., Curtis, L., & Sakrouge, R. (2004) Educating Young People about Mental Health and Mental Illness: Evaluating a School Based Programme. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 6(4), 23-32

In 2001 MIEACT engaged the University of Canberra to carry out an independent evaluation of the MIEACT School Education Program (MIEACT SEP). The research evaluated the program's effectiveness in achieving its three aims of reducing stigma, increasing knowledge and increasing help seeking.

The researchers carried out a series of tests with 457 high school students to measure levels of stigma, knowledge and help seeking intentions before and after participating in the MIEACT SEP. The results showed that the MIEACT SEP was effective in achieving its aims. The most significant improvements were to student's knowledge, followed by stigma and then intention to seek help. The program was found to be equally effective for boys and girls, however the research highlighted that the boys had lower scores on all three measures prior to participating in the program, than did the girls. Whilst it was difficult to determine which part of the MIEACT presentation had benefited students the most, students were deeply touched by the personal stories told by Volunteer Educators, and both students and teachers reported that this had been a highly effective component.

The research demonstrated that MIEACT was achieving its aims in the School Education Program and provided the organisation with some possible areas for improvement. MIEACT continues to make amendments to the SEP as a result, for example by increasing the focus on early help seeking.

Read, S., & Rickwood, D.J. (2009) Volunteering as a community mental health educator: Positives and negatives for recovery. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 8(2), 1-10

MIEACT partnered with the University of Canberra to explore the positives and negatives for mental health recovery for Volunteer Educators engaged in delivering community and or school education sessions with MIEACT.

Ten Volunteer Educators were interviewed to explore in detail the positives and negatives for each person about their involvement with MIEACT with a focus on their recovery from mental illness. Analysis of the interviews showed that the positives far exceeded the negatives. Closer analysis of the positive aspects revealed four themes: "the unique peer support and encouragement provided by other presenters; the personal meaning gained by educating others about mental illness; the benefits of validation and catharsis through telling their story; and, the skills gained through embarking on their role as a consumer educator" (Read et al, 2009; p 5). The negatives fell into three themes; feeling vulnerable during or after a presentation; fear of stigma; and, challenges with co-presenters.

The researchers confirmed that the positives identified by the Volunteer Educators in this research are all well documented aspects of recovery, and that participation in the MIEACT programs had contributed to recovery for all participants. MIEACT has begun working on ways to combat the negatives associated with presenting with MIEACT, for example by developing a mentoring program for new presenters and offering debriefing for all volunteers.

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