

YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM WELLBEING RESEARCH RESULTS



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Between April and June 2013, Youth Opportunities participated in the first study of its type in South Australia to use valid and reliable measures of wellbeing to assess the impact of its Personal Leadership Program on the social and emotional wellbeing of students undertaking the program. The collaboration with researcher Lorna Fawcett, a Bachelor of Health Sciences (Psychology) Honours student at the University of Adelaide, evaluated the effectiveness of the program in promoting positive outcomes for Year 10 students (14 to 16 year olds) in partner schools.

The Personal Leadership Program has been delivered to more than 9,000 secondary students in South Australia since 1998.

MEASURING WELLBEING AND PERMA

The research study measured the changes in wellbeing of 102 students in Year 10 at five South Australian high schools. 54 students participated in the Personal Leadership Program over a 10-week training period. A further 48 students formed the control group.

All of the students answered a series of survey questions before and after the training program at an eight week interval. The questions were aligned to seven measures to correspond with Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing as well as measures of self-esteem and goal setting abilities. The PERMA theory contains five measurable elements of wellbeing: **P**ositive emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning and **A**ccomplishment.

HOW THE PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM MEASURED UP

In each of the seven measures the Personal Leadership Program students experienced improvements whereas the control group experienced only marginal increases or declines in each measure.

“Overall, the results for the PERMA variables are consistent with the aims of the Personal Leadership Program, and lend weight to the notion that a school-based positive psychology program can positively impact the emotional, social, and academic facets of the lives of adolescents.”

Lorna Fawcett, University of Adelaide Honours Student.

Students who undertook the Personal Leadership Program experienced significant changes in their wellbeing relative to the control group. The researcher concluded that: “the results provide convincing support for the hypothesis that: between the pre- and post-program data collection points (Time 1 and Time 2) the intervention group would experience a significant increase on all PERMA variables, self-esteem and goal setting measures, relative to the control group.” The most significant effects occurred in the measurements of goal setting, positive emotion, self-esteem and meaning and purpose.



Teachers of 60 students in the study were asked to assess the 'before' and 'after' engagement levels of students. The teachers reinforced the research findings and reported that students who participated in the Personal Leadership Program displayed a **significant gain in engagement** compared with the control group students, whose engagement levels had fallen on average.

The positive results in these research findings indicate that personal development training can provide distinct benefits for the social and emotional wellness of young people.

