

## **Evaluating the *Keeping Ourselves Safe* Programme**

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*Keeping Ourselves Safe* is a personal safety / child abuse prevention programme for New Zealand schools. Originally a joint project with the Department of Education, Police has assumed responsibility since the Department was restructured into a Ministry in 1989.

*Keeping Ourselves Safe* is part of the Youth Education Service of the New Zealand Police. Its most distinctive feature is the involvement of sworn (uniformed) Police Education Officers who work with teachers to prepare for and then teach *Keeping Ourselves Safe*.

Work on *Keeping Ourselves Safe* began in the early 1980s. Three primary school modules were launched in 1988. A secondary school module followed in 1995. Additional material for parents/caregivers was developed in 2002 and currently (2006) a draft early childhood education module of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* will be trialled.

All teaching materials were written by experienced teachers, health educators, school counsellors, Police Education Officers working under the facilitation of the Youth Education Service Curriculum Officer.

### **Aim of *Keeping Ourselves Safe***

*Keeping Ourselves Safe* has a threefold aim:

1. teach young people a range of safe practices they can use when interacting with other people;
2. encourage Young people who have been, or are being, abused, to seek help;
3. contribute to an overall community abuse prevention programme by making parents and teachers more aware of their responsibilities to keep young people safe.

### **Does *Keeping Ourselves Safe* work? What the evaluation community has to say.**

A number of external evaluations of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* have been conducted since the three primary school programmes were launched in 1988. Evaluations have attempted to gather and interpret evidence about the extent to which the programme is achieving its threefold aim.

Evaluations have also indicated how the programme modules could be improved. All programme modules have been revised and republished at least once. The programme for Years 0-3 is currently in its fourth version, reflecting the particular difficulties working in this area with very young children.

## **A Two Early Studies**

**Woodward (1990)** The first external evaluation of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* was conducted by Woodward (1990). Principals, teachers, Police Education Officers and some parents/caregivers of selected Dunedin primary schools were interviewed about current intentions with regards to the then new programme. Woodward noted that it was taking a long time for some schools to begin their preparation for teaching. Of a sample of 66 schools 24 intended introducing it in the current year, 23 in the future and 19 other schools were either not planning to introduce it or were undecided.

Woodward was able to sample two schools actually implementing *Keeping Ourselves Safe* at the time of her study. One successfully taught *Keeping Ourselves Safe* but the other had not proceeded after a difficult meeting with parents/caregivers. Woodward stressed the importance of carefully planned and professionally delivered consultation meetings with the school, not Police, being seen to 'own' the new programme.

Changes were subsequently made to the implementation procedures to ensure the parent/caregivers meeting was facilitated by the school. Police Education Officers had sometimes been put in a difficult position by school staff who were apprehensive about how their parent community might respond to a proposal to teach *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. It was made clear to Police Education Officers that unless the school was willing to adopt the programme there was little point in proceeding. Indeed, to do so was considered unsafe.

As more schools introduced the programme successfully teachers became more confident about using it. Many said that their apprehensions seemed unfounded.

Woodward's study reflected what a ground breaking programme *Keeping Ourselves Safe* was. For it to be taught successfully required a school to prepare thoroughly and involve teachers, parent/caregivers and Police Education Officers.

**Van Kessel (1990)** Opponents of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* claimed that the programme would frighten and upset children. After reading a newspaper article about these claims Kirsten Van Kessel decided to examine the reactions of children to *Keeping Ourselves Safe* in an Auckland primary school. One hundred and twelve parents and twelve teachers were surveyed. No significant changes in how comfortable children were in a number of given situations were observed. Parents and caregivers considered the programme had a good overall effect and all reported it had led to discussion and the sharing of safety messages at home. As the developers of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* had made a big effort to find ways to involve parents/caregivers this was a most encouraging result.

The spill-over effect into homes has been noted in evaluations of other YES programmes as well. A Massey University evaluation of the *Dare to make a Choice* programme suggested the "flow on" or "ripple" effects of these

programmes into homes seemed a somewhat unique feature (for example, 1992 p16).

## **B First Outcome Evaluation**

The first study to try to identify programme outcomes was reported by Briggs (1991). Two hundred and fifty eight children aged 5 to 8 years were interviewed in December 1990 from a variety of schools in Taranaki and Porirua. Some teachers in these schools had not taught *Keeping Ourselves Safe* at all, some had taught some of it, and others had taught it completely and thoroughly.

Briggs found that the safest responses came from schools where *Keeping Ourselves Safe* had been taught by committed teachers and where the safety skills in the programme had become part of the culture of a school. She noted that in one school this had happened to such an extent that five-year olds arrived at school for their first day already familiar with the safety strategies the school followed. Conversely, some of the least safe responses came from children in higher decile schools where the programme was only partly taught because teachers did not consider their children were at risk from molestation.

Briggs found the “inadequate” concept of stranger danger was still deeply embedded in New Zealand society.

In a follow up study conducted one year later Briggs and Hawkins (1994) re interviewed 117 of the original 252 children. The earlier study had concluded that there was evidence that *Keeping Ourselves Safe* increased skills and knowledge about self-protection in the short term. Reassessment 12 months later showed that children had gone on to make additional skill and knowledge gains. Results for some older children who had gone on to use the middle primary module between evaluations suggested that repetition and extension leads to further gains. Briggs and Hawkins found evidence that teachers and parents had adopted a safety focus that continued beyond the school into homes, a particularly encouraging result. The variables of sex, age, race, and academic achievement did not affect additional gains in either the short or longer term. The biggest variable was identified as teacher commitment. Children taught by “committed teachers” had almost double the gains compared to children taught by “uncommitted teachers”. Although sexual abuse is found in families across all socio economic groups children from lower socio economic groups had additional risk factors having lower initial safety knowledge and less parental support and reinforcement.

Briggs and Hawkins recommended that all schools teach *Keeping Ourselves Safe*, that they use Police Education Officers to help facilitate teaching and support teachers, and that schools involve parents/caregivers as much as possible. They advised that the first module for 5-6 year old children needed to be revised. They noted that improving teacher enthusiasm towards the programme was a critical variable.

Briggs and Hawkins published the results of these studies in the international literature<sup>1</sup>.

A revised version of the module for 5-6 year olds was written in 1994.

### **C Two Studies of the Senior Primary School Module.**

The nomenclature for senior primary school classes has changed in recent years. It includes Years 7 and 8 students who are in the age group 11 to 12 years. It is also sometimes still referred to as the intermediate school level.

In 1995 two studies focussed on the senior primary school *Keeping Ourselves Safe* module.

**Perniski (1995)** evaluated *Keeping Ourselves Safe* with 137 senior primary students from three Wellington schools. She used a Children's Knowledge of Abuse Questionnaire and role-play scenarios to determine whether children could distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate situations. Results indicated that all children involved in the programme showed statistically significant increases in knowledge at post-test. Perniski concluded that the study provided support for both the need for abuse prevention education, and for *Keeping Ourselves Safe* as an effective way of doing that.

**Briggs and Hawkins (1995)** The second study with senior primary students was conducted by Briggs and Hawkins in ten schools from Dunedin, Nelson and New Plymouth. The schools included a school for girls with learning disabilities. Two hundred and fifty two children and one hundred and forty two parents/caregivers were interviewed. Briggs found that all students knew that sexual abuse was reportable and there was evidence that some children had reported abuse after the *Keeping Ourselves Safe* programme. Other children had encouraged victims to report. The children in the study could give examples of how the programme had helped them avoid or report abuse. The study found that it is possible to teach *Keeping Ourselves Safe* to students who have learning difficulties.

The input from Police Education Officers was greatly appreciated by both schools and parents/caregivers and their presence helped ensure that the problem of children's safety was taken seriously. The input of male Police Education Officers was perceived by Briggs and Hawkins as being especially valuable for boys.

Significant evidence came from the study that *Keeping Ourselves Safe* encouraged children involved with abuse to report. Eighteen parents confirmed that their children had reported abuse immediately after a *Keeping Ourselves Safe* lesson, two parents revealed cases of incest not already reported, parents and children reported that 20% of participants in the survey had already been sexually abused. There was evidence that some children who stayed away during the survey period were abuse victims. Hence the abuse statistics gathered during the study are probably on the low side.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Briggs and Hawkins, 1994.

Ninety five percent of children demonstrated benefits from *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. Children who had completed all three primary school modules demonstrated the greatest benefit.

As a result of these evaluation results, a revised senior primary programme was published in 1997.

#### **D A Critical Look at the Development of *Keeping Ourselves Safe***

Mahoney (1998) completed a narrative description of the development and implementation process followed with *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. She was particularly interested in investigating the controversy it provoked in the 1980s during its development. Opposition from the 'moral right' has been generally recognised. Less recognised were the difficulties the developers faced with restrictions from education legislation and regulation. Mahoney noted that the "frustration and despair" (p151) faced by the development team at Police Headquarters as a human story not often remembered now. Mahoney approached her study from a feminist perspective. She noted, with interest, that leadership for programme development within Police came largely from a group of men.

#### **E Evaluating the secondary school module.**

In 2001 Briggs and Hawkins examined the two secondary school *Keeping Ourselves Safe* modules. Surveys of health co-ordinators and Police Education Officers confirmed that these modules were used less than the primary school modules. Barriers in secondary schools were, the low status health had in the secondary school curriculum and the consequent restricted curriculum time available to teach it.

The researchers reported concern about the risky behaviours claimed by the teenagers they consulted. Boys were unwilling to acknowledge that they might be victims of sexual abuse because they believed it only happened to girls and gays. Boys mostly needed protection from physical violence while girls needed protection from rape and sexual attacks.

The teenagers told the researchers they thought the programme should be taught by Police Education Officers as well as teachers because of the life experiences, training and confidentiality Police Education Officers had. The students interviewed considered teachers were unreliable with confidential information.

The results of this report were considered as part of a complete rewrite of the secondary modules during 2003. The revised version was restructured so it would be easier to use, more emphasis was placed on a whole school approach and the content was extended to include family violence. The revised programme has been republished as just one module.

#### **F Youngsters with Special Needs**

In 1996 Briggs and Hawkins had shown that girls with learning difficulties were especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. These girls had benefited from being taught *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. In 2004 Briggs and Hawkins

conducted a follow up evaluation with 116 boy and girl students classified as having learning difficulties. The earlier finding was confirmed but with the caveat that teachers needed to find innovative ways to reinforce, repeat and consolidate learning with these students. Repetition and reinforcement was the key to working successfully with these young people.

All students interviewed wanted to be taught *Keeping Ourselves Safe*, and two thirds named Police Education Officers as their preferred 'teachers'.

The researchers recommended that greater attention be given to the protection needs of boys. Their vulnerability to abuse was not being taken seriously. Boys were less likely to report abuse, giving the impression that they were less at risk.

## **G Education Review Office Evaluation**

The Education Review Office is the New Zealand Government agency that reviews schools.

In 2004 the Education Review Office reported on the implementation of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* in 358 primary schools located within two Police Districts<sup>2</sup>. The report confirmed the wide use of the programme in these schools (84% had used the programme at least once and 76% in the last two years).

*Keeping Ourselves Safe* is highly valued by these schools. They commented positively on its structure, organisation, sequencing, user-friendliness, interesting activities, relevance to student needs and the ease with which it is linked to the health curriculum. Typical of the response from schools was one principal's comment, "*very worthwhile and very valuable. We would not consider being without it. I enjoy teaching it and feel it is essential for the continued well being of our children*" (ERO, 2004 p.22).

Twenty four schools indicated children had disclosed abuse at school as a result of the programme. These children were located in schools across all socio economic groups.

Schools considered that the involvement of a Police Education Officer was a key element in the successful delivery of the programme. The availability of Police Education Officers was found to vary between the two Police Districts studied. This affected the use of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* by schools in the less well staffed District.

The main recommendation from the review was to consider ways of increasing parent involvement in the programme. Police are considering some innovative ways to do this but note that the prime responsibility for contacting parents is the schools not the Police's.

The schools surveyed identified a number of positive outcomes from the programme, including:

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<sup>2</sup> Canterbury and North Shore/Waitakere/Rodney.

- increased awareness of child abuse by teachers, children and parents.
- increased knowledge of strategies to use by teachers children and parents.
- empowerment of children.
- children disclosing abuse and schools knowing how to support them.
- improved school/community relationships.
- meeting the requirements for the health curriculum.
- safer school environment
- reviewing policies and procedures
- positive experiences with police.

It is interesting to note that a number of these outcomes suggest the threefold aim of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* is being achieved.

### **Some Recent Developments**

A number of evaluations advised Police that the involvement of parents/caregivers in *Keeping Ourselves Safe* needs to be strengthened. In 2002 Police worked with the then YouthHealth Institute (now the Young New Zealanders' Foundation) to publish an information booklet for parents and caregivers providing advice on how to keep their children safe from abuse. This booklet is provided free to all families the first time their youngsters are taught *Keeping Ourselves Safe*. Home activities that extend both the booklet and the Keeping Ourselves Safe school lessons are available for parents/caregivers on an associated web site<sup>3</sup>.

A draft early childhood *Keeping Ourselves Safe* module has been written and will be trialled during the first half of 2006. Early childhood centres have a strong tradition of parent/caregiver involvement. The draft programme has been designed to capitalise on that.

Briggs and Hawkins' evaluations demonstrated that having *Keeping Ourselves Safe* taught by motivated teachers was one of the most significant factors for its success. Two initiatives have been introduced. Training about *Keeping Ourselves Safe* has been made available to health advisors and student wellbeing facilitators. These staff members work in schools to support and encourage teachers of health. A more innovative initiative has been the contracting of a Māori motivational speaker to promote *Keeping Ourselves Safe* in schools with a large numbers of Māori families. The initiative aims at getting better involvement by parents, particularly Māori parents and reminding teachers and students how important *Keeping Ourselves Safe* is. An independent evaluation by the Education Review Office suggested that the initiative is "*effective in supporting and enhancing the messages of Keeping Ourselves Safe*" (Education Review Office, 2003 p.19).

### **End Piece**

*Keeping Ourselves Safe* operates as a partnership between police and education - between Police Education Officers and teachers.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.noexcuseforabuse.com](http://www.noexcuseforabuse.com)

Evaluation studies have confirmed that this distinctive mode of implementing *Keeping Ourselves Safe* is one of its strengths. Professor Freda Briggs' view is that: "*It would clearly be unwise to make any changes that reduced Police Education Officer contact with schools. My experiences show that, without them, Keeping Ourselves Safe would gradually disappear...*" (Briggs, 2002 p.25).

The Education Review Office report and other evaluations suggest *Keeping Ourselves Safe* is achieving its threefold objective. "*Schools identified many positive outcomes (from) delivering the programme for teachers, children and parents. The immediate outcomes are related to increased awareness and knowledge of strategies. In some schools, the policies and practices related to student safety have been reviewed thus creating a safer school environment. Some schools described cases where children were empowered by the programme to disclose abuse. The schools believed that they were better able to support children and their families.*" (Education Review Office, 2004 p.4).

*Keeping Ourselves Safe* is somewhat unique among New Zealand school programmes in that it has been evaluated, repeatedly, over a longish period of time<sup>4</sup> to identify what improvements could be made. As modules are revised and republished these improvements are incorporated into the new versions. Managers of *Keeping Ourselves Safe* are committed to continuing to work in this way.

The next evaluation scheduled will be of the draft early childhood module. This is being trialled in the first half of this year.

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<sup>4</sup> at least 20 years

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