

YarraMe School

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, required many teachers, parents, and students to rapidly adjust to new modes of learning. In a matter of weeks, YarraMe School had to respond to the immediate needs of the school community and implement viable alternatives to the intake and outreach services. Prioritising our students and families, YarraMe School shifted gear to implement new and inclusive initiatives.

YarraMe School developed a coherent and strategic three-pronged approach to embed a multi-tiered system of support.

The first strategy was a new service for parents/carers, [Parent Help Desk] (<https://www.yarrame.vic.edu.au/help-desk.html>) supporting children with complex needs who were learning from home and was offered to parents state-wide. To empower and up-skill parents/carers, YarraMe provided [free online courses] (<https://www.yarrame.vic.edu.au/courses-for-parents.html>) in ASD and ADHD.

The second strategy was providing a timely and responsive outreach service. In Term 4 2020, YarraMe mobilised its resources to support students, staff, and schools to assist with re-engagement strategies for at-risk cohorts returning to onsite learning. Students were supported in their mainstream primary schools so that outreach teachers could focus on strengthening inclusive practices and re-engagement plans.

The third strategy launched by YarraMe School was to deliver a new course for educators, Wellbeing and Mental Health, to build system wide capacity in responding to the mental health needs of students resulting from the pandemic.

Throughout 2020 YarraMe School held true to our Vision, Mission and Values. The high level of collaboration among staff was fundamental in responding to the changing environment which strengthened the response to YarraMe Community.

Yarraville SDS

At Yarraville Special Developmental school, we have employed an Occupational Therapist as part of the Medical Health Practitioner (MHP) initiative at our school. In response to this new role, we have developed and adapted several approaches to this and our MHP is currently applying the Poly-Vagal theory as a backdrop framework to her practice.

This focuses on the fight, flight response and students inherent sense of safety within themselves, their environment, and their relationships. This has then set the foundation for more complex programs including the Zones of Regulation, So Safe and Well Girls. These have all supported our students to express themselves, gain emotional intelligence, relational safety and understand puberty related changes. EFT tapping, deep pressure massage and the Therapressure brushing technique have also helped support our students to manage their anxiety, reduce self-injurious behaviours and increase their engagement at school.

We are also working on adapting some meditation, mindfulness, affirmation, and yoga video to support the students to engage in these activities. Using a combination of these sensory, neurological, and explicit teaching techniques we feel we are beginning to see some great success in supporting our students' mental health and wellbeing.