

## FACT SHEET – CORRECTING MYTHS ABOUT SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY



When people pause to examine what chaplains actually do in schools, they find a service that supports the particular needs of the school community, and enhances both school culture and the efforts of other care professionals – at a low cost, and achieving significant social outcomes:<sup>1</sup>

1. Almost 175,000 support programs, for over 1.2 million participants nationally every year, including:
  - More than 80,000 sessions supporting social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, with more than 560,000 participants, including 230 funerals and memorial services.
  - Almost 50,000 educational support programs, involving over 475,000 participants, including more than 31,000 free breakfast programs.
  - Almost 15,000 extra-curricular activities in which chaplains are involved.
2. More than 420,000 preventative and responsive formal pastoral care conversations with students every year, including conversations involving:
  - Friendship / peer concerns (141,100)
  - School behavior (74,300)
  - Mental health (many of which are referred on to therapeutic counselling services – ensuring students receive the care they need, but might otherwise not find) (69,800)
  - Bullying and harassment (67,500)
  - Family breakdown / parental separation (67,300)
3. More than 230,000 formal pastoral care conversations every year (54% of total formal pastoral care conversations) across Australia with students in the following categories:
  - Disabilities (72,800)
  - Indigenous (65,500)
  - In state care (42,520)
  - Culturally diverse (29,160)
  - Refugees (6000)
  - Juvenile justice (5,800)

Here are some myths and misconceptions about school chaplaincy, and the actual reality:

### Myth / Misconception

### Reality

a) Chaplains are unqualified counsellors

That assertion is wrong. Chaplains perform pastoral care, not counselling. This involves:

- engaging students with structured programs (e.g. to build self-confidence, help with self esteem, develop skills in peer and other relationships, manage life transitions, work through grief and loss and family breakdown), and
- pastoral care conversations to build resilience and connect students with support networks.

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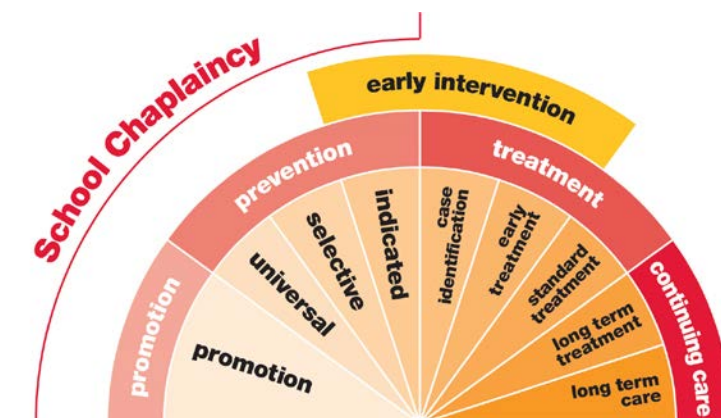
<sup>1</sup> Each of the figures in paragraphs 1-3 represent the outcomes for NSCA-affiliated chaplaincies (in approximately 2000 of the 3000 schools funded by the NSCP), for which we have data – so the total outcomes of the program in 3000 schools reasonably would be even greater than these figures.



**Myth / Misconception**

**Reality**

These activities seek to promote positive wellbeing, prevent negative wellbeing factors and ensure students are referred appropriately to others where therapeutic intervention is needed – the ‘PPEI’ model (Promotion, Prevention, and Early Intervention):<sup>2</sup>



b) NSCP does more harm than good

That assertion is wrong.

In fact the evidence is overwhelming that school chaplaincy is strongly positive for schools – in wellbeing and educational terms – as shown by those who know schools and students best:<sup>3</sup>

- School staff (42%), the students themselves (26%) and their parents/carers (17%) are the largest sources of referral of a student to a school chaplain. Those closest to the students (and the students themselves) are the ones creating 85% of the demand for school chaplaincy services.
- Those interactions result in thousands of referrals to other sources of professional support – including guidance officers, counsellors and psychologists. Chaplains are required to be trained in identifying mental health issues and referring appropriately.

In this way, many students who might otherwise not seek the help they need can find the support of a chaplain, as well as referral to sources of therapeutic care.

<sup>2</sup> This is adapted from PJ Mrazek and RJ Haggerty, *Reducing the Risks for Mental Disorders: Frontiers for Preventive Intervention Research* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Refer to page 2 of McCrindle Research snapshot in the appendix.



**Myth / Misconception**

**Reality**

This is hardly surprising, given that all chaplains are trained in how to identify mental health issues and refer appropriately.<sup>4</sup>

c) Chaplains are untrained

That assertion is wrong.

The mandated minimum standard qualification is a Certificate IV in youth work, community work or equivalent. All school chaplains meet that standard and 77% of NSCA affiliated chaplains exceed the mandatory educational standard.

d) Educationalists and psychologists reject the chaplaincy program

This assertion is wrong – at least for those who have studied the school chaplaincy program.

For example, a 30 month longitudinal study completed in 2012 by the Research Centre for Vulnerable Children and Families demonstrated (among other outcomes):<sup>5</sup>

- the social and emotional support provided by school chaplains to students has a considerable positive impact;
- school chaplains help to build up students’ confidence to a considerable extent;
- the programs that the school chaplains run helps to develop students’ self-esteem;
- students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities are assisted by their chaplains; and
- students experiencing grief and loss or facing relationship difficulties are helped by their chaplain.

e) Federal money would be better spent on qualified youth workers

Chaplains ARE qualified in youth work, community work and equivalent areas of training.

The program achieves significant outcomes, with a proven record over 11 years, and at a very modest cost to government:

- almost 175,000 support programs delivered each year, for over 1.2 million participants nationally;
- more than 420,000 preventative and responsive formal pastoral care conversations with students every year; and
- a committed workforce of around 2000 trained pastoral care workers (66% in rural or remote communities, and 58% of the chaplains are women)

<sup>4</sup> Clauses 9(c)(iv) and 30(b) of the Commonwealth-States-Territories Project Agreement at

[http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/project-agreement/nat\\_school\\_chaplaincy.pdf](http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education/project-agreement/nat_school_chaplaincy.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Harries, Cant, Lavery, Philips and Di Risio, *Evaluation of YouthCARE Chaplaincy Service in Western Australia* (University of Western Australia, 2012) ch 4. The study reinforced the 98% acceptance rate by school principals of an earlier 2009 study. The 2012 study looked at a wide group of stakeholders including school principals, teachers, parents (including regional indigenous parents), students, psychologists and professional associations such as primary and secondary school associations, and Parents and Citizens Associations.



**Myth / Misconception**

**Reality**

involved in promotion, prevention and early intervention activities for youth - and all of them trained in how to identify mental health issues and to refer appropriately.

Those outcomes are delivered at a cost to the federal government of approximately \$1.55 per child per week.

The NSCP also represents a significant social return on government investment. We have calculated that for every \$1 of federal funding, \$2.38 of value is delivered in schools, through the uplift of donations, volunteer hours, school support and in-kind assistance.

- f) The High Court twice ruled chaplaincy as invalid

The two High Court cases concerned now-superseded funding models. The Commonwealth has used a valid funding model since 2014.

In any case, in 2012 the High Court was unanimous (7:0) in finding that the school chaplaincy program is not invalid under the establishment clause (s.116) of the Australian constitution.<sup>6</sup>

- g) The High Court declared school chaplaincy is no value to children

That assertion is wrong.

In the 2014 High Court decision, the joint judgement observed, *'it may be assumed that provision of chaplaincy services at a school will help some students... will be of benefit to them ... in the sense of providing them with an advantage or a good.'*<sup>7</sup>

- h) Schools should be secular. Religion has no place and should be left between consenting adults in the privacy of their home

Students should be free to explore spirituality for themselves. Denying this to students is contrary to: liberal thinking on free discourse; the human right of freedom of thought, conscience and belief; and the Melbourne Declaration on Australian Educational goals.<sup>8</sup>

In a free society, why should this one subject be excluded from schools – particularly when it plays such a positive protective role in wellbeing (including in secular literature)?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> James, Peter CJ; Benson, David - "School Chaplaincy, Secularism and Church–State Separation in a Liberal Democracy" (2014) 33(1) University of Queensland Law Journal 131, at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UQLawJl/2014/8.html>

<sup>7</sup> Per French CJ, Hayne, Kiefel, Bell and Keane JJ, Williams v Commonwealth [2014] HCA 23 (Williams No.2), at 44.

<sup>8</sup> E.g Australian *educational* values: that students develop 'an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and *religious* diversity, and a sense of global citizenship'. Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians (2008) 4.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Twenge, Brittany Gentile, Nathan DeWall, Debbie Ma, Katharine Lacefield and David Schurtz, 'Birth Cohort Increases in Psychopathology among Young Americans, 1938–2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI'



**Myth / Misconception**

**Reality**

- i) Secular roles are the neutral option in schools

That assertion is wrong, as the European Court of Human Rights has found:

*‘Neutrality requires a pluralist approach on the part of the State, not a secularist one. It encourages respect for all world views rather than a preference for one. ... A preference for secularism over alternative world views – whether religious, philosophical or otherwise—is not a neutral option.’<sup>10</sup>*

School chaplaincy is based on this approach, consistent with Australia’s multicultural and plural nature.
  
- j) Having religious chaplaincy is discriminatory against students who do not have a religious faith

Chaplains offer support to students regardless of whether or not they have a religious faith. However, because chaplains have a personal faith connection, they are able to better relate to and support students who come from a personal or cultural faith background – which is still more than 70% of the population.
  
- k) Chaplains can’t convert students, so there’s no point in a religious chaplaincy program – secular workers should be used

It is entirely appropriate that chaplains cannot proselytise, and must respect the views of all students (whether religious or not).

However, a key distinctive of the program is that the role expressly supports the social, emotional AND spiritual wellbeing of students. Chaplains do not define that spirituality for students, but work with them to develop a positive spirituality, taking account of the student’s own cultural, family and religious (if any) background.

A secular program would lack that spiritual dimension – and would not work with the student’s own cultural, family and religious (if any) background - yet spirituality is a key element in wellbeing. No other role in schools fills that space.

The chaplaincy program is a proven tool for the federal government to meet the spiritual development objectives of the Melbourne Declaration on Australian Educational goals.

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(2010) 30(2) Clinical Psychology Review 145-154. See the set of protective factors (which include ‘moral beliefs’ and ‘participation in a church or other community group’) and risk factors in Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health – A Monograph (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000) 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> *Lautsi v. Italy*, Appl. No. 30814/06, Grand Chamber (18 March 2011), per Judge Power. Discussed by Ian Leigh in ‘The European Court of Human Rights and Religious Neutrality’, Gavin D’Costa, Malcolm Evans, Tariq Modood and Julian Rivers (eds) *Religion in a Liberal State* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

# APPENDIX 1: MCCRINDLE 2017 SNAPSHOT

## 2017 NATIONAL SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY SNAPSHOT

### QUICK FACTS

**1,562** CHAPLAINS

working in

**1929**  
schools

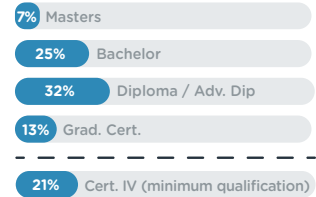


The average number of work days is 3

Average age **45 years**



**QUALIFICATIONS**



**Gender**



**77%**

of chaplains exceed the minimum qualification level of Cert. IV across Youth Work, Social Science, Education, Ministry/ Theology and other disciplines.

### WHAT DO CHAPLAINS DO ?



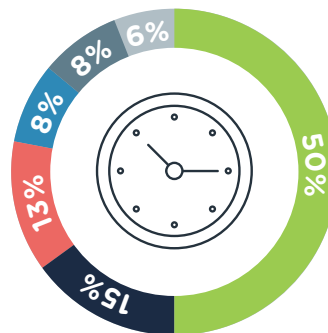
**Social, emotional & spiritual support**



**Wellbeing outcomes**



**Educational outcomes**



**How chaplains spend their time:**

- Social, emotional and spiritual support
- Role modelling and mentoring
- Educational support
- Extra-curricular activities
- Team contributions
- Community Development

School chaplains promote social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing through role modelling, mentoring, pastoral care, structured activities and programs.

### A CARING PRESENCE



Every week chaplains have  
**28,264**  
informal conversations with students

Every week chaplains have an additional  
**17,867**  
informal conversations with parents/carers & school staff



Chaplains are uniquely placed to connect with students through quality time and significant conversations about everyday life.



As adult role models & mentors who built into the school system, chaplains become protective factors for the wellbeing of students.

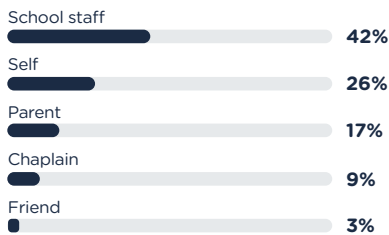


Chaplains also provide a caring & supportive environment for both parents/carers and staff through personal conversations.

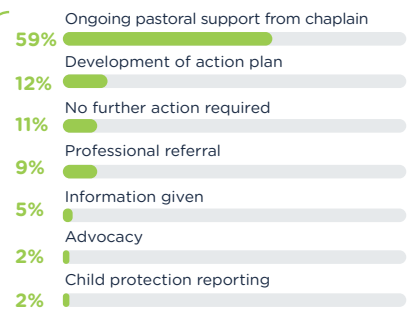
# APPENDIX 1: MCCRINDLE 2017 SNAPSHOT

## PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS

### Sources of referral

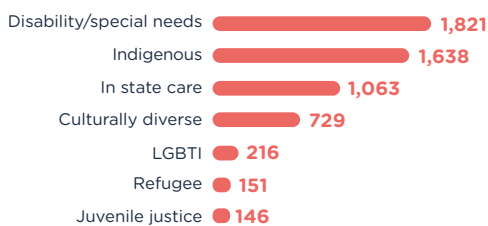


### Outcomes



EVERY WEEK  
chaplains have  
**13,461**  
formal conversations  
WITH STUDENTS

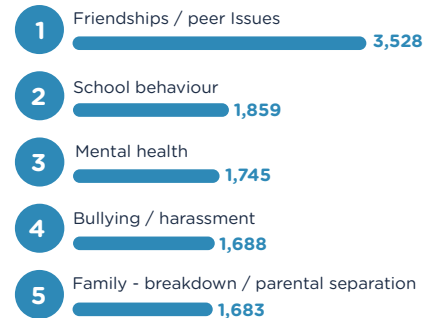
### Formal pastoral conversations with particular student groups per week



**5,582**

meetings with school based support professionals including guidance officers, counsellors, special needs coordinators and many others.

### Top 5 pastoral issues



## PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES



Chaplains make a **significant contribution** to the wellbeing of school communities through the facilitation of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing programs and participation in extra-curricular activities.



Each term chaplains run

**43,262** SESSIONS

supporting

**314,353** STUDENTS

### Extra-curricular school activities

Chaplains are involved with **3,626** extra-curricular school activities each week...



**1236**  
Fun/recreational activities



**849**  
Sports



**406**  
Excursions



**341**  
Student leadership



**292**  
Music



**502**  
Other

### Program breakdown

Social, emotional and spiritual support programs

**140,612** participants

**20,564** sessions

*Including 58 funeral/memorial services*

Role modelling and mentoring programs

**20,570** participants

**8,795** sessions

Educational support programs

**119,510** participants

**12,167** sessions

*Including 7,945 breakfast programs*

Community development programs

**33,661** participants

**1,736** sessions

### Methodology

The 2017 National Chaplain Census took place during term 3, 2017 when 1184 chaplains took the survey with 940 completes. The data presented in this infographic has been extrapolated from the survey data to match the total number of chaplains (1562) in Australia working for organisations that are part of the National Schools Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) at the end of term 3.

### Background information

The National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) is a network of Christian Chaplaincy organisations in Australia. It is represented by Access Ministries (VIC), Generate Ministries (NSW), Schools Ministry Group (SA), YouthCARE (WA) and Scripture Union (ACT, QLD and TAS).

Research and infographic by:

**mccrindle**

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