

MEDIA RELEASE

How *Solving The Jigsaw* can stop child brutality

A gripping documentary showing how kids are learning to tackle the growing threats of bullying at school - and violence at home - will be screened on ABC1 on Thursday 11 June at 9.25 pm.

The documentary profiles an innovative program, currently based in Victoria, that could be making a significant impact nationwide.

- q In graphic and moving detail, the documentary shows the kids grappling with their feelings as they share their concerns about things that have happened at school and at home: 'My Dad threatened me with a knife', 'Dad has stopped talking to us', and 'There was a big fight last night and I felt really scared and frightened'.
- q They are hardly alone. One Australian child in six is bullied every week. (By the age of 20, 60 per cent of bullies will have a criminal record.)
- q The statistics on domestic violence and its effects on children are equally disturbing. More than half a million teenagers in Australia are living with violence in the home.
- q *Kids' Business* follows students in a grade five and six class taking part in ***Solving the Jigsaw***, (currently) a Victoria-wide early-intervention and prevention program that is helping them learn to feel safe and to develop trust. It is hoped the program can be extended nationwide.
- q Filmed in a Bendigo primary school, *Solving the Jigsaw* bridges the worlds of home and school, promoting the belief that a child's self-esteem and wellbeing are raised when they feel safe, valued and connected.

Programs such as Jigsaw are vital, says Dr Elspeth McInnes, a director of an early childhood and family studies research group at the University of South Australia.

'We can't afford *not* to have programs like *Solving the Jigsaw* in our schools if we are ever going to succeed in reducing and preventing violence and abuse in our homes, our schools and workplaces and streets.

'Children are exposed to violence and abuse across their communities but there is little opportunity for most to safely talk about what has happened to them.

'When whole classes and schools become involved, the community is transformed.'

Alastair Nicholson, chair of the National Centre against Bullying and a former Chief Justice of the Family Court, says the Jigsaw program is one of the most outstanding he has seen.

'It is a truly innovative program that extends beyond bullying prevention to the teaching of values such as respect for each other and for differences of religion or lifestyle,' Mr Nicholson says.

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- **INTERVIEWS:** For more on *Solving the Jigsaw*, contact Carla Meurs on 0407 326 700, or Margaret Augerinos on 0418 544 045. Interviews can also be arranged with Dr McInnes about the effects of bullying on children.
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BACKGROUND FOR MEDIA

The story behind *Kids' Business*

Kids' Business is a compelling documentary about kids and violence, bullying and relationships.

Filmed in a Bendigo primary school by People Pictures, it follows a grade five and six class taking part in Solving the Jigsaw, an early-intervention and prevention program that changes a culture of violence and bullying into a culture of wellbeing.

For an hour each week, Jigsaw facilitator Bernadette Wright encourages the kids to talk openly about all aspects of their lives. The film shows them grappling with their feelings as they share their concerns in front of their classmates about things that have happened at school and at home.

‘My Dad threatened me with a knife.’

‘Dad has stopped talking to us.’

‘We want to see our great-granddad before he dies.’

‘No one plays with me and I’m not included.’

‘There was a big fight last night and I felt really scared and frightened.’

‘I want to spend more time with Dad.’

Over the course of a year Jigsaw helps them learn to feel safe and to develop trust. They also learn to deal with their problems, and how to talk about their lives and what matters.

In the film, Casey tells the group that she was tired of her father not listening to her. She tried to tell him how she felt and raised her voice. He responded by picking up a knife and jamming it into a chopping board.

Kacee tells how upset and scared she was after she saw her stepfather hold her mother down and grab her brother by the throat.

Jacob explains how he was distressed when his absent father told Jacob’s sister how cross he was that his kids forgot to phone him on his birthday. Jacob has had surgery to remove a brain tumour. Since the operation he can’t walk, run or play footy the way he used to. He also has short-term memory loss.

Jacob believes his father might not want to see him again.

Hayley and Jessica are cousins. A feud in their extended families has prevented them from seeing their great-grandfather for two years. The girls are worried they won't see him before he dies.

Bernadette asks the girls who they have spoken to in their families, and what they would like to say. The girls make some notes and each agrees to talk to their parents. Hayley accepts her mother's view that it is better for Hayley to remember her great-grand father the way he was.

Jessica is able to visit her great-grandfather. Hayley asked her family for a memento of her great-grandfather. Both girls seem pleased with the outcomes.

The making of the documentary

Solving the Jigsaw had originally invited People Pictures, film-makers Stewart Carter and Cath South, into the Bendigo classroom to produce videos that could be used to train facilitators, teachers and parents.

Amazed by what they found, Stuart and Cath distilled 80 hours of footage into a 58-minute documentary that reveals the complexities of the children's lives and their relationships.

'The making of this film has been an extraordinary learning experience,' Cath says.

'As filmmakers, it has always interested us that there are some stories that are virtually impossible to tell in a documentary form. That everyone in the film was willing to have their stories on the screen has been profoundly moving.'

When they began shooting, the pair had no idea they would be witnessing such challenging and moving moments.

'While shooting we were amazed at how easily Bernadette turned dramas into places of learning, with clear ways to move forward,' Cath says.

'We were particularly struck by the wisdom and clarity these kids showed in their understanding of their experiences.'

By the editing stage the film makers had learned that the kids could raise difficult topics, and through Bernadette's effective approach, gain greater understanding of their lives.

It was also clear that the kids were happier. So they kept the difficult stories. During the editing they screened the footage to the kids, and with their consent, later screened it to their parents.

The filmmakers decision to include those challenging and sensitive stories, and to overcome their urge to censor material, turned out to be correct.

All the families agreed the footage should be included in the documentary. They felt that it was important for people to hear their kids talk wisely and openly about their feelings.

Hearing the kids' perspectives on domestic violence, relationships with parents and grief shows just how deeply they are affected by such issues.

To arrange an interview contact: Carla Meurs on 0407 326 700, or Margaret Augerinos on 0418 544 045.