

9. STUDENT RESILIENCY AND HEALTH & EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Much has been documented about the notion of ‘resiliency’, which is made up of protective factors, found both within individuals and their environments, which impact upon the **health and well-being of young people** and consequently on their **educational outcomes**. This section will discuss resilience at an individual level, and section 10 will discuss community resilience in the context of social capital and the ability of the Croc Festival™ to positively affect this.

At an individual level resilience is described as:

The ability of an individual to successfully recover from, or adapt to, adversity and to develop social/emotional and academic competence despite exposure to life’s problems.^{vi}

There are several qualities acknowledged in the literature that contribute to a young person being resilient^{vii}.

These include such qualities as:

- Positive problem solving skills
- Self-efficacy
- High sense of worth
- Awareness of and empathy with others
- Willingness and capacity to plan
- Good communication and social skills
- Good teacher/school bonding
- Having stable relationships with peers
- Considering realistic future plan
- Experiencing success in one or more areas of life
- Possessing a strong attachment to at least one adult
- Having a positive sense of being able to achieve and deal effectively with tasks

9.1 PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR RESILIENCY

While many of the qualities for resilience described above are biologically-based, the literature also points to a number of environmental characteristics, or protective factors, that can enhance resilience at an individual level. These protective factors can exist in a number of environments including the school, the family, peer

groups and the wider community. The following table provides a summary of some of the protective factors that can be seen as influences in developing resiliency in young people.

INTERNAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS (Within the individual)	EXTERNAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS (Environmental)
<p>Genetics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No family history of chemical dependence ▪ First-born <p>Personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good verbal skills ▪ Internal locus of control ▪ High self-esteem ▪ Healthy attitude toward drug use ▪ Responsible ▪ Sense of well-being ▪ Self-efficacy ▪ Confident optimism/considering realistic future plans ▪ Sense of humour <p>Physical Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good physical health ▪ Diet/exercise ▪ No congenital defects ▪ No acquired handicaps <p>Individual’s interaction with environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good social skills ▪ Achievement via independence ▪ Good coping skills ▪ Good communication skills ▪ Good assertiveness skills ▪ Independent thinking ▪ Positive problem solving skills ▪ Strong school bonding 	<p>Immediate family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number children ▪ Positive parent-child relationship, especially attention during first year ▪ Structure, rules, direction and guidance in household ▪ Shared family values ▪ Extended family/presence of additional caretakers ▪ Informal network of kin/supportive and available for counsel ▪ Cultural diversity <p>Extended family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive communication ▪ Cultural diversity <p>Social/peer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drug-free peer group ▪ Strong positive peer bonding ▪ Cultural diversity <p>Community/school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informal network of neighbours available for emotional support & counsel ▪ Counsel available from teachers ▪ Access to specialist services (mental health, remedial classes) ▪ Trustworthy role models/staff worthy of trust ▪ Cultural diversity

While the Croc Festival™ is not able to impact on all of the protective factors described above, particularly those associated with family (and obviously those termed ‘genetics’), there are a number where Croc Festival™ is suggested to have built or enhanced these protective factors. In the following section a number of examples are provided of how Croc Festivals™ have contributed to strengthening the individuals’, families’, school/community’s social framework for fostering resilience, however the extent to which this occurs is difficult to measure.

9.1.1 *Internal protective factors (personality, physical health and individual's interaction with their environment)*

While most people listed many benefits for students from their participation in the Croc Festivals™, they also added a proviso, as there was a perceived need to be realistic about what can be achieved from a three-day event. While they could identify immediate outcomes, in terms of long-term outcomes, the Festival was seen as “a brick among many bricks”.

A range of benefits were identified for students, particularly as the Festival is seen as a fun and exciting event that offers something different for students. Students in both the post-Festival and in-Festival research were able to identify a range of activities that they enjoyed and it was clear that the Festival offers a unique and different experience for each student. Many students commented specifically upon the exciting atmosphere of the Festival itself:

“I feel energetic, happy and proud to be Australian.”

One of the main benefits that has been identified consistently in the research since 2000 is the impact of student involvement in the Festival on **self-esteem**. Students are involved in a number of activities that were seen to increase confidence such as trying new activities, asking questions and interacting with new people - “you see students’ growing confidence”. The strengthening of self-esteem is particularly important when viewed within the context of students’ educational development:

“Student approaches to learning provides evidence that students with strong motivation and a belief in their own abilities are able to take better control of their own learning, and that this helps them to perform much better at school^{viii}.”

The Festival was seen to promote ‘having a go’ and to ‘try your best’ without fear of embarrassment and without judgement. Students were seen to gain a sense of achievement through trying new things as part of the Festival. Performing on stage was also seen as an important way to increase confidence and self-esteem, as well as a way for children to learn skills about working together.

“It’s relationship building (through dance and socially), confidence building, offers teamwork opportunities. It gives them goals and something to look forward to.”

“The kids get a sense of achievement with their performances – getting rid of the shame factor. It is very rewarding for them.”

Similarly, a number of teachers felt the Festival is a positive experience as it is based upon building and exercising respect:

“As an Aboriginal school the theme ‘Respect Yourself, Respect Your Culture’ is very important to our students.”

Once again, respect is an important building block in both personal and community development. Respect has been deemed an important part of empowering individuals to “*take control over their living and working conditions in order to be able to develop lifestyles conducive to health*”^{ix}.

There were also a number of benefits identified through the research around **social and communication skills**. As mentioned in section 8.5, Port Augusta and Thursday Island teachers mentioned a skills program that they conduct before the Festival that gives basic office experience to students in making phone calls and using a fax machine. Students called a range of local businesses in order to promote the Festival as well as to source materials for use as part of the Festival, such as materials for their performances. This was also seen to increase communication skills and **confidence** in communicating. This was seen as particularly important in Thursday Island as it gave students an opportunity to speak with business owners in English. This exercise gave students exposure to businesses and members of the wider community, while at the same time gave them **responsibility** within the school community.

Teachers mentioned the Croc Festival™ promoting student responsibility in a number of ways, i.e. responsibility to travel, stay away from home, participate in interactive activities and practice for performances, etc.

The Croc traineeship program was seen as an excellent way to combine hands-on work experience with **job responsibility**:

“**[It gave us] experience and we learnt to work as a team and take on responsibilities.**”

“**We learnt to work with and trust other people.**”

“**Younger kids admire you.**”

Students involved as part of the Croc traineeship were very positive about the experience and teachers felt that the program was extremely beneficial in helping students develop leadership qualities, and identifying possible career options for the future.

There were a number of examples of how the Croc Festival™ encouraged students to **consider future plans**, set goals and motivated students to work toward achieving them. Section 8.1 discusses the recall and perceived impact of the ‘I want to be’ workshop in relation to this, as when prompted about future careers many students made the link between education and a career:

“**If you want to be something you have to get an education and put your mind to it.**”

Section 8.3 demonstrates the ways in which the Croc Festival™ **offers students something to work towards**, which was seen as an important motivator with regards to school. Many believed that the Festival also offered opportunities to **broaden horizons** and encourage **goal setting**.

Limitations were acknowledged by participants, as the motivation to stay at school was felt to be driven by many factors, including the need for this to be developed at home/in the family.

Many teachers and community members commented upon the importance of the drug and alcohol messages that increased awareness, particularly as the Festival is drug and alcohol-free. The Festival was seen to be an important experience for students as an example of having fun without alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. This is particularly important for creating a safe community environment that encourages healthy lifestyle choices.

Section 7.2 discusses the high student recall of general messages about alcohol and **other drug use, physical health, diet** and **exercise**, all of which are linked to enhanced resilience in young people. There was also some articulation of the benefits of making positive choices, although to a lesser extent than general health messages.

Section 8.4 discusses the greater sense of school pride experienced by some students as a result of participating in the Croc Festival™, particularly those involved in performances. A number of teachers also provided examples of improvements in teacher/student relationships. These relationship and pride issues can be linked to **stronger school bonding** among some students, again a protective factor associated with resilience.

9.1.2 External protective factors: family

While participants found it relatively easy to discuss interactions between students and teachers, or students and the wider community, or networks between different community organisations, most found it much harder to discuss the link between the Croc Festival™ and improved interactions between family members. This is possibly attributable to the Festival being primarily aimed at students, rather than their families. However, the following observations were made in relation to this.

Many spoke of the opportunity for parents to get involved by attending the performances and the chance to watch their children perform as an important benefit of the Festival. This was seen as especially relevant for Indigenous parents who may have limited involvement with school activities.

“Pride in the eyes of the mums and dads, as it is one of the only things they see their kids doing.”

One student had this to say about parental involvement in the Festival:

“It’s good for them (parents) to know what you are doing at school.”

Research shows that encouraging parents of Indigenous students to be more involved within schools and educational institutions has positive effects upon Indigenous education. One of the causes of low Indigenous school retention is related to factors associated with culture and history such as *“parental discomfort with schools.”* Parents increased involvement in the Festival in some cases was linked to an increased interaction with school activities, which offered opportunities to strengthen ties between parents and the school, and to encourage effective communication in the future:

“It has given me a chance to interact with parents who normally have a negative attitude towards school. Now they see things differently.”

“It bridges the gap between school and the community as often the parents come along.”

“It has enabled teachers to form closer working relationships with parents and other members of the community as we have worked together to make it all come together.”

“There is more positive talk about what young people are doing at Port Lincoln High. Also, as a result more parents have been involved in the school – some have travelled with the school to the Festival – and they are becoming more comfortable interacting with the school now.”

“The fact that 500 parents are out there on the school oval is really significant for us, as we find it just so hard to get them to even walk through the front gate.”

While the Croc Festival™ focuses primarily on students, feedback suggests that some parents directly benefit from their involvement. This ranges from parents attending the performances, through to parents volunteering with the school or in the hosting of the event. Some even felt there was a positive impact just from parents coming onto the school grounds for the performances, as this was seen to help break down barriers. This ties in with some of the recommendations from *Impacts on Social Capital and Educational Attainment*, which suggest that there is a need to help make schools and educational institutions *“parent and elder friendly places”*. It can be argued that the Festival is helping to break down historical barriers between parents and schools through parents’ involvement in the Festival.

“Parents take an interest in what students are doing and provide support and advice. Volunteers from the community and school help out at workshops and the Croc Village.”

“Elders and parents help out at Croc in security and as Teachers aids. Elders also come and talk at school about Aboriginal culture, the land and bush tucker.”

A number of parents were heavily involved in the organisation of the Festival, either logistically or by providing support with cultural activities. This was particularly the case in Weipa, where the Chairperson and other members of the Croc Committee consisted mainly of parents.

“Parents were involved in and supported the activities and supervised as volunteers. They also constructed the Croc Village tents, made Johnny cakes and taught culture.”

Finally, there was some evidence from the careers market that some parents accompanied their children when they went through and that a few even came back later for more information. Activity facilitators as part of the health exhibition hoped that health information would be handed onto parents from their children when they took booklets and pamphlets home. This highlights the idea that the information and messages regarding health and careers is not just for students, but can also benefit parents as well.

“The range of workshops and information that promote to students that there are choices in life as well as support, not only from other students but also parents, community, teachers and organisations.”

The Croc Festival™ through its incorporation of parents into the Festival as facilitators, cultural experts, and teachers’ aids and as an audience to the performances is addressing another recommendation from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research. The recommendation states that:

“Commonwealth, State and Territory Education departments should explore new models of educational delivery that integrate communities and schools, enabling true lifelong learning from preschool to adulthood^{xi}.”

While the impact of the Croc Festivals™ on parents is restricted because many parents have limited exposure to the event beyond the performances, the Croc Festivals™ are an example of this new model of educational delivery through their ability to deliver learning in an interactive, fun way and also because they enable student, parent and community involvement.

9.1.3 External protective factors: social/peer

Many students identified **meeting and mixing with students from other schools** as one of the highlights of the Festival, and this was made possible through some of the activities and during free time at the Croc Village. Teachers also felt that this was an important benefit for students as they were given opportunities to interact with students from different areas. For children from remote communities, this was seen as especially beneficial, as the interaction was seen to strengthen their character and self-confidence. This interaction is what students comment on most often, and it was felt this could have a flow-on effect into high school (for example, many of the children from remote area schools may attend one of the host community schools when they go to high school). In particular, for students who spoke English as a second language, this interaction was seen as an effective way to increase their communication skills, as by necessity they had to communicate in English.

A number of teachers and activity facilitators mentioned the student benefits of performing in relation to teamwork and bonding, as well as the sense of collective pride and achievement experienced by students. Many research participants observed a sense of **positive peer bonding** among students in relation to

performing at the Croc Festival™. This was considered a strong positive impact of the Croc Festival™, as it was considered somewhat unusual given the general negative direction of peer pressure in relation to ‘achievement’ experienced in many of the school communities.

A co-ordinator of a youth centre felt the Festival was very important, and the positive outcome of this was to see students’ “willingness to be involved in a public spectacle”, which was perceived as something that youth are often hesitant to volunteer for.

A number of students said that they felt proud to belong to their school as part of their involvement in the Festival, particularly if they were performing. Teachers were also able to identify the benefits for students and schools provided by the opportunity to perform:

“Performing on stage gives the school a higher profile and it gets people talking about us back in Port Lincoln – we have been in the paper three times before coming here. A mural has been produced that depicts our performance.”

Section 6.4 discusses the positive reactions both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students had toward mixing with students from different cultural backgrounds, and that being involved in Indigenous cultural activities at school made them feel proud. The positive promotion of **cultural diversity** within communities is considered one of the protective factors influencing resiliency in young people.

9.1.4 External protective factors: school

Both students and teachers spoke of the Festivals’™ ability to ‘break down barriers’ and allow interaction in a more relaxed, informal and fun social situation, which resulted in enhanced **trust** in some student/teacher relationships. Students talked about getting to know their teachers in a new way outside of the classroom. Teachers spoke of similar occurrences:

“There are a lot of hard times at school and this gives you a chance to get to know them on another level.”

Section 8.3 presents some evidence to suggest that there may be some link between the Croc Festival™ and **school attendance**, although the extent to which this is the case is difficult to measure. Some teachers mentioned that the retention rate for Indigenous students has increased in recent times, and it was felt that this may in some way be influenced by Croc Festival™, although most were hesitant to identify direct cause and effect relationships. A number of teachers mentioned higher attendance in the lead-up to the Festival, particularly as for many schools participating in the Croc Festival is used as a reward for good behaviour or school attendance.

Satisfaction with the Festival was extremely high across organisations and schools within the communities, and it was agreed that the Festival offers a **unique learning and social experience** for students. The volume and variety of activities and experiences mentioned by those included within the research is a testament to the Croc Festival's™ ability to satisfy a wide range of interests of students.

Many teachers referred to the number of students who did their performance practice outside school hours as indicative of the increased student motivation toward school as a result of the Croc Festival™.

The Festival *“brings in a touch of novelty and newness”* as people are exposed to new technologies, new activities such as sports and dancing, and have the opportunity to meet new people and students. This was seen to be particularly relevant for students from rural and remote communities as they are exposed to activities and information that they would not have otherwise seen.

“It’s good to have the Croc Festival™ here because we can’t guarantee being able to get the funds to get kids to the mainland to see those types of things.” (Thursday Island)

“It gives them a wider understanding of their lives and people around them. For example, the activities about voting (the AEC) equips them with skills for life.”

Amongst students who were from the host community, the Croc Festival™ was seen to promote community spirit and pride among the youth. In fact, the Festival was often perceived to increase community pride throughout the whole community:

“I love it (Croc Festival™), it’s brilliant! Kids get involved who don’t usually, or won’t do anything in class and the results are amazing. They’re interacting and helping each other. Isolated kids have made friends. It brings schools, communities, teachers and the public together, there’s not enough of it. The Croc Festival™ is the only thing that we do as part of a community.”

There were a number of **networking** opportunities identified between different sectors of the community. Teachers commented that they were able to interact with activity facilitators, develop contacts and collect information. For example, in Thursday Island local cabinet-makers were able to establish links with the high school and when they were ready to take on an apprentice they contacted teachers in order to assess the interest from students in taking on the apprenticeship. This issue of networking and its associated benefits in relation to social capital is discussed in more detail in section 10.

9.1.5 *External protective factors: community*

Howard and Johnson discussed teachers’ perceptions of the resilience enhancing potential of linking schools with other community-based organisations, particularly health programs that “introduce students to community agencies and their roles and supportive nature of agencies out there and bodies out there to assist that they might be able to tap into at an older age^{xii}.”

The Croc Festival™ has been recognised as an important vehicle that encourages interaction between different sectors of the community, and often building long-term relationships as a result of this. This was demonstrated in many ways.

The Croc Festival™ was seen to **expose students to positive opportunities and information within the community**, particularly about their future direction, education, health and interests.

“They learnt by not knowing they were being taught.”

The Croc Festival™ was seen to **raise awareness of the organisations** involved in the Festival. For example, a youth centre that in the past had organised activities at the Croc Festival™ said that this was very effective as it increased the awareness of their service, especially as they came into contact with people who don't usually use their service in the community, which was very good in increasing exposure to young people and the schools.

This increased awareness was seen to improve the receptiveness of schools to bringing in people from the community and community organisations to run cultural activities, information days and workshops, which **increased the interaction between schools and communities**.

The interaction with various **role models** was identified in all communities as an important benefit for students as part of their involvement in the Festival. Students spoke of meeting people like Evonne Goolagong-Cawley and Kyle van der Kuyp and hearing stories of their experiences. Teachers felt this was beneficial as these role models emphasised the importance of school and achieving your best. Students were also able to interact with local role models and leaders such as health care workers, local TAFE workers, local council workers etc. This mix of local and national role models shows students examples of the range of options open to them and the belief that they can achieve anything if they put their minds to it.

Local role models are of particular relevance to Indigenous students as research into Indigenous school retention shows that students are more likely to stay at school longer when sustained contact with people of higher education levels is maintained^{xiii}.

Section 6.2 discusses the fact that for many communities, the Croc Festival™ is the only event that is well attended by all sectors of the community, that is youth and adults, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. Many people commented on the success of the Festival in being drug and alcohol free and it was seen to be an important community-supported message to provide to young people, which helped to strengthen the community's social framework for fostering resilience.

It was seen to demonstrate to young people a sense of **community unity** in putting together the event, something that no other community events in any of the communities was perceived to have achieved.

Many people commented that the Croc Festival™ made the community stronger and more unified, even if it was only for the three days when the Festival was on. Strengthening the community in this way was attributed to the **networking** opportunities offered by the Festival and the way families, schools, businesses and community organisations were united by the Festival. Making a community stronger through *“networks of social relations... that serve the purpose of potentially enabling groups and individuals access to a pool of resources and supports^{xiv}”* is the foundation for social capital, which is discussed in the following section.