

The Walk of Life Program

A crime prevention and child protection initiative

ARCJC Conference, July 2024
Dr Emma Antrobus

Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

*The Brisbane River pattern from A Guidance Through Time
by Casey Coolwell and Kyra Mancktelow.*



Acknowledgements

Participants from Walk of Life Programs

Senior Constable Mark Cartner

Suncorp Safer Queensland Community Grant

ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course (Life Course Centre) Social Interventions Grant

Context

Youth anti-social behaviour (including criminal behaviour) and victimisation create significant harm and concern

Youth disengaged from education who also have poor perceptions/relationships with police

- ▶ Site of program is an area of significant youth disengagement:
 - High youth unemployment
 - Lower than average school attendance rates

Challenge: Need to find a way to engage these young people who are at increased risk of becoming victims and/or offenders

The Walk of Life Program

The Walk of Life is an outdoor bush adventure program that aims to engage young people at risk of justice system involvement to develop resilience and life skills through experiential learning in a wilderness-based expedition while connecting with police, school staff, and pro-social peers.

The Walk of Life program aims to:

- Develop leadership and resilience
- Increase positive relationships between students, police and teachers
- Improve student behaviour
- Remove barriers to learning
- Reduce truancy rates
- Divert students from antisocial/destructive behaviour.

Variety is the Walk of Life

The Walk of Life Program encourages participation from both students identified as "at risk" (referring to students who the school identifies as disengaged in the classroom, who have significant disciplinary issues, or who have come into contact with police or child safety) and students who are not "at risk"

The Research

Aims to investigate whether this program can benefit students in a holistic way, providing positive outcomes in terms of:

- Personal and Social development, including factors like self-confidence and resilience
- Perceptions of school and police
- Police contact
- Peer and professional relationships

Evaluation Measures

Student surveys:

- measuring factors such as (immediate/short term) changes in self-control, leadership, goal setting (student objectives), and opinions of professionals (e.g. school and police).

Interviews with professionals involved with the program:

- measuring perceptions of the program and its challenges and benefits for the students and the school.

Official responses:

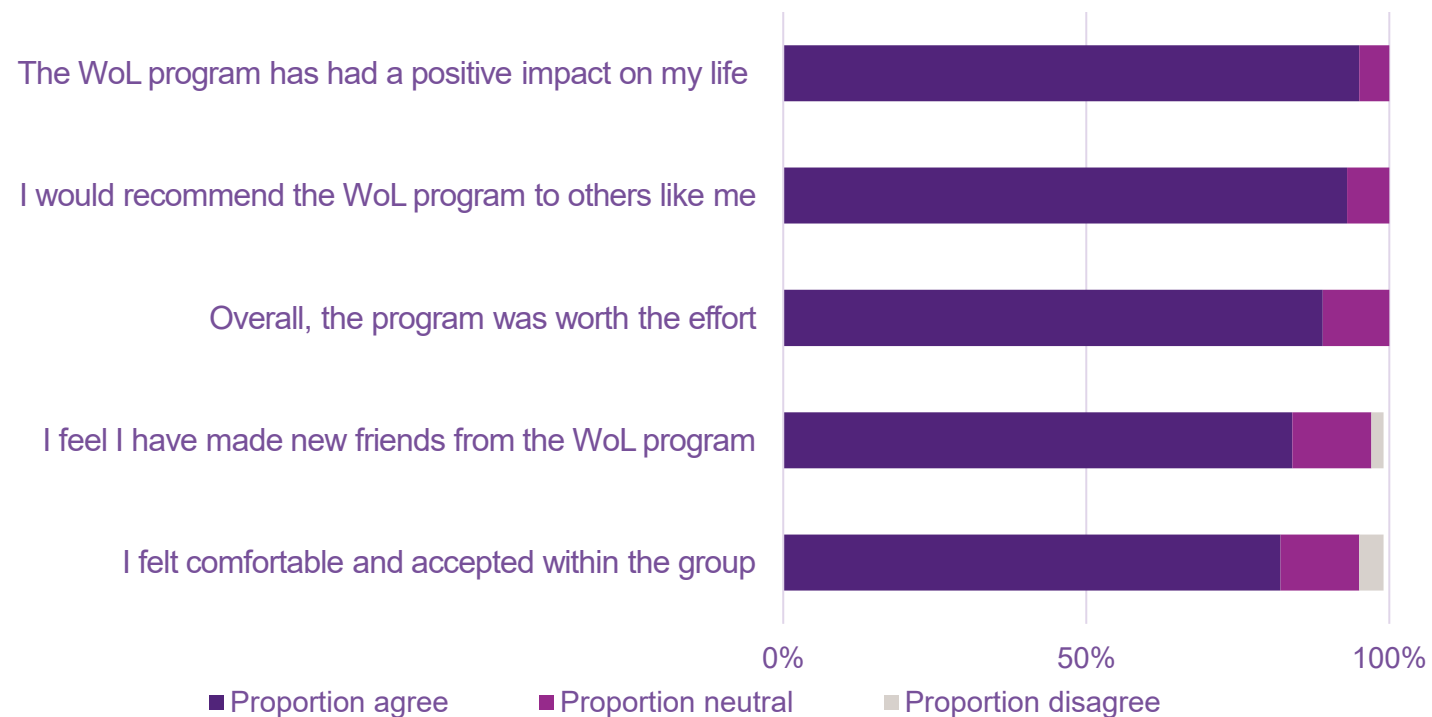
- police contact rates pre and post participation (QPS data)

Student Surveys

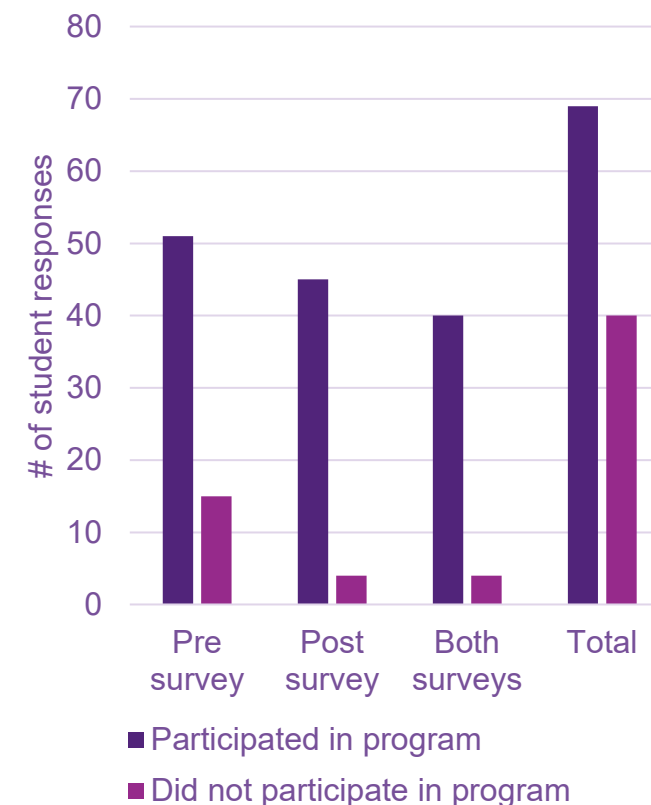
Students responded to surveys pre- and post-program

Overall impressions of program – positive

Students' (n=45) evaluations of the Walk of Life program

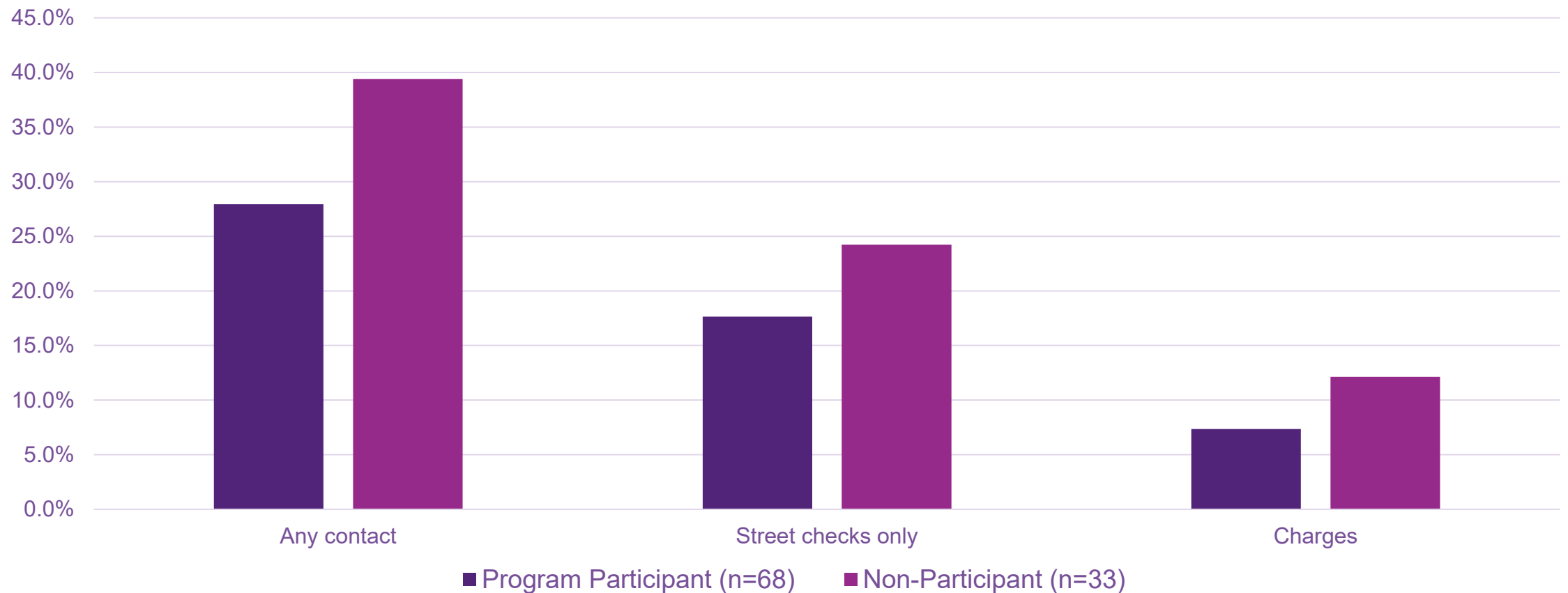


Student Survey Responses



Results: Police contact

Proportion of students (n=101) with police contact (post program)



“At-Risk” Student Results

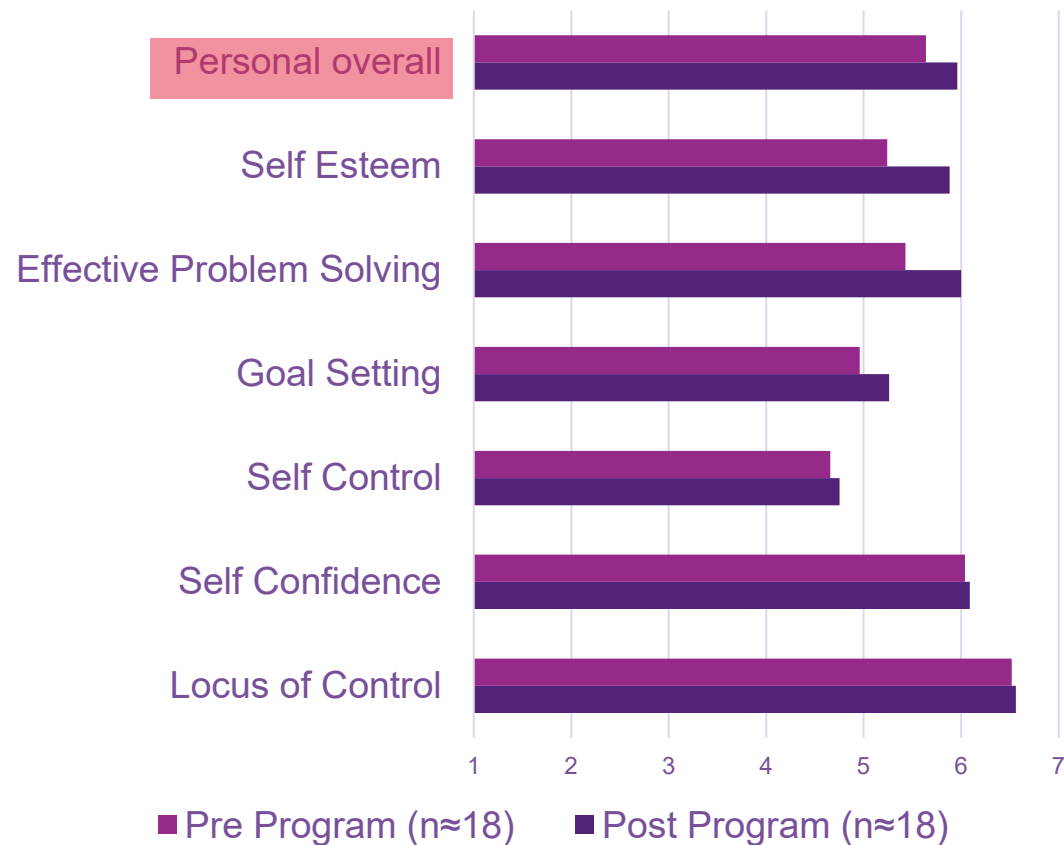
“At-Risk”: Students who self-reported engaging in anti-social behaviour (e.g., bullying, being suspended from school, using illegal substances) in the pre-survey

Sample:

- 18 matched survey (i.e., have both pre and post surveys) participants
- Average age = 15.6 years
- 56% male
- 12% Indigenous

Results: Key student objectives (“At Risk” Youth)

Personal Objectives

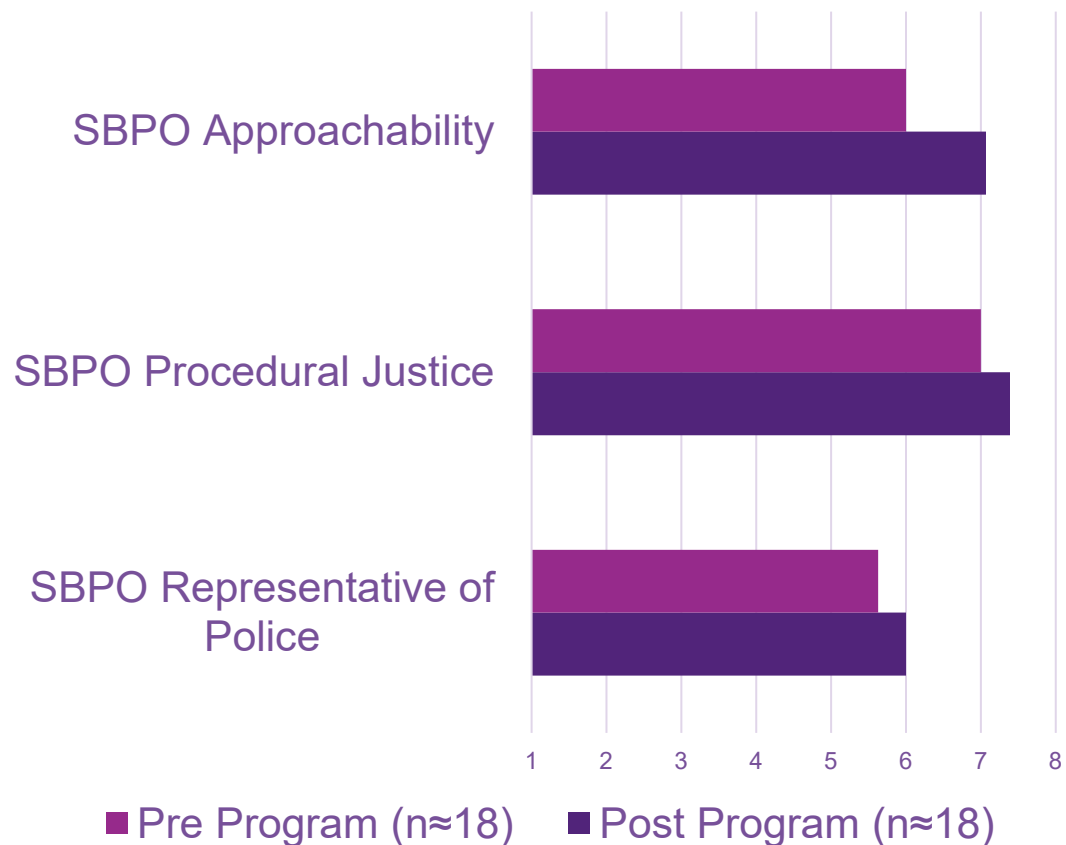


Social Objectives

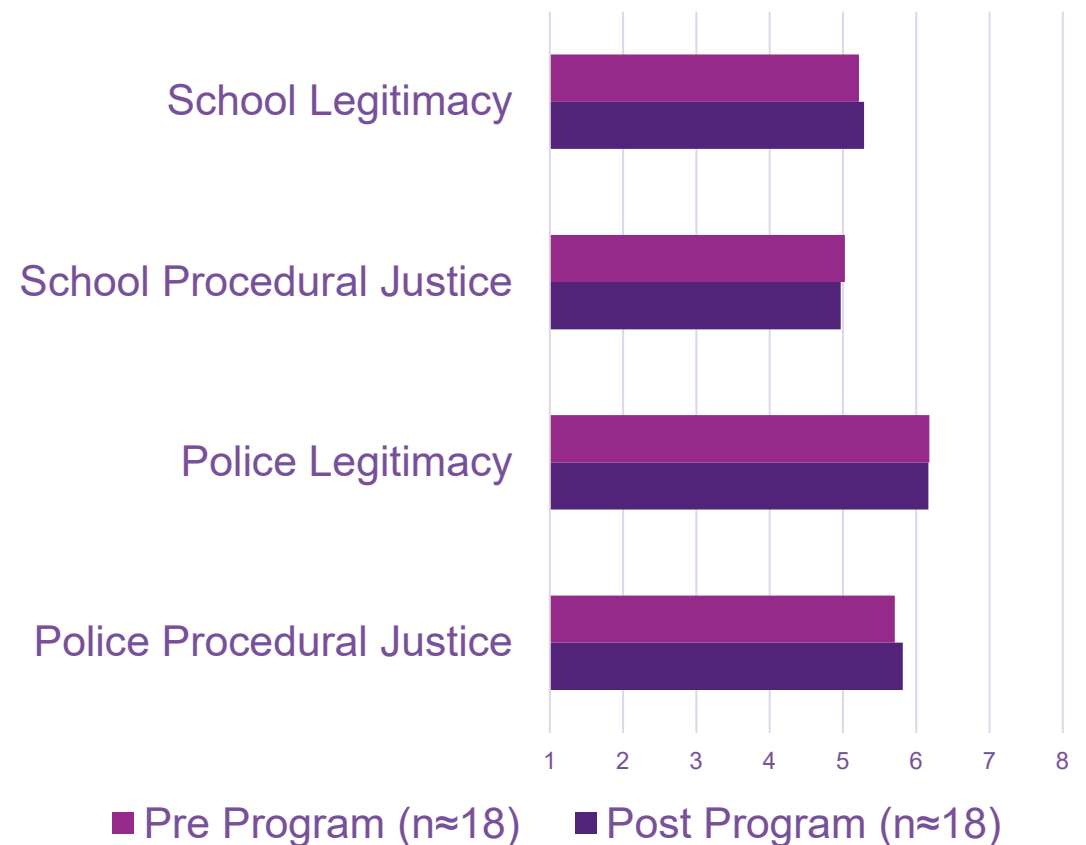


Results: Perceptions of professionals (“At Risk” Youth)

School Based Police Officer



General Perceptions



Professionals Perceptions

Walk of Life Participants – Benefits

So, many of these children were kids who didn't particularly have a good experience at school or had other programs, and they hadn't really gone too far with them. ... So, it was a mixture of kids. Kids who were disengaged, to kids who had leadership potential, and bringing the two together and helping the leaders to build the leaders in the kids who were feeling that they weren't having any successes.

(Former Principal)

Mix of students

Because it's challenging them, it's actually getting them to see that they're capable of more than what they think. That when things get tough and physically tough, it's actually a head game. It's not... This is not physical; it's mental and it's getting them through that, getting them over that.

(Guidance Officer)

Learning through experiences

It wasn't just about walking, it was about all the things that you've got to deal with in order to go on a trek, in order to set up a camp, in order to cope with a severe thunderstorm in the middle of the night. All of those things that the kids had to learn. Learn how to deal with those things and problem-solve through those things.So, those skills... and the kids worked together for that.

(Former Principal)

Professionals Perceptions

Walk of Life Helps Build Relationships with...

...Police

...those at-risk kids have at-risk parents. And through [SBPO's] role he's been able to make links with those parents, as well, as part of the Walk of Life, in a positive way. So it hasn't been ringing up the parents to say, "Your kid has done something naughty" or "You're doing something naughty." It's actually a positive interaction, which is beneficial, again.

(Teacher).

...School Staff

They're just happier to come and share with me. It just breaks down invisible barriers.

(School Chaplain)

...Peers

We had junior camps where we'd take a mix of you know, our better behaved kids, our leadership-type children. And sometimes it was our at-risk kids that were out-shining ... our leaders. ... So just those peer-to-peer relations changed as well.

(Teacher)

Professionals Perceptions

Challenges for the Program

I think for schools the challenge is that they don't like taking time away from the curriculum, and I think the challenge is that they probably don't understand the full extent of how beneficial it could be.

(School based Nurse)

Curriculum balance

It always comes back to money. So, this program was subsidised. [The SBPO] got grants to subsidise it. So, no child missed out because they couldn't afford it. It ran on borrowed equipment.

(Former Principal)

Resources

Walk of Life version 2.0

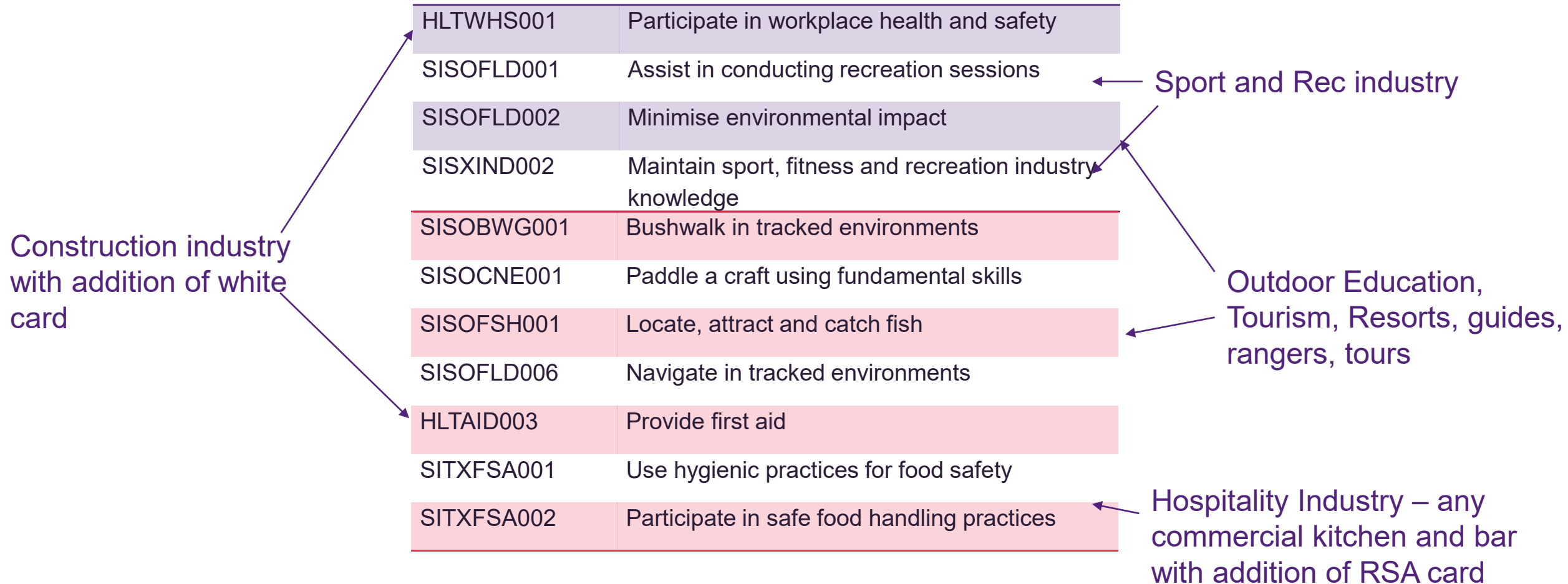
**Longer engagement (over the full
academic year)**

More camps/trips

**Added vocational element:
Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation**

Program provides for various employment pathways

Via Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation



Conclusions

Overall, participants indicated the Walk of Life Program has “something for everyone”

Professionals saw this as a valuable way of engaging students from different background

Some evidence of positive self and social improvements

Thank you!

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