



The Love of Learning Program Evaluation Report 2014

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The Love of Learning Program

The Pyjama Foundation developed The Love of Learning Program in order to support children in foster care improve their educational and life outcomes. To achieve this aim, the program recruits volunteer adult mentors, called Pyjama Angels, who visit a child in foster care each week and engage them in learning-based activities and educational play. The Pyjama Angels have an important goal of building a positive relationship with the child as previous research has found that positive and encouraging carers and mentors are important influences and resources in children's lives and this can make a significant impact on a child's attitude towards learning and reading.

The aim of the program also includes broadening the child's support networks and providing relief and support for the children's carers, as well as the child protection system generally by providing an effective community approach to teaching and protecting vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Why The Love of Learning Program is important

There are over 40,000 children in foster care in Australia (AIHW, 2014). Many of these children have missed out on stable, positive and healthy family relationships and stable schooling. More than one quarter (25.6%) of children in care report having problems at school that they have been unable to get help with. The most common unresolved problems is with their schoolwork (43.6%) (CCYPCG, 2012). Research indicates that many children in care have poor physical health, socio-emotional wellbeing and cognitive/learning outcomes in comparison to their peers (see Paxman, et al. 2014). 92% of children in care have below average reading skills by the time they are only seven years of age, and it is a struggle for them to catch up. This results in 75% of children in care not completing high school and 35% of children in care entering the juvenile justice system.

The statistics suggest a solution is required that is child centred and builds the community's capacity to give children connections with supportive adult mentors who support them to increase their cognitive/learning outcomes. The Pyjama Foundation believes that the Love of Learning Program is an effective solution, as it supports children in care to form and sustain healthy adult attachments, gain improved educational success and increase their confidence and love for learning (e.g. Berridge, D. 2005; Fernandez, E. 2007; Delfabbro P, et al. 2007).

The Pyjama Foundation has identified the key outcomes of The Love of Learning Program should be:

1. SUPPORTED - Children are provided with opportunities to have healthy positive and caring relationships with adult mentors.
2. SMART - Children are provided with opportunities to enjoy learning, gain confidence and educational success.

Findings and program performance

This evaluation was conducted in November 2014 to assess the role satisfaction of Pyjama Angels who volunteer for The Pyjama Foundation and to identify if they have observed any changes for children who have been in the program between six months and two years. The evaluation used an on-line survey to collect the observations and feedback provided by a sample of 163 Pyjama Angels who volunteered to participate. This sample represents 17% of Pyjama Angels volunteering with The Pyjama Foundation in 2014.

This evaluation found:

- The Pyjama Foundation is providing 62,100 hours per annum to mentor and support children in care.
- Pyjama Angels are reading 81,000 books to children in care each year.
- Pyjama Angels are spending 35% of their time with children doing activities that develop the children's literacy skills, 47% of the time building a positive relationship with them by chatting, doing interactive activities or teaching them a new skill (e.g. tying a shoelace, baking a cake). 18% of the time is spent doing activities that involve specifically developing the child's numeracy skills.
- The Pyjama Foundation's training and support is effective with 99% of Pyjama Angels reporting they have a good relationship with the child they mentor.
- 83% of Pyjama Angels have observed an improvement in the child's reading, with 42% stating they feel the program has directly contributed to their reading abilities.
- Over 84% of Pyjama Angels believe that the areas where they have seen most positive change since mentoring, have been the children's ability to concentrate on a task or activity and children's general positive attitude towards learning.

Story behind the findings

The findings are extremely positive given that the children who are visited by Pyjama Angels have many different needs to other children in the community. Many of the children have learning difficulties and have experienced trauma which can be overwhelming and lifelong (van der Kolk and McFarlane, 1996). Children in care have much higher rates of psychological disorders than the general population and can find it difficult to form and maintain positive relationships. The disorders include Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Social Emotional Disorders. (Specialist Foster Care Review, 2011)

Physical and psychological trauma and disorders are one of the major reasons for children in care having lower scores on national tests than any other group in Australia. Educational institutions have struggled to overcome these difficulties when working with children in care and the national trend has been that children in care are well behind their peers when they start school and this gap widens during the course of the child's schooling (AIHW, 2011). This is why the outcomes achieved by Pyjama Angels are extraordinary. For many of these children any improvement is a remarkable achievement. Therefore the improvements noted in this study are outstanding.

The Pyjama Foundation has provided 62,100 hours in the last year to mentor and support children in care. These hours represent new connections between the foster home and the community. They have created new experiences, skills and knowledge for children in care and they also represent a connection for the child between learning and having fun. This means that literacy has been just one of the positive outcomes. There are many other indirect outcomes being achieved such as interpersonal and educational skills and development. As this study has shown, the program is improving the child's ability to concentrate on a task or activity and the child's general positive attitude towards learning.

Pyjama Angels Survey

Methodology

The evaluation used an on-line survey to collect the observations and feedback provided by a sample of 163 volunteer Pyjama Angels.

The evaluation used a number of scales to measure:

1. The Pyjama Angel's role satisfaction ($\alpha.93$)
2. The Pyjama Angel's intentions to leave their volunteer role ($\alpha.72$)
3. The quality of the relationship between the Pyjama Angel and the child they mentor ($\alpha.93$)
4. The changes the Pyjama Angel has observed since mentoring the child ($\alpha.92$)

There were 26 items in the survey that were used to assess the quality of the relationship between the child and the Pyjama Angel. Some of the items were developed by Ferro, et al. (2014) and used with permission. The other items were developed specifically for The Pyjama Foundation by Ruth Knight. The questions included, "Would you say that your relationship between you and the child is warm?" and "Does the child seem happy to see you?"

The volunteers were asked to rate all the scales on a 5-point likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

There were also a number of qualitative questions where the Pyjama Angels could provide their views and comments.

The surveys were independently analysed by consultant, Dr Ruth Knight from Zark Consultancy.

Survey participants

The survey was completed during November 2014. A total of 163 usable surveys were used in the analysis – these were Pyjama Angels who reported that they had been matched with a child between 6 months and 2 years.

The Pyjama Angels that participated were from the NSW and QLD regions where The Pyjama Foundation operates. Most of the participating Pyjama Angels were from Brisbane (40.5%). See Table 1.

Table 1 shows that most of the participants were female (87.7%) with the most common age being 46-65 years (42.3%). The average age of all the Pyjama Angels participating was 50 years old.

Results

Role Satisfaction and Intentions to Leave

88.3% of Pyjama Angels reported being very satisfied with their role and their experience as a Pyjama Angel. Only 1.2% stated that they had intentions to leave their volunteer role.

95% of Pyjama Angels believe they are using their skills and knowledge to help children learn in a positive way. 92% agreed that they would recommend the Love of Learning Program to people they know.

Children in the program

This evaluation specifically chose to assess the changes for children who have been in the Love of Learning program for between six months and two years. This was to limit the other factors that might influence normal developmental changes for children.

The Pyjama Angels participating in this survey stated they were working with 163 children between the ages of 2 years – 17 years. The majority of the children were between 4-12 years old (84%). See Table 2.

Time spent with the child

The 163 Pyjama Angels who participated stated they spent a total sum of 755 hours with children in the program each month. This is an average of 4.6 hours a month and a total of 9,060 per annum. With 1,125 children in the program nationally, that means The Love of Learning Program is providing 62,100 hours of mentoring and support to children in care.

Activities

The Pyjama Angels were asked to record the amount of time they spent conducting different activities with their child each visit. The results show that on average, the children are being exposed to a wide range of activities.

Table 3 shows that the most common activity they are doing with their Pyjama Angel is something that involves literacy (35%) followed by interactive activities and games (24%).

Books

The 163 Pyjama Angels participating stated that on average they read 6 books to the children in the program each month. This is a total of 978 books being read each year to 163 children. Currently there are 1,125 children in the program nationally, so this means on average The Pyjama Foundation is supporting children in care to read 81,000 books each year.

Quality of the relationship

The results showed that the majority of the Pyjama Angels (99%) believe that they have a good relationship with the child they are matched with. Of these, 62% state they have an excellent relationship with the child.

Observed changes

The Pyjama Angels were asked to report if they had seen any changes in the child since they had been mentoring them. There were a large number of Pyjama Angels that had observed positive changes and 17% who had noticed some negative changes.

An analysis of the feedback from 17% of Pyjama Angels about why they thought they had observed negative changes reveals that none of the changes were directly related to the program. In their opinion these changes have largely occurred because of:

- Environmental issues – e.g. the child's living conditions, parenting styles from biological or foster carer, changing foster carers etc.
- Grief and Loss experienced by the child.
- The child's health e.g. tiredness, puberty, psychological issues.

Table 4 shows that the most substantial positive changes were seen in the areas of the child's positive attitude towards the Pyjama Angels visits and the child's general confidence.

The most overall changes however, were seen in the areas of:

- a) The child's ability to concentrate on a task or activity (87.6% state they have observed positive changes)
- b) The child's general positive attitude towards learning (84% state they have observed positive changes)

The least overall amount of change was observed in the child's positive attitude towards school and improvement in numeracy skills. However, there was still some positive change observed in these areas. See Table 4.

These changes may or may not have been as a direct or indirect response to the child being mentored in the Love of Learning Program. Table 5 shows that over half of the Pyjama Angels (53.4% and 51.5%) believe that the child's positive attitude towards their visits and the child's increased confidence are the areas most influenced by the program.

While 82.7% of Pyjama Angels in the survey felt they had generally observed an improvement in the child's literacy skills, 41.7% of Pyjama Angels believe that the program had directly contributed to this improvement. See Table 5.

Significant Correlations

The analysis identified that there were some small positive correlations between:

- a) The age of the Pyjama Angel and the number of books being read to the child.
- b) The age of the Pyjama Angel and the length of time a person volunteers.
- c) The number of hours the Pyjama Angel volunteered and the changes observed.
- d) The number of hours the Pyjama Angel volunteered and their role satisfaction.

The larger positive and significant correlations were between:

- a) The number of hours the Pyjama Angel volunteered and the quality of their relationship with the child.
- b) The quality of the relationship between the Pyjama Angel and the child, and the number of observed changes.
- c) The quality of the relationship between the Pyjama Angel and the child, and the Pyjama Angel's role satisfaction.
- d) The more changes a Pyjama Angel observes and their role satisfaction.

There were negative correlations between

- a) The quality of the relationship and the Pyjama Angel's intention to leave. This means if the Pyjama Angel doesn't feel they have a good relationship with the child, they are more likely to resign from volunteering.
- b) The Pyjama Angel's role satisfaction and their intention to leave. This means the less satisfied they are, the more likely they are to leave.

There was also a small negative correlation between:

- a) The age of the Pyjama Angel and their role satisfaction, suggesting that the younger Pyjama Angels are more satisfied with their volunteer role.

Overall, the most significant predictor of observed change is the quality of the relationship between the Pyjama Angel and the child. This finding is consistent with the previous evaluation completed in 2011.

Tables - Results in Detail

Table 1. Demographics of survey participants

Demographics		Frequency (n)	Percent %
Gender	Male	8	4.9
	Female	143	87.7
	Unknown	12	7.4
Age	Under 25	16	9.8
	26-35	27	16.6
	36-45	12	7.4
	46-55	31	19.0
	56-65	38	23.3
	66-75	28	17.2
	Over 75	2	1.2
	Unknown	9	5.5
Tenure as a Pyjama Angel	Less than 1 year	42	25.8
	More than 1 - up to 2 years	84	51.5
	More than 2 - up to 3 years	10	6.1
	More than 3 - up to 4 years	8	4.9
	More than 4 years	10	6.1
	Unknown	9	5.5
Education Level	Up to year 10	11	6.7
	High School / Year 12	24	14.7
	Certificate / Trade Qualification	19	11.7
	Diploma	16	9.8
	Degree	52	31.9
	Graduate Certificate/Diploma	16	9.8
	Masters Degree	13	8.0
	PhD	2	1.2
	Unknown	10	6.1
Region	Bundaberg/Hervey Bay/		
	Maryborough	2	1.2
	Brisbane	66	40.5
	Cairns	5	3.1
	Gold Coast	20	12.3
	Gladstone	3	1.8
	Ipswich	3	1.8
	Logan	9	5.5
	Mackay	4	2.5
	Sunshine Coast	5	3.1

	Sydney	9	5.5
	Toowoomba	16	9.8
	Townsville	12	7.4
	Unknown	9	5.5

Table 2. Age of children being assessed

Age of child in program for between six months – two years	Age (years)	No.	% of all children being mentored
	2	1	0.6
	3	6	3.7
	4	11	6.8
	5	16	9.9
	6	13	8
	7	14	8.6
	8	21	13
	9	10	6.2
	10	18	11.1
	11	17	10.5
	12	16	9.9
	13	8	4.9
	14	5	3.1
	15	2	1.2
	16	2	1.2
	17	2	1.2
	Unknown	1	

Table 3. Activities the children are participating in with their mentors

Activity	Average % of time spent on this activity
Reading or activities that involve reading and writing	35
Interactive activities or games	24
Maths or activities that involve numeracy	18
Chatting/talking together	17
Learning a new skill (e.g. tying a shoelace, baking a cake)	4
Other	2
TOTAL	100%

Table 4. Changes observed by respondents (%)

	Improvement					
	Not Sure	No improvement/ No change	A little	Some	Large	Substantial
The child's reading ability	4.7	12.7	20	34.7	16	12
The child's motivation to read and/or write	4.7	17.3	22.7	26.7	16.7	12
The child's comprehension	4.7	12.2	14.9	38.5	18.9	10.8
The child's speech	5.9	17.1	14.5	30.9	19.1	12.5
The child's ability to concentrate on a task or activity	2	10.5	17	39.9	22.2	8.5
The child's general positive attitude towards learning	4.7	11.3	14.7	34.7	26	8.7
The child's positive attitude towards school	14.2	23	12.8	26.4	14.9	8.8
The child's positive attitude towards your visits	8.7	14	7.3	18	34.7	17.3
The child's confidence	7.9	8.6	6.6	23.2	39.7	13.9
The child's numeracy skills	9.5	20.9	14.2	27	19.6	8.8

Table 5. The programs impact on the changes

Do you feel the Love of Learning Program HAS CONTRIBUTED to the changes you have observed in these areas? The child's...	No. of respondents who said YES	% of total respondents
Positive attitude towards your visits	87	53.4
Confidence	84	51.5
Ability to concentrate	69	42.3
Reading ability	68	41.7
Motivation to read and/or write	67	41.1
General positive attitude towards learning	62	38.0
Numeracy skills	55	33.7
Comprehension	53	32.5
Speech	45	27.6
Positive attitude towards school	25	15.3

Improvement Ideas

Some of the ways that the Pyjama Angels thought the program could be improved included:

Further training and support for Pyjama Angels

Example comments include:

- Opportunities to attend refresher courses in numeracy literacy theory and skills.
- The training mainly was about younger children so a bit more training for mentoring an older child would be good.
- Some guidelines for what to expect at different ages/levels of development.
- Dealing with children who are severely physically and intellectually impaired requires specialist skills. More training to get the best out of them needed.
- Maybe a little more training in motivating children and skills to do that.
- Perhaps some specific strategies given in training to deal with learning difficulties, or some details about them to help identify when that is causing problems with engagement.
- Perhaps by offering yearly or 6 monthly refresher days for the volunteers when they could benefit from new information and by sharing ideas with others.

More activity ideas and resources that Pyjama Angels can use

Example comments include:

- Workshops/sharing ideas for specific age ranges. Most focus on school aged children.
- More resources to borrow.
- More informal get-togethers with other Angels to share ideas on activities, games and stories on what they do during visits, how long they spend with their child, their relationship with family etc.
- Perhaps you could offer more resources for us to work with the children. I have subscribed to studyladder.com.au to download work to use at my visits.
- More books and resources suitable for pre-schoolers in the library.
- I'd like more craft ideas like the monsters made from bottles email that was sent recently. Maybe a forum where we can post things that we've made and get ideas from other Angels.
- More resources for 7-10 yr. old boys.
- Rather than me decided what we're going to do each week, having a set program to follow would be good. It gets hard, trying to think of new things to do each week.

Volunteer Support

Many participants provided good feedback about the amount of support they were being given. For example:

- I believe the support is excellent.
- I feel very supported by the Pyjama Foundation. I know that there is help if I need it.
- The support I have been provided with has been terrific.
- The team have been absolutely fantastic!!

Some Pyjama Angels provided comments about how they thought the support could be improved. Example comments include:

- Provision of online learning videos, professional development.
- By being located in a more central location. The old premises were much more central. It is very hard for me to visit and get resources when the office is on the extreme NE of Brisbane.
- Online access to materials would be nice.
- Maybe the pyjama foundation could subscribe to a website and offer downloadable worksheets for all of the pyjama angels to access.
- Some sort of online Angels forum where we could exchange ideas. I'm thinking about ideas for activities or books that might have engaged a difficult child.
- Meetings and social get-together with other pyjama angels. Also at times with supervisors. Need more support and to talk together and give ideas.
- Suggest activities per age group + developmental standards to strive towards. It is hard to know ""where"" a child needs to be, literacy wise.
- I understand one can talk to liaison person and the workshop program is useful and gives an opportunity for networking and sharing experiences with the foster children. I think they may need to remind us in emails that we can arrange time to discuss issues if the need arises. I would like to think a similar survey /information call is directed to carers so they can share their observations also.
- The toy library on the Gold Coast needs more toys.
- A bit more notice about upcoming events.
- Varying meeting days and times so I am able to attend more events.
- I have had one phone call from a primary school teacher volunteer which was really helpful. More of this please!!!!
- I think it would be great to encourage the foster parents to provide a quiet environment for the child and the PJ Angel. Unfortunately, our quiet area is between two very large televisions with constant interruptions from the foster mum.

General Comments

The Pyjama Angels were given the opportunity to make any other general comments. Example comments include:

- Fantastic program. Well done!
- This is a fantastic program and I am really proud to be able to be a part of it. I believe every child with a PJ Angel is truly blessed and these children will have a better chance in life as a result.
- I think it is a great thing and I have gained as well as the child.
- I am really enjoying being a part of this program. I have learnt lots!
- I have enjoyed reading the newsletter especially with the section of the apps and resource ideas.
- I am so happy to be involved and I look forward to continuing on with this wonderful organisation.
- I find the PF an incredible organization, very organized and never lose focus on the mission to support children.
- Absolutely fantastic initiative, love being part of this and really giving back to the child, he's grown so much and it's so nice to experience that growth with him.
- I was a foster parent for 15 years many years ago and only wish that our foster children could of had this extra support. I can really see the benefit of this programme.
- I love my work with my little person. Sometimes I feel like I might be the only light of positivity in her week and that pains me, but I will continue to be this light for her as long as she needs it.
- I have three children to look after when I visit. All are responding far more positively to books and reading, and will now rifle through the resources to find their favourites. Today I has 2 of them reading quietly while I listened to the third one's oral presentation for school. It's always a magical time.
- I enjoy my role as a Pyjama Angel and look forward to my visits. The smile makes your day.
- It is a great program that I am proud to be a part of. Two thumbs up!

Conclusion

Strategy and Action Plan to improve outcomes/results

Since 2011, The Pyjama Foundation has been conducting research about the Love of Learning Program to ensure that it is evidence-based and successful. This evaluation continues The Pyjama Foundation's commitment to understanding what impact the program is having and how to improve outcomes for children in the program.

As a result of this evaluation The Pyjama Foundation will:

1. Encourage Pyjama Angels to engage children in different ways using a variety of resources, games, activities and tools.
2. Continue to place an emphasis on supporting the Pyjama Angels so they are resourced and confident to perform their role.
3. Create a webpage which gives volunteers access to video support which will help increase their skills as well as provide them with resource ideas, book lists etc.
4. Improve and increase Pyjama Angels access to ongoing learning opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge while they are volunteering.
5. Secure funding to implement a peer support strategy so that Pyjama Angels are able to connect with each other and share ideas.
6. Provide increased access to physical resources through the regions – e.g. open a Caboolture and Logan resource centre.
7. Increase the number of Spread Your Wings events in all regions.
8. Develop an effective Communication Plan that includes:
 - Multiple communication methods to increase volunteer participation.
 - Implement more informal gatherings for Pyjama Angels.

By fulfilling the Action Plan the Pyjama Foundation should reach its aims of increasing the skill set of Pyjama Angels and helping them to feel more supported. It has been acknowledged that volunteers come from all different backgrounds and therefore have different needs including time restraints. This is of high importance to the Pyjama Foundation and therefore focus will be given to increasing opportunities to access information and events by using different media to communicate as well as varying days and times for Spread Your wings and informal gatherings.

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