

LIFT

LEARNING-IDENTITY-FAMILY-TRANSITION

A Framework for Supporting Grade 6 to Year 7 Transition



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Project Background

In 2017 School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) Central Highlands Eastern District (based at Ballarat Community Health) embarked on a project with a local secondary school and a small cohort of feeder primary schools.

The LIFT Project aimed to support successful Grade 6 to Year 7 transition by utilising local community agency programs and resources, focusing on three program objectives:

- School staff capacity building
- Student support and resilience building
- Family support and engagement

The project continued through 2018 and 2019, and involved close collaboration between SFYS and the participating schools. SFYS completed a report of the project which included a full evaluation of effectiveness, learnings and recommendations. This document has been produced as a result of the findings of that report and provides schools with a framework for supporting student transition from Grade 6 to Year 7. The link to the full report can be found in the Resources section (page 22).



Transitions and School Engagement



The process of moving from primary to secondary school is well recognised by researchers as a key transition and one that can affect students' academic outcomes, wellbeing and school engagement.[i]

In Victoria, data from the Attitudes to School Survey highlights that students are generally less engaged in their schooling after they commence Year 7, absenteeism rates rise and student connectedness to school declines, which leads to an overall decline in academic outcomes[ii]. While researchers agree that the majority of students ultimately navigate the transition from primary to secondary school smoothly,[iii] for a significant minority of young people, "this 'dip' in engagement and academic outcomes can be difficult to rectify, and can be the start of their disengagement from education".[iv]

Some students may be particularly vulnerable to disengagement during transition due to a range of family, community, school and personal factors. These include students from disadvantaged families, culturally and linguistically diverse students (particularly those from refugee backgrounds), students living in Out of Home Care, Indigenous students and students with a disability.[v] Gender is a factor, with the performance of boys declining faster than girls.[vi,p.23]



Research linking experiences of trauma to children's capacity to concentrate and to learn has significant implications for school engagement.[vii] Whilst student experiences of bullying have been particularly associated with poorer transition experiences and failure to achieve the positive indicators of a successful transition. [viii]

A range of factors, programs, and school approaches have been identified as important influences in facilitating successful transition for all students.[ix] One of the most important of these is positive relationships with peers and teachers.[x] Feelings of connection to primary school are also important for ensuring later connections to secondary school and student mental health.[xi]

For students who have experienced trauma, teachers can play an important role in assisting them to build a positive attachment to school. The resource, *Calmer Classrooms*, identifies “two key mechanisms” by which teachers and school personnel can assist students to build this attachment: “...understanding traumatised children and developing relationship based skills to help them”.[xii](p.iv)

Transition clusters, consisting of the secondary school and its main feeder primary schools, have demonstrated a number of transition benefits: enhancing communication between the individual schools; enabling implementation of processes to strengthen communication and information sharing; supporting student engagement and continuity of learning as they shift between primary and secondary school.[xiii]

***"For primary schools strong links with secondary settings can lower anxiety, increase resilience in students and strengthen parental involvement, correlating with better academic results and positive behaviours."
(START Resource pg10)***



How to use the LIFT Transition Framework

This LIFT Transition Framework has been produced as a result of the findings of the LIFT Project and provides schools with a framework for supporting student transition from Grade 6 to Year 7 by supporting the whole school community. Recommendations are broken into three sections:

- School staff capacity building
- Student support and resilience building
- Family support and engagement

Each section outlines strategies and interventions found to be successful during the LIFT Project. This resource is intended as a framework and is designed to be used in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) *A Toolkit for Transition Clusters: Primary to Secondary* and *Student Transition and Resilience Training (START)* resource. Used together, these resources allow a flexible approach which recognises that schools are at different stages in their journey to address transition needs.

In addition, utilising local community services (where possible) to support the specific needs of your school community and transition cluster, is an important factor. However, the needs of each school cluster and the available local supports will be different in each location. Therefore, schools are encouraged to form relationships with any available and relevant local community services who can assist in supporting successful transition. A list of useful resources where schools can access additional supports is included on page 22.



School Staff Capacity Building

As with all aspects of the LIFT framework, the building of relationships is paramount to ensuring the successful transition from Grade 6 to Year 7.

The LIFT framework strategy builds staff capacity to manage transition, focussing on areas of poverty, disadvantage, trauma, adolescent development and bullying. Our belief is that once teaching staff gain an understanding of the drivers of disadvantage, the language of poverty, the lasting effects of trauma, and the emotional and behavioural changes that adolescents are experiencing, they are better equipped to form meaningful relationships with their students.

The following is a summary of the programs and workshops addressing these needs.

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING POVERTY



This 2-day workshop can be offered to teaching staff, wellbeing, leadership and transition coordinators in both the secondary and feeder primary schools.

- The LIFT Project Report found that workshop participants effectively increased their knowledge and understanding of the impact of poverty on school engagement.
- The workshop challenges core beliefs and, as one participant stated, the training “...assisted us to understand the world some of our students inhabit”.
- Providing this training to both the secondary and primary school staff ensures that schools are using the same language when discussing the impact of disadvantage on students.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Grade 6 to Year 7 transition coincides with student adolescent development, with significant hormonal changes affecting the physical, behavioural and neurological aspects of young people. When teaching staff are aware of these changes they are able to communicate with and support students more effectively.

- Psychologist Andrew Fuller provides workshops aimed at increasing the understanding of the changes the adolescent brain experiences during the teen years. These workshops were reported by participants as “extremely engaging” and provided powerful skills and useful strategies to support their adolescent cohort.
- The LIFT Project Report found that workshops addressing adolescent development gave teachers an accessible language that can be shared with students when discussing brain development. This will aid with students' ability to self-reflect.
- *Headspace* and other community-based organisations may be available for consultation in adolescent development.



BULLYING: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES

The LIFT Project Report found that fear of being bullied is one of the most prevalent issues confronting students during transition, and is often the issue that staff feel least confident to address. It is an issue that impacts feelings of safety for students, families and staff alike.

- Organisations such as *Wellbeing in Schools Australia (WISA)* provide comprehensive training in the effective strategies schools can use to address bullying. These training sessions can be tailored to the needs and time constraints of individual schools.
- A survey of teaching staff who attended *WISA's* Bullying training showed that 92% had never received any prior formal training to address bullying. After the training, 89% of participants reported feeling more confident in addressing bullying and 100% stated that the training was useful and relevant to their role.
- The LIFT Project Report recommends that strategies and responses to bullying are most effective when delivered to both primary and secondary school staff together.

TAILORED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS

Whilst there are issues experienced universally across both secondary and primary schools, the LIFT Project found that some schools experienced unique issues they were either unfamiliar with or not well equipped to address. Issues such as anxiety, trauma and problem sexualised behaviours required school staff to participate in workshops tailored to their individual needs.

- Community agencies specialise in addressing these issues and can provide tailored workshops and professional development for staff.
- Workshops addressing specific needs of schools, facilitated by local community agencies, help to nurture relationships between them. This often leads to ongoing support for the school community beyond the school gate.

TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE COACHING

Using Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) in the classroom provides useful strategies to address trauma and disrupted attachment. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that teaching staff find it challenging to translate TIP learnings into every day practice. The LIFT project used a TIP “Coach” to work with school staff, teachers, education support staff and administrative staff.

- The LIFT project found that the TIP Coach needed to be someone who was trusted by the school community, whilst also having a good understanding of the culture within the school. Using a Coach that was well versed in TIP and with previous experience as a classroom teacher was key to the success of this strategy.
- The TIP Coach used a flexible approach: working in classrooms; providing group and individual coaching; team teaching; mini Professional Development sessions; providing assistance with student Individual Education Plans (IEPs).
- TIP Coaching is an innovative approach to embedding TIP in schools. The LIFT report found that this method of skilling teachers and staff stimulated their knowledge and understanding of working with young people who have experienced trauma.



START RESOURCE

DET have a program on their website called the *Student Transition And Resilience Training (START)* resource, which is a flexible classroom program aimed at preparing and building resilience in Grade 6 and Year 7 students. In 2018 SFYS coordinators worked with Clinical Psychologist Andrew Fuller, one of the authors of the *START* resource, to create an updated abridged version.

- The *START* resource abridged version contains six lesson plans for Grade 6, which form an individual student portfolio. The lesson plans are delivered in Term 4 by the primary school. The student portfolio is then forwarded to the secondary school to deliver the remaining six lesson plans in Term 1 of Year 7.
- It may be necessary to organise a short workshop for Grade 6 and Year 7 teachers in regard to the content of the *START* resource, to familiarise staff with the content and aims of the resource.
- The *START* Summary (abridged) resource document can be found at: www.bchc.org.au/learning-identity-family-transition-lift-project/
- The full version of the *START* Resource is available at: www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.docx

TRANSITION CLUSTER

A coordinated and collaborative process is necessary to support students transitioning from primary to secondary school. The formation of a Transition Cluster allows for transition to be a shared responsibility that leads to a better outcome for students.

- DET has a resource available on their website to assist in the formation of a Transition Cluster: www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/Toolkit_TransitionClusters.docx
- The LIFT Project Report found participants felt Transition Cluster meetings gave the schools agency over their own problem-solving. This frequently led to innovations such as a “hand-over” day, where crucial student information was shared face-to-face between primary and secondary staff.
- The Transition Cluster meetings require considerable organisation and facilitation, preferably by a nominated staff member at the secondary school. To ensure the success and continuation of meetings over the year, time must be allocated to these designated staff members.

Student Support and Resilience Building

GETTING TO KNOW YOU DAY

The LIFT Project found that ongoing relationships and the building of new friendships is a major concern for students transitioning to secondary school. The initial focus of the project was to work with rural and isolated primary schools who had a small cohort transitioning to a bigger school in a regional city. The aim of the "Getting to Know You Day" is to allow natural friendships to form in a relaxed and fun environment.

- The "Getting to Know You Day" was facilitated by the local YMCA, who ran their Leadership Program with students over the course of the day. As well as building leadership skills, the day also provided opportunities for students to make connections and foster relationships with each other.
- The activity was held during Term 3 school holidays to ensure there was no disruption to normal school classes.
- A successful strategy for running these days is to hold them at the secondary school, with key secondary staff in attendance. This allows wellbeing staff, school nurses and transition staff an opportunity to mix with and observe the students. This also has the added benefit of beginning the all-important relationship between teacher and student.



PEER SUPPORT TRAINING

A key strategy in ensuring primary school students have strong support before, during and after transition is to provide them with secondary school peer support or a "Buddy". Conversations with the original LIFT Project student participants in 2017 indicated they believed peer support would have assisted them in a smooth transition. In 2019, a cohort of middle years secondary students volunteered to undergo a peer support training session with the specific aim of providing support to the 2020 Year 7 cohort.

- Peer support training was provided by *Stride*, a not-for-profit organisation which has delivered mental health and wellbeing programs for young people for over two decades. The training was undertaken over a one-day session, with assistance from school teaching staff. Stride can continue to support the school community in their implementation of peer support beyond the initial session.
- The training session focused on building empathy and confidence, understanding the role of peer support and where and when to ask teaching staff for assistance.
- In a post program survey, 100% of the participating students showed a marked increase in their confidence to provide support for a Year 7 student in their role as a "Buddy".



Family Engagement and Support

TUNING INTO TEENS

Numerous consultations with both school staff and families indicated a need to provide specific parenting advice and support to families, with the aim of building their capacity to support young people through transition. As stated earlier, transition occurs during a time when young people are experiencing physical and neurological changes. Communication can often be a casualty if anxiety experienced by the young person and/or their families is not addressed.

- *Tuning into Teens* is a program designed to assist families in understanding the physical and neurological changes that their young person is experiencing. The program uses “emotional coaching” to ensure that families continue to communicate effectively.
- The LIFT Project found that the most effective method for delivering *Tuning Into Teens* occurred when the program was delivered in school communities who have established a working relationship with their families.
- The LIFT Project also noted that the program had the most success when it was run over a longer time period i.e. two hour sessions over six weeks rather than a two-day session.
- Running the program at the primary school, where parents already knew each other (to some degree) also added to the program’s success. Families need to feel safe and understood to fully share and participate in *Tuning into Teens*.



CREATING RESILIENT FAMILIES

The LIFT Project ran concurrent training in resilience building for both teaching staff and families. This ensured both cohorts received consistent messages and used common language when communicating and discussing support strategies for young people.

- The training was provided by Andrew Fuller, who is a clinical psychologist known for his engaging manner and knowledge of the skills needed to guide a young person through transition.
- The training, aimed specifically at families, was held in the evening at the secondary school. Feedback from participating families showed that the event was relevant and useful in helping to increase their understanding of student needs during transition.
- The LIFT Report identified that the timing of such events can affect the level of engagement from families. It is recommended that events of this type are hosted early in the school year for Year 7 cohort families.

PARENT EDUCATION & INFORMATION TABLES

Secondary schools often have early orientation days and events. These are held to familiarise prospective Year 7 students and families with their future secondary school. These events can be used to provide support, resources and information for families and are a great opportunity to capitalise on having a present captive audience. On these days, community agencies can and do provide a wealth of information from beyond the school gate.

- The LIFT Project utilised the local *headspace* Community Educator to facilitate a discussion on adolescent development. The talk focused on the changes occurring in the adolescent brain, with ample opportunities for questions and shared experiences.
- Parent education is a powerful way for schools to be seen by families as showing care and concern for their communities. Schools become a place where families can come for assistance. It is also a great way for new school families to get to know each other.
- An information table, with pamphlets and flyers showcasing local community programs - facilitated by local agency staff answering queries - is also a great resource for new families.

BULLYING WORKSHOPS

During the LIFT Project it became clear that families were often as concerned as their young people about bullying. To meet this perceived need, the project provided an evening session at the secondary school for families, which was facilitated by *Wellbeing in Schools Australia (WISA)*. A similar session was run earlier in the day for school staff. The aim was to provide both staff and families with a comprehensive raft of strategies to address bullying and to ensure that they worked together.

- The workshop covered a wide selection of issues linked to bullying: adult/teen communication; cyber bullying; friendship; the importance of sleep for the developing brain of adolescents.
- The workshop provided families with clear definitions of bullying. It provided resources and strategies to address bullying, whether their child was a perpetrator and/or victim.
- A Question and Answer session was included, giving families more opportunity to get to know and support each other.

Summary

Successful Grade 6 to Year 7 Transition depends on a variety of interconnecting factors specific to the needs of individual schools. This resource provides a flexible framework to assist schools to build strong relationships within their transition cluster and the local community. It utilises a co-ordinated and holistic approach, which complements existing transition activities and encourages partnerships between schools and community agencies.

The SFYS team at Ballarat Community Health used their experiences supporting schools in the LIFT Project to design this resource. We hope you find it a valuable tool in supporting your school community during transition.

Timeline

The following timeline is based on an initial 18-month implementation period and is intended as a guide only. Following the initial 18-month period, Transition Clusters can decide on the plan for a rolling 12-month timeline of events and activities. Resources to support implementation of this timeline can be found on page 22.

YEAR ONE

TERM ONE

ALL SCHOOLS

- Establish Transition Cluster: identify current practice and any existing gaps in training and policies/ procedures.
- Plan for staff training.
- Begin planning Transition Strategy.

TERM TWO

ALL SCHOOLS

- Transition Cluster Meeting/s: establish Transition Strategy.
- Staff training across Transition Cluster: Suggested topic - Bullying Interventions (or alternative as decided by Transition Cluster).

SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Workshop for existing and prospective families: Suggested topic - How families and schools can work together to prevent and address bullying (or alternative as decided by Transition Cluster).

Timeline continued

YEAR ONE

TERM THREE

ALL SCHOOLS

- Transition Cluster Meeting/s continue.
- Staff introduced to *START* Resource. Workshop held if necessary.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Trauma Informed Practice Coaching implemented to prepare staff and students for transition. (Option to commence in Term 3 or Term 4 depending on need).

SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Morning tea or evening workshop to assist in engaging prospective families. Local services can be utilised to present information. Examples include: adolescent development, building resilience as a family, supporting children during transition and available local support services.

TERM 3 SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

ALL SCHOOLS

- 'Getting to Know You Day' facilitated for Grade 6 students transitioning next year. If possible, the day is held at the secondary school.



Timeline continued

YEAR ONE

TERM FOUR

PRIMARY SCHOOL

- *START* Resource implemented in classrooms.
- Trauma Informed Practice Coaching is implemented or continues if already commenced.
- At end of Term 4 *START* Resource student portfolios are transferred to secondary school.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Peer support training for middle-years cohort who will act as 'Buddies' to transitioning Year 7's. Buddies may make initial contact with Grade 6 students.

ALL SCHOOLS

- Transition Cluster Meeting/s continue.
- Orientation and Early Orientation days provide a good opportunity to engage with new families and provide relevant education and information tables.
- Trauma Informed Practice Coach attends Orientation days to assist students and provide continuity of care.



Timeline continued

YEAR TWO

TERM ONE

ALL SCHOOLS

- Transition Cluster Meeting/s continue: review Transition Strategy and establish plan for any further staff training.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Trauma Informed Practice Coaching commences to support staff with transitioning students who have additional needs.
- *START* Resource student portfolios are utilised and activities continue in the classroom for new Year 7's.
- Peer support via "Buddies" continues.
- *Tuning into Teens* provided for families of new Year 7 cohort.
- Year 7 family engagement activity to introduce new families to the school, school processes, staff and each other.

TERM TWO

ALL SCHOOLS

- Transition Cluster Meeting/s continue
- Staff Training across Transition Cluster: Suggested topic - Bullying Interventions (or alternative as decided by Transition Cluster).

SECONDARY SCHOOL

- Workshop for existing and prospective families: Suggested topic - How families and schools can work together to prevent and address bullying (or alternative as decided by Transition Cluster).
- Trauma Informed Practice Coaching continues to support staff with Year 7 students if necessary.

Timeline Chart

For convenience, we have provided a visual representation of the timeline of activities to be undertaken by schools over the initial 18-month transition period.

TIMELINE	PRIMARY ONLY	SECONDARY ONLY	ALL SCHOOLS
Year 1 - Term 1			✓
Year 1 - Term 2		✓	✓
Year 1 - Term 3	✓	✓	✓
Year 1 - Term 3 School holidays			✓
Year 1 - Term 4	✓	✓	✓
Year 2 - Term 1		✓	✓
Year 2 - Term 2		✓	✓

Resources



Resources to support the LIFT Program

This framework document has been produced as a result of the findings of the LIFT Project report. The full report can be found at www.bchc.org.au/learning-identity-family-transition-lift-project/

School Staff Capacity Building

Transition Cluster:

A Toolkit for Transition Clusters is a concise and clear plan showing how best to form a cluster of schools to support Transition. This document is available to download for free on the DET website. The link to the document is:

www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/Toolkit_TransitionClusters.pdf

Workshops and Professional Development for Your School:

Local community agencies can provide a wealth of knowledge in specialised areas such as adolescent mental health, family violence support, support for sexual assault survivors and parenting programs. These organisations may also be willing to provide secondary consultations for your school and free workshops for your staff on an as-needs basis. Community organisations may have an education component in their funding contracts and will be keen to build a relationship with your school.

The LIFT Project used local services in the Ballarat area such as *headspace*, *Centacare*, *Child and Family Services*, and *Relationships Australia* to provide workshops on adolescent development and tailored professional development to address specific school needs. To find appropriate local services in your area, you can visit the following Australia-wide service directories:

Infoxchange Service Seeker www.serviceseeker.com.au

Ask Izzy www.askizzy.org.au

Resources continued

Student Support and Resilience Building

START Resource

The *Student Transition and Resilience Training (START)* resource is a flexible classroom program aimed at building student resilience and preparing students to transition from Grade 6 to Year 7. The program involves students completing a portfolio about themselves, their strengths and the ways in which they learn. This portfolio can then be taken to the students' secondary school where the program continues, giving some familiarity and consistency whilst also providing useful information about individual students for their new teaching staff. In consultation with the resource's author, Clinical Psychologist Andrew Fuller, SFYS Coordinators created an abridged version of the original START resource.

The full version of START is available on the Victorian Department of Education website : www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/transition-year-6-7/resources

The abridged version includes twelve lesson plans (six for Grade 6 and six for Year 7) for use by teaching staff involved in LIFT. The abridged version can assist teaching staff to implement the program by providing a summary of the resource, with clear lesson plans that involve a progression of activities from Grade 6 to Year 7.

A copy of the SFYS abridged version is available at:

www.bchc.org.au/learning-identity-family-transition-lift-project/



Resources continued

Family Engagement and Support

The *Better Health* website provides information about family support services to assist parents to raise their children. Please see the link below to view supports available for children and families in Victoria.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/servicesandsupport/child-family-and-relationship-services

Tuning Into Teens

Regional Parenting Services are funded by DET to provide education and support to parents. These programs help families foster their skills and confidence to meet their children's needs and improve their children's health, wellbeing, learning and development. In the Grampians region, *Centacare* has funding to facilitate parenting programs for schools, such as the *Tuning Into Teens* program.

Refer to the DET website to find organisations that can provide supports in your area:

www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/services-for-parents/Pages/services-regional.aspx

Fee for Service programs

Resources utilised by the original LIFT program

If your school has a budget allocated to supporting transition, we recommend the following:

A Framework for Understanding Poverty www.socialsolutions.com.au

Creating Resilient Families www.andrewfuller.com.au

Bullying: Effective Strategies and Responses www.wisawellbeing.com.au

Student Leadership Program www.ballarat.ymca.org.au

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School Focused Youth Service

