HANDS ON LEARNING

Everyone needs a little magic in their week

Save the Children

Quarterly eNews

September 2020

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Welcome

This issue is all about the voices of students and our partner schools, and the important way HoL builds the social and emotional wellbeing foundation for learning.

Click on the links below to hear directly from HoL students at three different schools describing the impact of the program, or HoL artisan-teachers sharing their experiences in our two latest podcasts. The pages that follow feature more insights straight from students, along with the beauty of kindness and community in this pandemic year.

Let's hear it from students

Camperdown College

Have a listen to students talk about motivation, confidence and the ways they learn in HoL.

Noble Park Secondary

Year 12 past-HoL students, share their experiences and the impact HoL plays in their senior years.

SFX, Berwick

Year 8 student Lucas describes how doing HoL makes him feel.

Community projects

Statement pieces

HoL webinars

We have flipped the switch to virtual PDs for our artisan-teachers! In August we conducted a community projects webinar with project ideas and tips for fundraising. In September we followed up with a bite-sized skills PD about project planning a statement piece for your school.

Episode #2

Episode #3

HoL podcasts

Our latest podcasts feature artisan-teachers Ryan Mayberry and Brooke King from Portland North Primary.

Our cover

HoL runs on Wednesdays at St Pius X Parish School, Warrnambool. Principal Joe Ewing describes it as like an island in the middle of the week that helps his students to get through and finish the last two days. "It really helps them focus on the more academic demands of school for the remainder of the week," he said. Read more from Joe and four other primary school principals on page 4.

HoL top 10 with Jessica Harris

Jessica has been a primary school teacher for 14 years and then became a School Support Manager for HoL in 2017. She is also an Artisan teacher at Mt Evelyn Primary school where has she has been running HoL for almost two years.

Best thing about HoL? Having the time to sit and get to know students and providing the support they need in a small group.

Best part of the HoL day? Out to work in the first session when the students are keen. We all have energy and are ready to accomplish something great.

Best school project? Our chicken coop. The idea came from the students and it took almost two years of planning, negotiating with the school, finding funds etc. Now it is up and they are so proud.

Best community project? Partnering with Melba, the local disability support group. They have visited us to help us in our garden and we have visited their plot at a local community garden to help them with theirs. The students have formed some great friendships and learnt invaluable life skills with the partnership.

Moment you are most proud of? The HoL students were invited to speak at a School Focused Youth Services network meeting in which they stood in front of the group and presented. They also showed them around the school to look at all their projects. I was so proud of them and how confidently they spoke and how enthusiastic they were about sharing what they had accomplished.

Best HoL tool? Having more than one drill and driver so the students don't have to share!

Best HoL lunch? Pizza lunches cooked in the HoL pizza oven.

Best student outcome? One of my students had very poor behaviour in HoL and in class. He had a break from HoL for a term then came back for Term 4. When he returned our relationship improved as I got to know him better. His attitude completely changed, he managed to accomplish many great things and developed his leadership skills. The relationships he built up with the clients from Melba were truly amazing. I would not have known this about him if the opportunity to return had not been presented to him. I am proud of what he achieved in his last year of school.

GROWING DEMAND

The Productivity Commission is not alone in the push for early intervention, and supporting positive social and emotional wellbeing at school, with increasing numbers of primary schools adopting HoL.

"Our biggest concern right now is wellbeing and ensuring kids are safe and happy. If we haven't built strong relationships and are not connected with our students and families, children won't learn," according to Scott Trewhella of Echuca Primary School.

"Connection is the key. A number of our HoL kids are attending during remote learning and having that consistent experience of HoL. The strong bond amongst the HoL team is critical – never more so than in 2020 when we have a real concern about losing kids during remote learning. We have been conducting home visits and organising food drop offs, but also allowing vulnerable kids to come to HoL is also an opportunistic way to engage and check-in.

The hands-on nature of the learning is beautiful. It's about getting your hands in the dirt, being on the end of a shovel, and creating things. Doing is such a powerful ingredient for building wellbeing.

When students complete projects around the school it fosters self- esteem, happiness and pride and opens up great opportunities for positive interactions with classroom teachers. For example, when the HoL students installed redgum sleepers around the garden beds you could just see the pride on the students' faces as staff and other students admired their handiwork. On occasions, some of these interactions between student and teacher can be challenging, but now there's something positive for both parties to hang onto and start new conversations."

Scott Trewhella, Leading Teacher Engagement & Wellbeing, Echuca Primary School

GROWING DEMAND It might be early days, and it might be during a pandemic, but four primary school leaders report on starting HoL during 2020.

Darling Heights State School

"As we started this term we all waited to see just where our new initiative, Hands on Learning, would take us. As we near the end of its first ten weeks, outcomes have been more substantial than we had anticipated. The quality staff, meticulously recruited, have built amazing bonds with the group of boys we invited to join the program and created a unique learning environment for them. Children have been enthusiastically engaged in the partnership of establishing their Hands on Learning Hub and, in recent weeks, have completed several creative constructions as they have put newly learnt wood working skills into practice. Classroom teachers have reported greater engagement of children in their classrooms as children await Friday and their 'special' day. Consideration is already being given to extending projects into providing wider benefits to our school. In all, an excellent choice for our school to be involved in a program that is engaging what were some of our least engaged students."

Mark Creedon, Principal,
Darling Heights State School, Queensland

Lismore Primary School

"Hands on Learning has been a great addition to our school. Students have embraced the opportunity to engage in purposeful projects that contribute to the greater school community. Parents have responded positively to Hands on Learning and are keen to support the program when we are back onsite. The Hands on Learning matrix has enabled students to participate while working remotely and students are keen to send through their achievements at home."

Jessica Kattwinkel, Principal,
Lismore Primary School, Victoria

St Pius X Parish School

"We have a group of senior children who struggle in terms of their behaviour and ability to engage in academic tasks. They started HoL this year and what we are seeing is the most positive thing imaginable. These kids are having explicit social norms modelled to them through HoL activities. We are seeing positive relationships being created with each other, outside their peer groups, with staff, and a huge connection to school. During remote learning these kids are on site because they are vulnerable. They have been able to maintain a focus during the school week that they wouldn't have had. HoL is on Wednesday at our school. It's almost like an island in the middle of the week that helps them to get through from the start of the week, and finish the last two days. It really helps them focus on the more academic demands of school for the remainder of the week. They are now more familiar with task orientation. They see a problem or need, they plan, gather resources, look at achievable steps, and are able to self-assess. Through their participation in HoL they get to experience a sense of completion. They have learnt how to collaborate. Completion, satisfaction, achievement, contribution to community. All life skills to learn how to work and complete things."

Joe Ewing, Principal, St Pius X Parish School,
Warrnambool, Victoria

Casterton Primary School

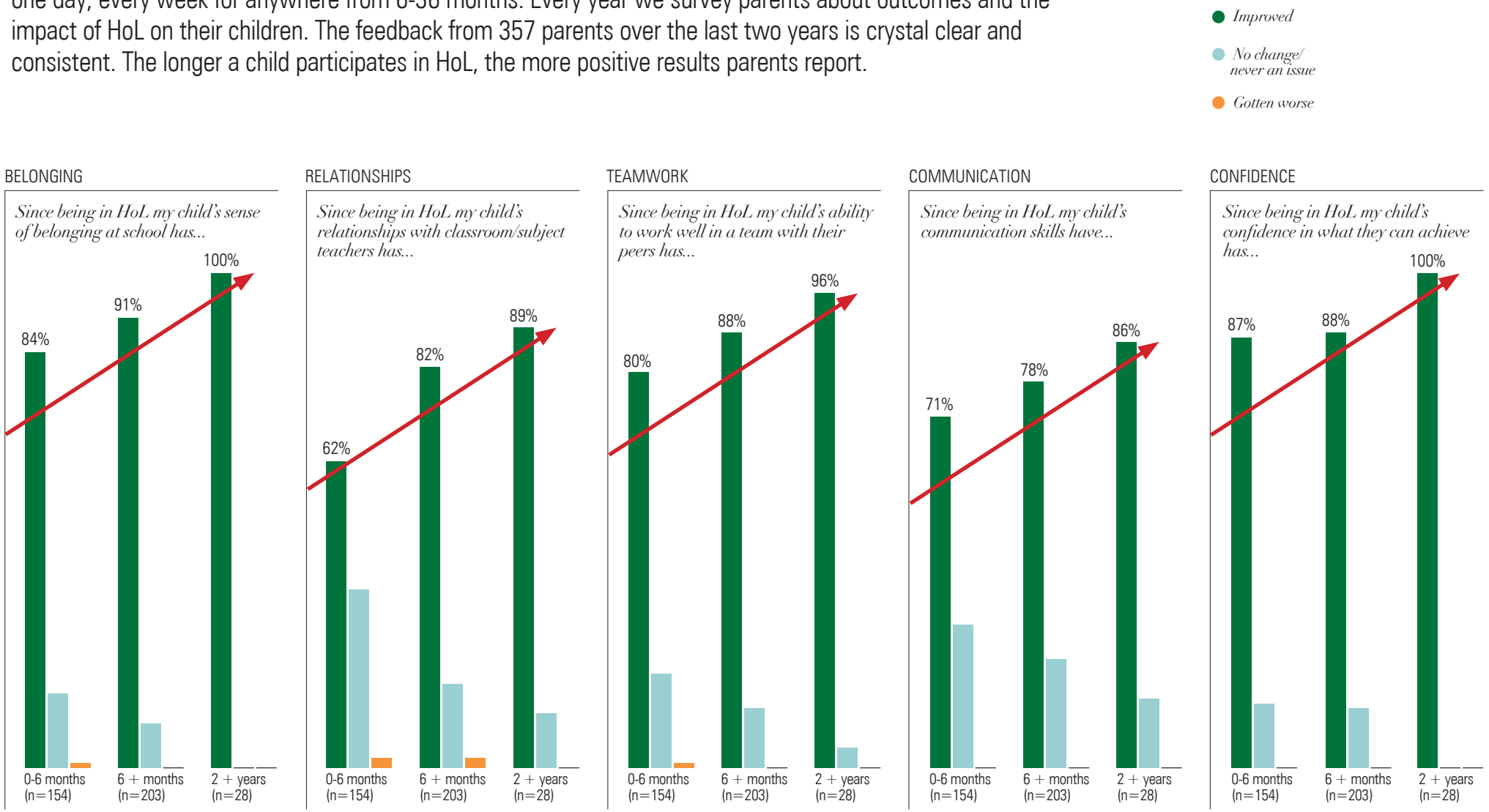
"Hands on Learning has given our disengaged students who don't usually have the spotlight on them the chance to shine. They are joining their remote learning sessions with things to share and stories to tell – the ultimate endorsement of their engagement. HoL is such a great way to keep these kids engaged with school, full stop. They are excited to do it and it has been a critical way to keep them connected to school during the disruption of COVID-19 and remote learning. These students are hungry for this kind of authentic learning because they don't engage well with the normal academic curriculum."

Gillian Robertson, Principal,
Casterton Primary School, Victoria

SUSTAINED SUPPORT

The evidence is in

HoL is distinguished by the sustained and ongoing nature of the intervention with students typically participating one day, every week for anywhere from 6-36 months. Every year we survey parents about outcomes and the impact of HoL on their children. The feedback from 357 parents over the last two years is crystal clear and consistent. The longer a child participates in HoL, the more positive results parents report.



Feeling like I belonged led to me finding my voice and my confidence. If you are in a good environment you are happy to throw yourself out there because you know you are safe, you won't get hurt, there are friends around you. That is the environment so many kids need, and that is the environment so many kids aren't getting.

BIG PLANS

If you have ever wondered if the future is in safe hands, meet Breeannan Rundell. Bree is School Captain at Murtoa College, and proud member of the Widjabul people of the Bundjalung nation. Selected for a Victoria Police traineeship at Horsham, Bree plans to study teaching at university, before ultimately becoming a member of the mounted branch of Victoria Police.

Why did you do HoL?

When I was in primary school, I was going great and loved school. My older brother struggled, wouldn't listen, and didn't like school much. But when he came home from a day in HoL he was always really happy. I was so jealous that he got to do it. Then when I was in Year 7 my attitude to school changed, I didn't have many friends, felt sad a lot, and didn't want to go to school. Hurls and Jenni (HoL artisan-teachers Brenton Hurley and Jenni Downer) asked me if I was interested in doing HoL? "OMG yes". One of my only friends was in HoL. She barely came to school, couldn't focus in class, and HoL had become great incentive for her to attend. By then my brother was a leader in the group, had changed his attitude, and was making the best out of every opportunity. I did HoL for the whole year in Year 8 and loved it.

What did you learn?

I learned to respect everything more. I learnt I can do lots of things. I learnt to build a saw-horse. It was the most fun thing. I had no clue how to do it. I was like, "I can't do that". Then they showed me. I was like, "I can do this". We cooked morning tea and lunch. I remember us all having a yarn, a milo, and talking together. You are part of a team and get to know people much better than you can in a classroom. The great thing about Jenni and Brenton is they know everyone so well. If you are not ok, they help, and they role model how you can change things. I became a lot more confident. Before, I was the quiet kid at the back of the room. After, I learnt how to speak up and share my opinion. In HoL you need to speak up or you won't be heard. I started to contribute more in class. I was going to school a lot more because of HoL. Mostly though, I learnt to be resilient, to look after myself.

How did you become school captain?

I had a tough time outside of school in Year 9 and early Year 10. I started to go backwards, but by midway through Year 10 I got sorted and devoted everything to school. I worked hard in class, got the traineeship with the Horsham Police, and put my hand up for lots of things. In Year 11 we got the chance to nominate for school leadership. I thought I had no chance, all the popular girls were going for it. We had to do interviews and they asked me what I had to offer? "Well, I have a very strong voice that can be utilised," I replied.

What difference does HoL make?

When you first go into Year 7 it is tough. You feel like you don't fit in. But in HoL you are part of a small group, you develop strong relationships, and finally you find somewhere you belong. Feeling like I belonged led to me finding my voice and my confidence. If you are in a good environment you are happy to throw yourself out there because you know you are safe, you won't get hurt, there are friends around you. That is the environment so many kids need, and that is the environment so many kids aren't getting. HoL pushed me in the right direction. "Now it doesn't matter where I am, I can learn, and I will have a blast doing it."

BIG MEANING

SFX Year 7 student Chase has just completed one very special remote learning project, making a stool replicating his great-grandfather's design, so he knows the family is still thinking about him during lockdown.

Year 7 student Chase, St Francis Xavier College (Officer Campus), started Hands on Learning at the beginning of Term 3. He might have only had one face to face session, but already he is flying. Chase's HoL team meets regularly during their remote learning HoL day, checking where everyone is up to and sharing projects. "HoL is already my favourite subject at school. I get to have a break from normal classwork, less pressure and more of how I enjoy learning," says Chase.

> *"Doing Hands on Learning gives me a lot of confidence and that gives me a little bit of hope for my other school work. It's the first time I've actually felt I've done good work, so now I feel that I can do other work well too."*

During remote learning each student worked on a six week project, planning what they would make at home, drawing it up and recording the progress. For Chase it was a chance to give back to his precious great-grandpa who had a stroke earlier in the year. Chase decided to replicate a stool his great-grandpa now 88, used to make for everyone in his family, so he knows they are all still thinking about him. "My grandad, Edward Osmalek, is such a hands on man, always doing and making things. He made us a stool when we first moved into our house. He can't walk anymore and we can't visit him so we have sent him a letter and photos of my stool. We plan to take the stool with us as soon as we are allowed to visit again. It felt good to make, I enjoyed it a lot; it was just fun to do," Chase added.

> *"Not all children are academic and can shine in the classroom. This program is so important because kids are able to do something that they find they are good at, providing a sense of belonging and achievement, rather than always feeling like the dumb one,"*
>
> Mel, Chase's mum.

BIG WINS

In his third year of HoL at Traralgon College, Year 9 student Jayden has changed his attitude to school.

"Back in Year 7 Jayden didn't want to go to school, we had to drag him there and sometimes he was 'exited' from class. He loves his HoL days and now Jayden is even happy to go on the days he is not in HoL. He is more responsible for himself, more confident and now we get a lot more positive than negative comments from teachers and the school itself," Jayden's mum Tina reports.

"The HoL artisan-teachers Adele and Nathan are great role models and having HoL at the start of the week makes school at the end of the week that much easier for Jayden," she added.

> *"HoL has changed the way I think about school. Doing HoL since Year 7 has improved my work ethic so when I go to normal classes I'm more motivated to get the work done."*

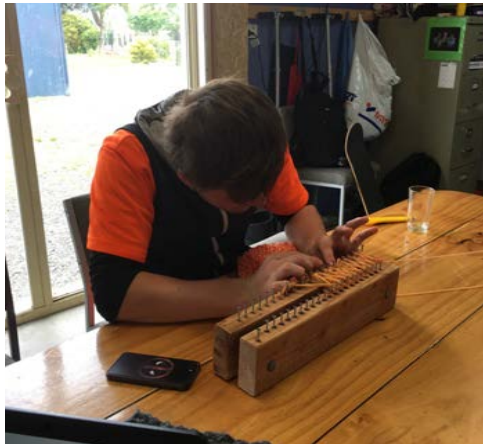
"My confidence has increased and that helps me to make more friends. When I first started, I was nervous working around other people, but now I am happy to show the new kids around and what to do. I love the teamwork, the cooking, and the volunteering. It makes you feel good," Jayden said.

According to Adele, Jayden is becoming a real leader. "In remote learning, he has been explaining schoolwork to his peers and helping with IT problems. He always completes his projects early, answers the reflection questions thoughtfully and promptly posts his results in Teams. Green write-ups on Compass have become the norm for Jayden, going from 16 negative and only 7 positives for all of last year, to 13 positives this year, with many of his teachers praising him for his efforts during remote learning."

Helmut Burri is Jayden's woodwork and metalwork teacher and has observed his increased politeness, consideration of others, and ability to regulate his behaviour.

"The Focus Plans at the heart of the HoL day really help make students aware of specific behaviours they need to target and strategies they can use to improve. The focus on them at the beginning of the HoL day and reflection at the end is really valuable."

Jayden is doing VCAL and a VET building and construction subject next year. When he reflects back he is so glad he is still at school and especially happy that he got introduced to HoL in Year 7.



No lockdown is stopping us from learning

"Our Hands on Learning students have demonstrated great resilience. Staying connected has been very important for many of our students. We have had lots of activities with varying results, but all with lessons to be learnt. We set up a collection box filled with supplies for the set projects at the front office for those that did not have what they needed. We have had a good response from our students, checking in three times a day – a 9.00am chat about how their week has gone and to get to the set project, 12noon to see how everyone is travelling and sort out any problems, then again at 2.00pm to go over the results, reflect and chat about what they learnt or what they might do differently. It has been great to talk about what they have been up to and how they are coping with schoolwork and this pandemic. Keeping in touch has been very valuable to both students and staff," Adele Addison, artisan-teacher.

This hot house was built from 860 recycled plastic bottles saving them from landfill. Now used to grow vegetables for student-made morning teas and lunches (right).

KINDNESS AND COMMUNITY

There is no better time to reach out and lend a hand than in 2020.

The HoL team at Dimboola Memorial Secondary College are excited finalists in the education category of this year's Keep Victoria Beautiful awards for their work creating the Fred Lord memorial garden at the Dimboola Police Station.

Fred was Officer in Charge at Dimboola for many years and it has been a real community project to transform the space beside the station. Funding came from the local community, plants from the local nursery, the seat from the Hindmarsh Shire Council and all the work to transform the site was completed by Hands on Learning.

According to Year 10 student Kolby, the team is pretty happy with their work. "I'm proud of what we did and I've shown my family when we come into town."

"Before we started, the site was just dirt, no plants, nothing. We worked really well as a team, all deciding who did what, and we installed a watering system too.

I've been doing HoL since Year 8 and it is a good program to teach you how to stick to one task at a time, finish and then move on. I now use that back in class and it has helped me to concentrate better."

Love your work Mt Clear

Mount Clear College's Hands on Learning crew teamed up with the school's remote learning students to make bird feeders for the gardens of local aged care homes.

Some feeders were painted to be ready for immediate installation, while others were delivered along with bright paint and brushes ready for residents to paint.

With spring well and truly here the bird feeders will enable residents to bird watch through windows from inside or outside in the garden.

"Research indicates every time you do something kind for someone else, your brain releases oxytocin. Oxytocin leads to increased self-esteem/confidence, increased energy, increased levels of happiness and increased levels of positivity. During this difficult time of remote learning we all need something to lift our spirits,"

Jodie Handley, Student Wellbeing Officer, Mount Clear Secondary College.