

# Boys are a girl's best friend

**Relationships** | Suzanne Robson

BOYS at Northcote High School are breaking the cycle of violence against women through a national program they helped create

This week the students saw their hard work come to fruition when the web-based violence prevention program *Be The Hero!* was launched at their school.

The program, developed by the Victorian Women's Trust, aims to break the cycle of violence against women by encouraging young men to build respectful relationships.

Northcote High School Year 10 coordinator and English teacher David

Norman said the boys collaborated with the women's trust to make sure it connected with young men.

"The idea is to promote young boys as active agents of change instead of men and young boys being passive observers," he said.

Mr Norman said the program's format was conceived by the students.

Boys involved in the program's trial and the school will continue to deliver the four-week program to Year 10 boys in Term 4.

Victorian Women's Trust executive director Mary Crooks said "being heroic was about having the courage to take a stand against violence".



Northcote High students take part in a violence prevention program focused on teenage boys.



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RICHARD CORNISH **EPICURE TODAY**

# Students hear from victim's sister how domestic violence led to tragedy



Jane Ashton talks to year-10 boys at Northcote High School about the death of her twin sister, Julie Ramage.

PICTURE: WAYNE TAYLOR

By **MIKI PERKINS**  
EDUCATION REPORTER

IN A calm, quiet voice Jane Ashton told the small group of Northcote High School students about the man who killed her twin sister.

Julie Ramage met her future husband on the bus when she was 16, she said. During their 23-year marriage Jamie Ramage was controlling, and sometimes violent, but Julie felt too embarrassed to talk about it.

Eventually, she left him. But at a meeting soon afterwards he punched her to the floor, and then strangled her.

"Violence towards women isn't a single reaction, it starts with the put downs, and it ends with not being able to walk away," Ms Ashton said.

Male year-10 students at Northcote High are taking part in a pioneering program that will educate them about violence towards women in all its guises — from verbal harassment to cyber bullying to physical assault.

The online "Be the Hero" program, developed by the Victorian Women's Trust, has been trialled in nine metropolitan and rural Victorian schools and



Julie and Jamie Ramage

will now be available to all Australian schools.

With the help of a male teacher, the interactive program takes a small group of teenage boys through hypothetical scenarios, such as how do you help a friend who is being bullied by their partner?

It also gives them access to facts and figures about violence against women, including the shocking fact that partner violence is the leading cause of preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44.

Ms Ashton, who guided development of the Trust's program, said it was invaluable: "We've been incredibly slow to include men in the discussion and have underestimated men's ability to part of the solution."

During his high-profile trial,

Jamie Ramage's lawyer argued his client had been provoked and killed Julie because she had told him she loved someone else and sex with Jamie repulsed her.

The law of provocation was abolished in Victoria soon after.

Year-12 student Ed Willis, 18, said meeting Ms Ashton made him realise violence against women could become a matter of life and death. "I guess you never think it could go to that level, where someone does this sort of thing to you," he said.

Victorian Women's Trust policy officer Kate Morris said the website also addressed violence against men, but noted that men were more likely to be assaulted by a stranger, while women were more likely to be attacked by someone they knew.

Prominent men supporting the program include comedian Wil Anderson, former footballer and independent federal MP Phil Cleary, former High Court justice Michael Kirby and TV host Rove McManus.

Jamie Ramage was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to a minimum of eight years, and a maximum of 11.

**LINK**  
▶ [www.bethehero.com.au](http://www.bethehero.com.au)

## Boost for pupil anti-stress program

By **NICK MILLER**  
HEALTH EDITOR

A NATIONAL program that teaches young schoolchildren how to battle stress, anxiety and depression is about to quadruple in size with an \$18.7 million injection from the Federal Government.

An academic review of the KidsMatter program, which has run in pilot form in 100 primary schools since 2007, found it helped children at risk of mental health problems — and they also did more schoolwork.

The program encourages communication between students, staff and parents, and aims to intervene early when children have mental health difficulties such as emotional or conduct problems, conflict with peers or hyperactivity.

A regular "social emotional learning" class in the school curriculum teaches children skills to deal with social or emotional setbacks.



Children from Monmia Primary School take part in KidsMatter.

measured a significant improvement in student mental health as a result.

Children identified as having "borderline" or "abnormal" levels of mental health problems benefited the most. At the start of the pilot more than a third of students fell in these categories, but by the end more than three-quarters had nor-

Professor Lyn Littlefield, executive director of the Australian Psychological Society, said it was a fantastic outcome.

"Signs of mental health problems can be identified at an early age, but only a quarter [of these children] access mental health services," she said.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon yesterday pledged \$12.2 million to expand KidsMatter to 400 schools in the next three years, and \$6.5 million to develop a version for pre-schoolers.

Beyondblue has contributed \$8 million to the project, and will put another \$3 million towards its expansion. Chairman Jeff Kennett said the disciplines learned by the children would help them throughout their lives.

"This is internationally groundbreaking work," he said. "It is a real investment in the long-term health of a person, rather than [what] we have traditionally done ... of

Win the

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