



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# We want you to listen: What young people want us to know about school refusal.

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**BRAVERY + PERSISTENCE  
= SUCCESS**

**IN 2 SCHOOL**

A partnership between Travancore School  
Royal Children's Hospital  
& Melbourne Graduate School of Education



# The three phases

## Phase 1

Relationship  
building and  
assessment



## Phase 2

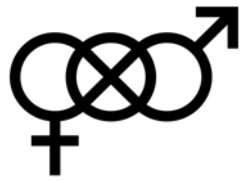
Therapeutic &  
educational  
programs  
delivered in  
transitional  
classroom



## Phase 3

Return to  
mainstream  
school

# Who are the students?



Created by Sophia Lee  
from Noun Project

Male = 14; Female = 30; Gender diverse = 4



Created by Rockicon  
from Noun Project

Aged 11-15 years (M=13.29, SD=0.94)



Created by Aghra Couderc  
from Noun Project

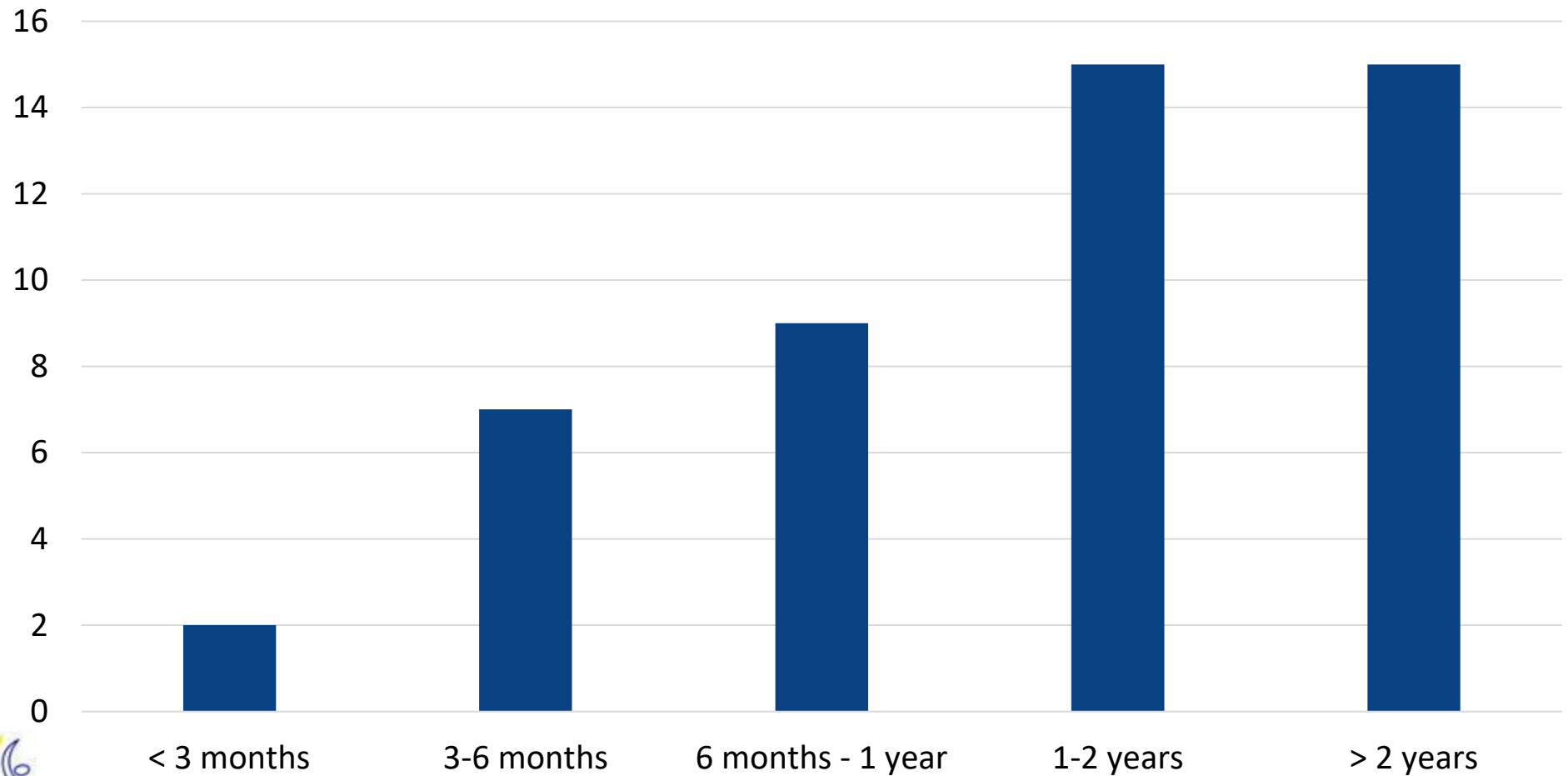
Public = 38; Catholic = 9; Private = 1

# How often are you attending school?

Type of attendance	Number of students
Not at school	32
1-2 days per week	6
2-3 days per week	3
3-4 days per week	7



# How long have you had difficulty attending school?





# Helpseeking

	Helpful	Unable to offer anything helpful	Made things worse	Not used
Mental health clinician	29	13	2	4
GP (local doctor)	5	27	4	12
Hospital school teacher	25	7	1	15
Medication	17	13	3	15
Inpatient stay	3	8	4	33
Student wellbeing	12	17	5	14
Chaplain	0	1	2	45
Parent/carer	22	16	7	3
Teacher at school	17	23	3	5



# Worries or troubles – social difficulties

People, making mates,  
speaking to different  
people

I'm worried about other students  
asking about where I've been  
and I'm also worried about  
people making fun of me for not  
being at school

Meeting people and  
having no friends or  
people to play with

I get worried what  
people are going to think  
of me



# Worries or troubles – mental health

My biggest worry is that I will be trapped in school when I am seriously sick and also that I won't be able to concentrate 100% in class

I always feel like I can't go through all of this because it's too much for me and I just feel really depressed and non-social to everybody and I just want to go home

My anxiety got to me most days making it almost impossible to attend school and my sleep deprivation

My anxiety. Not being able to concentrate. Fear of asking questions, always being upset because my mood drops

# Worries or troubles - school environment

I worry about the schoolwork being too hard, working in groups, speaking assignments

School work is hard. Not getting enough teachers' support, falling behind in school work = anxiety

Worries of the different classes, what we were going to learn. Worried if I forgot something I would get detentions, like left something at home.

I will worry about class work and my surroundings and about what class I might have next and the teacher. If there is too much noise or people in the same area as me I will feel overwhelmed

# Do you find learning difficult? What makes it difficult?

In science , the teacher doesn't stop talking. He abbreviates things into adult terms

The work doesn't make sense to me and I have to ask lots of help for it to make sense and it makes me think that I'm not smart

Speaking out loud, maths and asking for help when I have no idea what's going on

I sometimes need work to be explained to me multiple times so I can understand it

# Facilitators to attending – school

Helping my anxiety  
and getting the  
teachers to know  
what I can and can't  
do

Getting used to a  
classroom space  
and learning more  
communication  
skills

More support  
from teachers,  
and more  
understanding  
from teachers

If someone helped  
me understand  
the learning/work

Knowing what is  
happening on that day  
like what subjects/  
classes I have on that  
day or that certain  
problems have been  
dealt with.

# Facilitators to attending – social/emotional

To have friends,  
changing my  
sleeping time

Talking to other  
kids with the  
same problems

To lose my  
anxiety and  
develop new  
social skills

The support and people  
knowing how I'm feeling  
and what signs to watch  
for. and getting more  
help with work

The program teachers  
helped me overcome  
my unhelpful thinking  
and my medication  
helped control my pain



# Feelings about going back to school?

I wanted to go back because I got bored at home and wanted something to do. Also it was the best thing for everyone.

A little bit confident because I know that if I push through my anxiety I'll be able to go

I really don't what to but I know I need an education to be what I want to be when I grow up

in the middle - looking forward to friends, art. not looking forward to tests, specific specialists, having trouble understanding

I was excited to get back to school

It made feel all different mixed emotions like feeling very anxious, I also start to feel very angry because I don't want to be there or can feel very panicky



# What has made a positive difference for you?

Rewards - I used to get them from school - free drawing time, sticker, time in staff office, if I came early I got free time during class (drawing/iPad)

If I want a good job, I need to go and return to school!

The talking doctors make me feel better than I was before

Because my friends are there and I like school. I was excited about In2School because I do want to go back to school

The fact that I'm not expected to always be at the top of my game and that I just need to relax



# Thoughts

- The voice of young people is integral in understanding socio-cultural factors related to school refusal, and the interaction between systems when designing return to school interventions
- Interventions must address:
  - School environment
  - Teacher-student and student-student relationships
  - Appropriate academic adjustments
  - Future thinking and goal setting



# Daniel's reflection

“I thought in2school was going to be shit at first, I thought it was a special school for people like me (autistic people).

I was really hesitant to go to this programme, but it was a good as programme.

We went out for 'out and about' once a week on a Wednesday , they were extremely fun, I've met new people during this programme & made new mates, this programme was a massive confidence booster & I found out about myself a bit more.

I loved this programme & I'd strongly agree that all children should go to this programme if they didn't go to school!!”



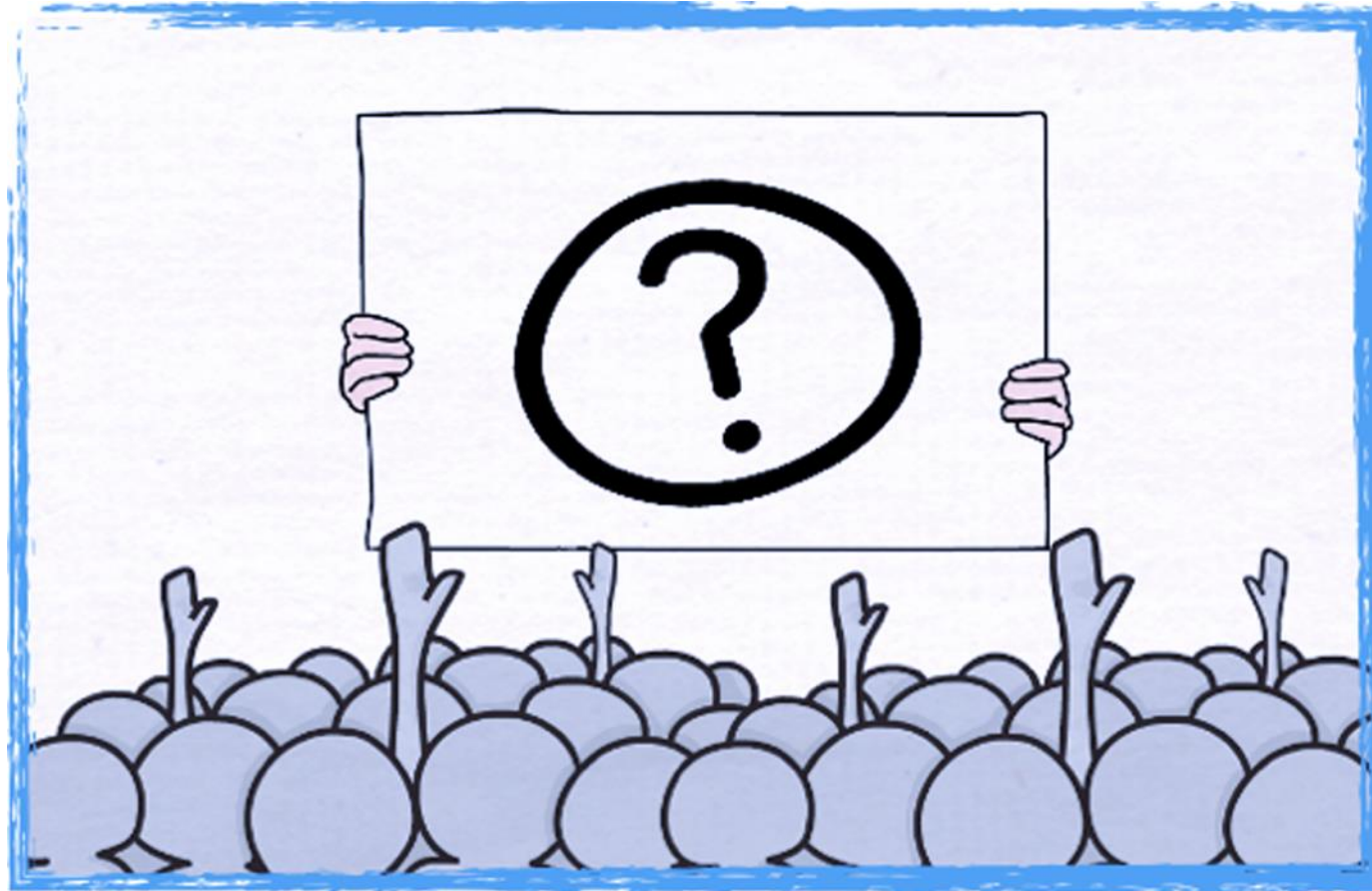
# Final thoughts from the students

Being able to sit down and talk to people about it. I think that's helped a lot because back at the old school, even the counsellor there, she only talked to me once and I never heard from her again.

So here I've been able to talk to someone about all of the stuff that's been going on and stuff like that. It's helped me a lot to go back to school and get over my social anxiety and stuff like that.







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