2026

Catholic School in Melbourne (March 2026)

the man cave

IN SCHOOL CASE STUDY

The Man Cave is Australia's leading preventative mental health charity for boys and young men. We have provided 115,000+ young men with impactful programs, role models and resources.

www.themancave.life

Overview

In Australia, young people are navigating a range of connected challenges across their education, social lives and emotional wellbeing [1-3]. To support them through this, The Man Cave delivers full-day school-based workshops designed to create lasting, positive change in how boys think, feel and act.

Our immersive workshops create space for boys to explore what it means to be a man, question outdated expectations about masculinity, and build healthier relationships with themselves and others.

Since 2022, The Man Cave and an independent Catholic school have partnered with a shared goal: empowering the boys to become great men. This school has embedded our evidence-based programs into their Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum, helping keep student wellbeing at the centre of school life.

So far, more than 1,700 students have taken part in our Level 1, 2 and 3 workshops. We've also run leadership experiences that support senior students to lead wellbeing initiatives in their final years of school.

Our work goes beyond students. We've run keynote sessions for more than 500 parents and delivered professional development workshops for this school's educators.

With nearly every boy, as well as many parents and educators, having been part of The Man Cave, this report looks at the impact of this whole-school approach, and what difference it's made to how students think and behave over time.

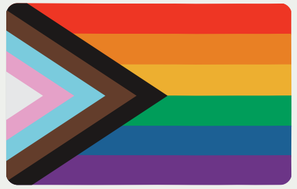
> “The culture at [school name] wouldn't be where we are now without the Man Cave.”
>
> **Principal**

Acknowledgement of Country

The Man Cave would like to acknowledge the custodians of the land throughout Australia, on whose unceded countries we conduct our business. We pay our respects to their elders, past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Indigenous Australia. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people continue to live in spiritual and sacred relationships with this country.

Acknowledgement of Gender

We recognise that gender exists on a spectrum and that not all people identify within binary gender labels. Throughout this report, the term boys refers to young people who identify as male, as well as those who were ascribed male at birth and may identify outside the gender binary. This usage reflects the demographic most engaged through The Man Cave's programs while acknowledging the diversity of gender identities and experiences among young people.



Overview of the program

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1

Year 5/6

Foundations

Designed for Year 6 boys, Foundations builds emotional literacy, empathy and trust. It helps create a more compassionate group dynamic and sets the tone for a culture of kindness and support.

2

Level 1

Self awareness

The Level 1 workshop begins The Man Cave experience, focusing on self-discovery. Through age-appropriate activities and discussions, participants expand their emotional literacy and begin to understand how masculine norms can shape mental health and relationships.

3

Level 2

Relationships

The Level 2 workshop builds on the self-awareness established in Level 1, guiding participants towards healthier relationships. Through shared narratives and reflection, they explore how relationships evolve over time.

4

Level 3

Boundaries

The Level 3 workshop builds on Levels 1 and 2, focusing on the critical concept of boundaries. Through reflection and story-sharing, participants explore the importance of setting and respecting boundaries.

5

Parents and communities

Keynotes

We offer keynote addresses for parents, educators, schools and community groups. These 60-minute face-to-face or online sessions provide context for what's going on in the world of young men, with practical takeaways.

6

Teachers and school staff

Educator PD

The Educator PD equips educators with the theory, language and tools needed to work meaningfully with teenage boys, particularly in emotional literacy, group culture and healthy relationships.

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

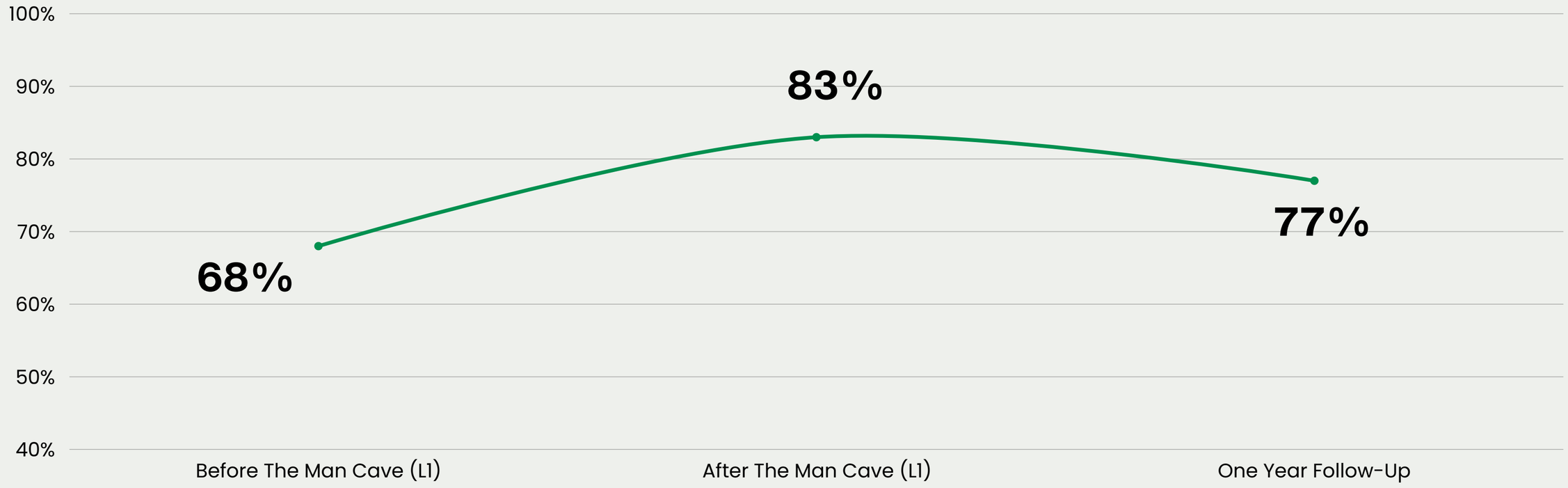
Participants in The Man Cave program complete a pre-workshop survey two weeks prior to the workshop, followed by a post-workshop survey immediately after the session. Each participant is assigned a unique code to track their responses over time, allowing for the collection of longitudinal data across subsequent workshop levels, which are conducted in consecutive years following their Level 1 Workshop. Qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews with three students and five school staff members. Each interview lasted 20 minutes, and generative AI was used to identify initial themes. These themes were refined and validated by the research team at TMC.

The Man Cave has normalised emotional openness among boys, making vulnerability, check-ins and help-seeking a routine part of school life.

Before participating in The Man Cave's Level 1 Workshop, 68% of this school's boys were aware of how gender stereotypes impact their mental health. After the workshop, we saw a 15% increase, and one year later, this figure remained 9% higher than the pre-workshop baseline.[1] Critically reflecting with boys on the scripts of masculinity they have adopted is a primary objective of our Level 1 Workshop. By expanding these expectations of masculinity, we help shift expectations from stoicism toward support-seeking, enabling boys to see the benefit of emotional openness.

This is supported by observational data from the boys' educators, indicating a noticeable increase in boys' help-seeking behaviours three months after our workshop. Educators are reporting a twofold increase in accessing professional mental health support, a 20% increase in seeking support from school staff, and no observed help-seeking decreasing by 22%.[2] Quotes from educators highlight that the boys do not limit these help-seeking behaviours to their peers, but also initiate healthy wellbeing habits with their teachers. Our workshops not only spark immediate positive changes but also cultivate lasting improvements in boys' help-seeking behaviours, reinforced by educators' testimonials.

(1) I UNDERSTAND HOW GENDER STEREOTYPES CAN IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH.

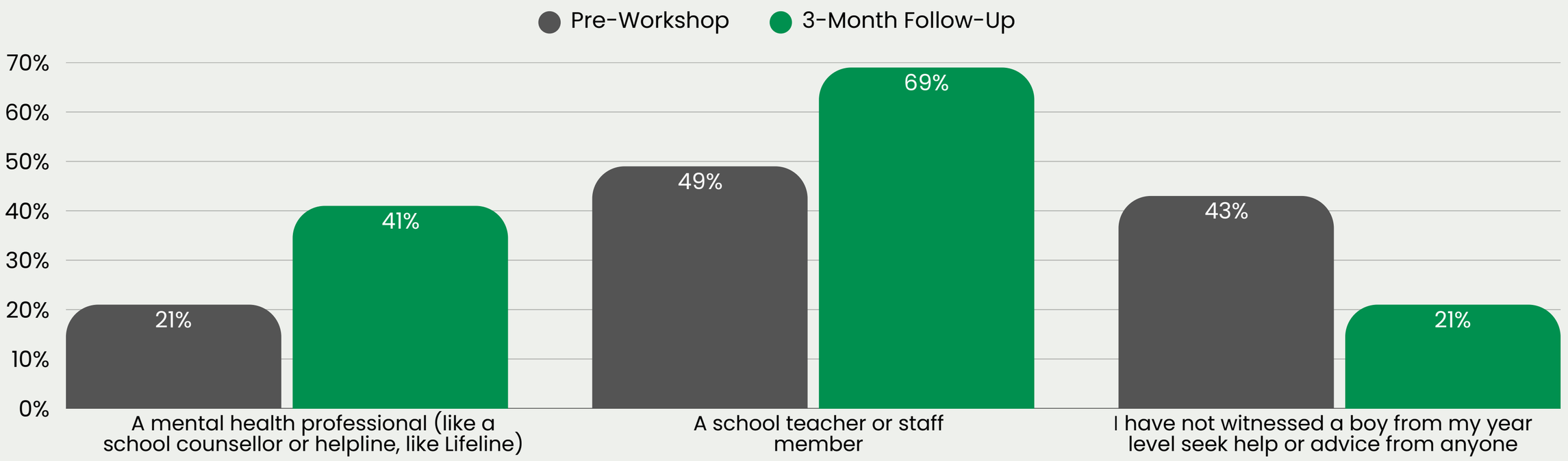


(This result is based on data from the school in focus)

(2) Educators reported more instances of boys seeking help after the workshop.

Pre-workshop vs 3-month follow-up

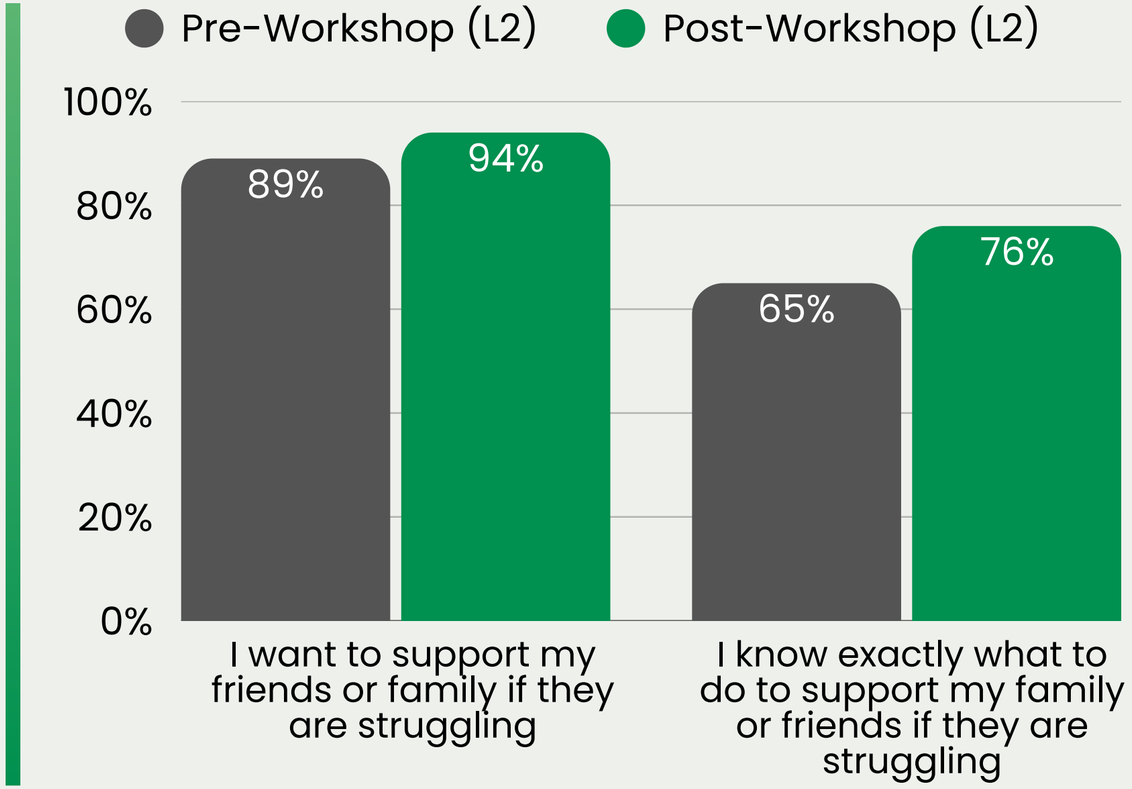
Prompt for educators: Tick any of these that you have witnessed a boy in your year level seek help or advice from in the past 2 weeks for a personal or emotional problem.



(These results represent findings from all of our workshops, not just from the school in focus.)

The Man Cave has transformed the senior boys into authentic role models who actively support younger students.

After two workshops with The Man Cave, the results from this school show a 5% increase in the boys' desire to support their friends and family compared to pre-workshop results. Alongside this, the boys feel 11% more confident in their ability to support loved ones during tough times. While these findings reflect the short-term impact of The Man Cave's workshops, qualitative testimonials from the school highlight the lasting effects these workshops have on the boys over time. Senior school boys facilitate check-ins and mentor the junior school, significantly improving the culture between year levels.



(This result is based on data from the school in focus)

“

I don’t know if The Man Cave has changed the seniors dramatically, but I can definitely tell that it’s affected them positively. I can see that it helps with how they carry themselves and how they greet young people around the school.”

—

Year 10 Student

“

What Man Cave’s has offered is the ability for our senior students to mentor junior students in a way that’s a little bit more structured in how you engage, listen, and empower.

As staff members, we hope to empower, support and mentor students, but there is always distance; it is a lot more authentic when it comes from the student body.”

—

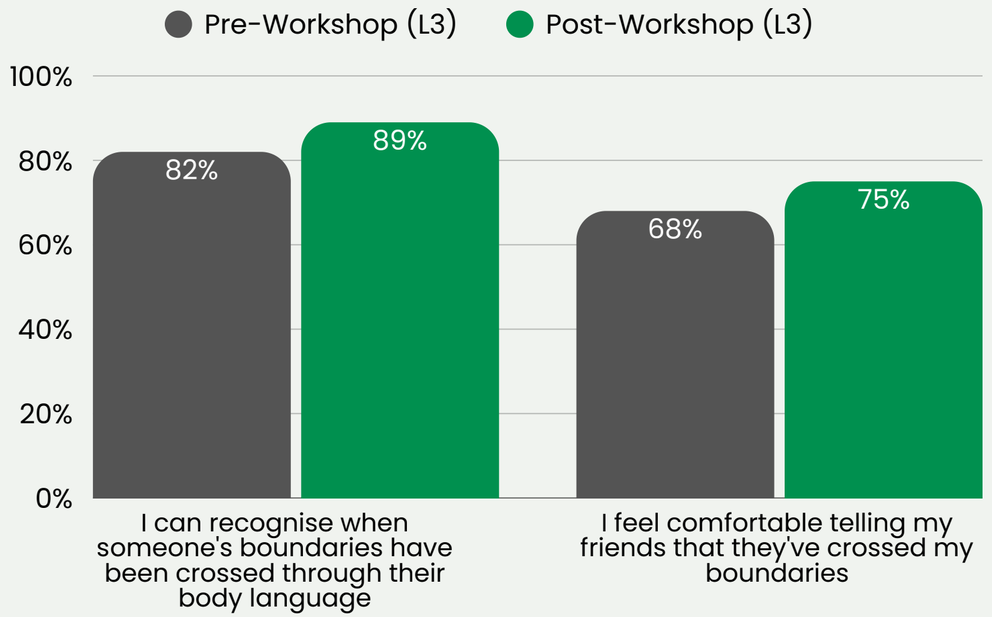
Deputy Principal

The Man Cave helps foster a more respectful and emotionally aware school culture by strengthening teachers' SEL teaching and improving boys' interpersonal behaviour.

After attending a third workshop with The Man Cave, the boys have gained a deeper understanding of boundaries in their everyday lives. In the short term, our workshops have helped increase the boys' awareness: they are now 7% more likely to recognise when someone's boundaries are being crossed based on body language, and 7% more confident in speaking up to their friends when their own boundaries have been crossed.

Feedback from educators also points to meaningful shifts in everyday language and behaviour. School staff have observed a notable reduction in disrespectful language among students who attended our workshops, suggesting that boys are not only learning about respectful boundaries and language, but also starting to apply them in their daily lives.

Finally, quotes from school staff highlight that educators are feeling more empowered with practical strategies they can implement in the school environment after observing our workshops.



(This result is based on data from the school in focus)

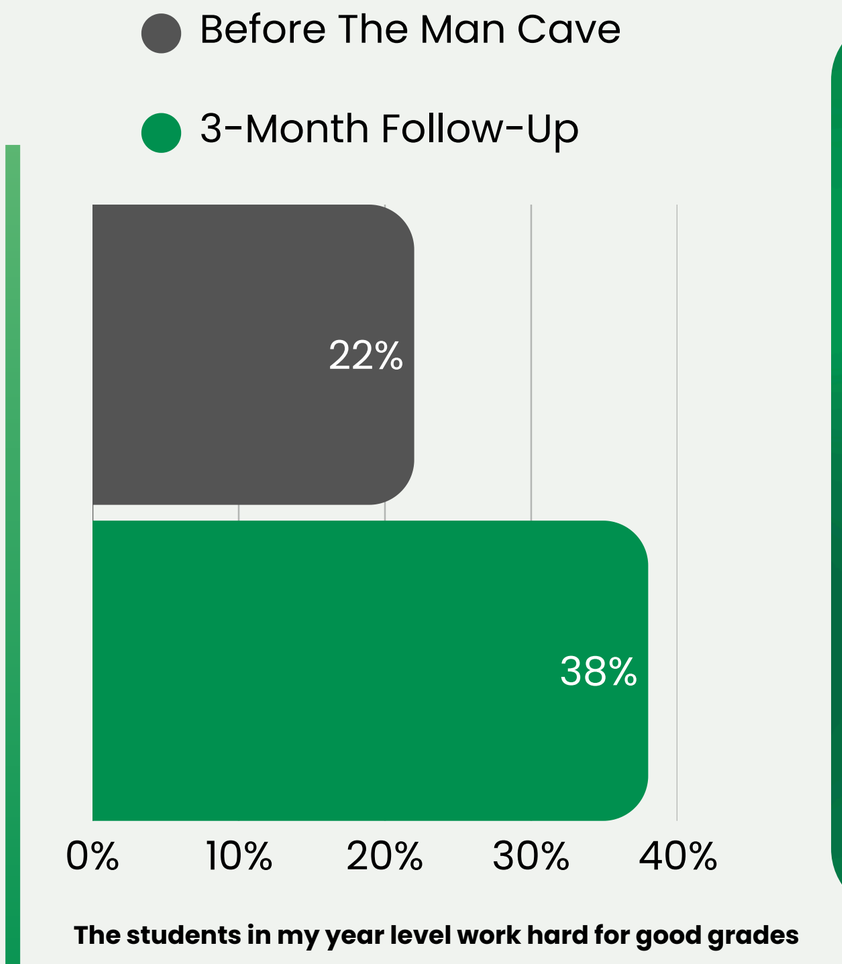
“There’s definitely been a reduction over time of homophobic language. I think at the school we do pretty well in that anyway, but it’s better backed up by the days that the Man Cave hold. As educators, we can use sayings like, ‘remember what we learned in the Man Cave, and how that made some people feel?’ The students go, ‘yeah, sorry, I stuffed up,’ and they can reflect on that and apologise. I also think none of it is intentional anymore. No one’s intentionally discriminating against a certain population, whereas maybe when I first started, they were actually intentionally doing it. People are more understanding and more aware of those things. It’s trending in the right direction.“

Deputy Principal

The boys are more engaged at school and are attending school more frequently.

A secondary outcome of our workshops is that boys are better able to recognise their needs and feel more supported within the school environment.

Observational data from educators reveal a 16% increase in the number of educators who believe their students work hard for good grades three months after attending one of our workshops, a finding further supported from our interviews with staff.



The students in my year level work hard for good grades

(This result represents findings from all of our workshops, not just from the school in focus)

> "There's definitely been a decline in school refusal and far more engagement in the classroom because now they're less concerned about the issues that they're harbouring inside and whether they stick out to their peers."
>
> —
>
> **Deputy Principal**

Conclusion

The findings from this report demonstrate that The Man Cave workshops create lasting, positive changes in boys' emotional wellbeing and contribute to a healthy school culture.

By embedding The Man Cave within the school's SEL curriculum, the senior school students have become the role models we strive to see in our communities, modelling help-seeking, empathy, and respect to younger students.

While short-term attitudinal shifts are evident, this report underscores the sustained behavioural changes, including greater school engagement and increased prosocial behaviour.

For schools seeking to enhance student wellbeing, emotional literacy, and interpersonal relationships, this report shows that The Man Cave offers a proven and effective approach.

> "We're looking at what's best practice, and we identified early that yours is best practice for us to engage with, and we want to form really good partnerships with high-performing community providers."
>
> — **Principal**

THANK YOU

We are grateful to the students, parents, and staff of this school for their continued support of The Man Cave. Your partnership and dedication to TMC have been instrumental in the successful integration of our programs into your curriculum. We are incredibly proud of the positive impact we've achieved together, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration in the future.

GET IN CONTACT

To find out if our program is right for your school, the first step is a conversation. Book a meeting with our Relationships Team below and we'll work with you to understand your needs and find the best fit.

REFERENCES

[1] Lawrence, D., Johnson, S., Hafekost, J., Boterhoven De Haan, K., Sawyer, M., Ainley, J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). The mental health of children and adolescents. Report on the second Australian child and adolescent survey of mental health and wellbeing. Australian Government Department of Health.

[2] Duncan A, Kiely D, Mavisakalyan A, Peters A, Seymour R, Twomey C and Vu L (2021), 'Stronger Together: Loneliness and social connectedness in Australia', Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series, #8, November 2021.

[3] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024, April 16). Health of young people. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/health-of-young-people