

Student Experiences at Kairos Community College

by Aleena Caiga, Renai Delaney, Ash Grant & Steph Walsh

Background

Kairos Community College developed from a youth service seeking to provide academic outcomes for young people who have disengaged from mainstream education. Disengagement is typically caused by incompatibilities with mainstream schooling environments, including learning difficulties, and personal or social circumstances. Young people typically demonstrate their disengagement through truancy and self-exclusion, even before school-initiated permanent exclusion.

Kairos College's purpose is therefore to create a safe learning environment that encourages these young people to re-engage with their education. To do this they are combining social service and neuroscience research into a unique framework known as the "Social Brain Education Model"

The model is based upon the premise that wellness of mind and stable relationships are central to academic achievement. At the centre is the mind of each individual, surrounded by a secure community, resulting in academic outcomes. Each component results in the next giving students personal and social development as well as academic achievement.



Overview of research

The objective of this research is to understand how the students of Kairos College experience the 'Social Brain Model'. It therefore asks the following questions:

What are the students' experiences of Kairos Community College as an alternative school for those who have disengaged with mainstream schooling?

- How do students perceive the school and its impact on their lives?
- How does Kairos' social brain education model shape student experiences of their education and the social environment?

Emergent themes

Students feel emotionally supported

"... The empathy rate in this school is through the roof" (Puc, Male, 18)

"King taught me how to have compassion. And you can't really grow unless you have empathy for other people." (Rabbit, Female, 18)

"It's [the school] teaching you that you don't have to be anyone else but YOU." (Puc, Male, 18)

Strong sense of belonging amongst students

"... We've all got each other's back, occasionally we'll all stab each other in the back. But at the end of the day, if push came to shove, if there was a situation outside of the school where you needed support, every single person would be there." (Rabbit, Female, 18)

"It's Kairos represent, this is our school." (Rabbit, Female, 18)

"They always call us a tribe." (Puc, Male, 18)

Academic expectations could be higher

"The work is here is more baby stuff." (Kendall, Female, 15)

"I'm no smarter than I was." (PD Male, 16)

Students desire for more adult resolutions for problems

"The way they deal with problems here is like primary school..." (PD Male, 16)

This poster is themed in respectful homage to Greek God Kairos, whose favourable opportunities oppose the fates of men. His arrow sparks endless universes of potential, and has done for all time. We dedicate it gratefully to the students whose own arrows are making fates all of their own.

Acknowledgements:

We extend our gratitude to our Academic Advisor Laura Cox, and Supervisors Dr. Lynda Cheshire and Dr. Sarah Bennett for their unwavering support. Many thanks also to our contacts at Kairos Community College, in particular Kairos College's principal, Tanya Genito, and the student cohort, without whom this research could not have taken place.

Methods

Our research team conducted two in-depth focus groups and six two-on-one interviews with the students from Kairos Community College. The focus groups were used initially to scope the field and understand the importance of the social context. Interviews followed the focus groups and were used to explore the students' personal experiences and perceptions in more depth.

Discussion

Student perceptions of school's impact

Through our preliminary data analysis we have found that the school's model is achieving the majority of its goals. While the students rarely acknowledge the model's impact on their lives and their experiences at Kairos, they implicitly demonstrate its impacts through their interactions, attitudes, and anecdotes.

School model shaping student experiences

The students' sense of belonging, connection to the school community, and optimism for the future that they exhibit is demonstrative of wellbeing of the mind. Healthy relationships between students and with staff members are also evident through their playful interactions and anecdotes of support. The students' willingness to be honest in their reflections and share personal stories indicates a strong sense of security, another important aspect of the model which is being achieved.

In summary, we have found extensive evidence that Kairos Community College and its Social Brain Model is positively impacting the students' lives



Create change