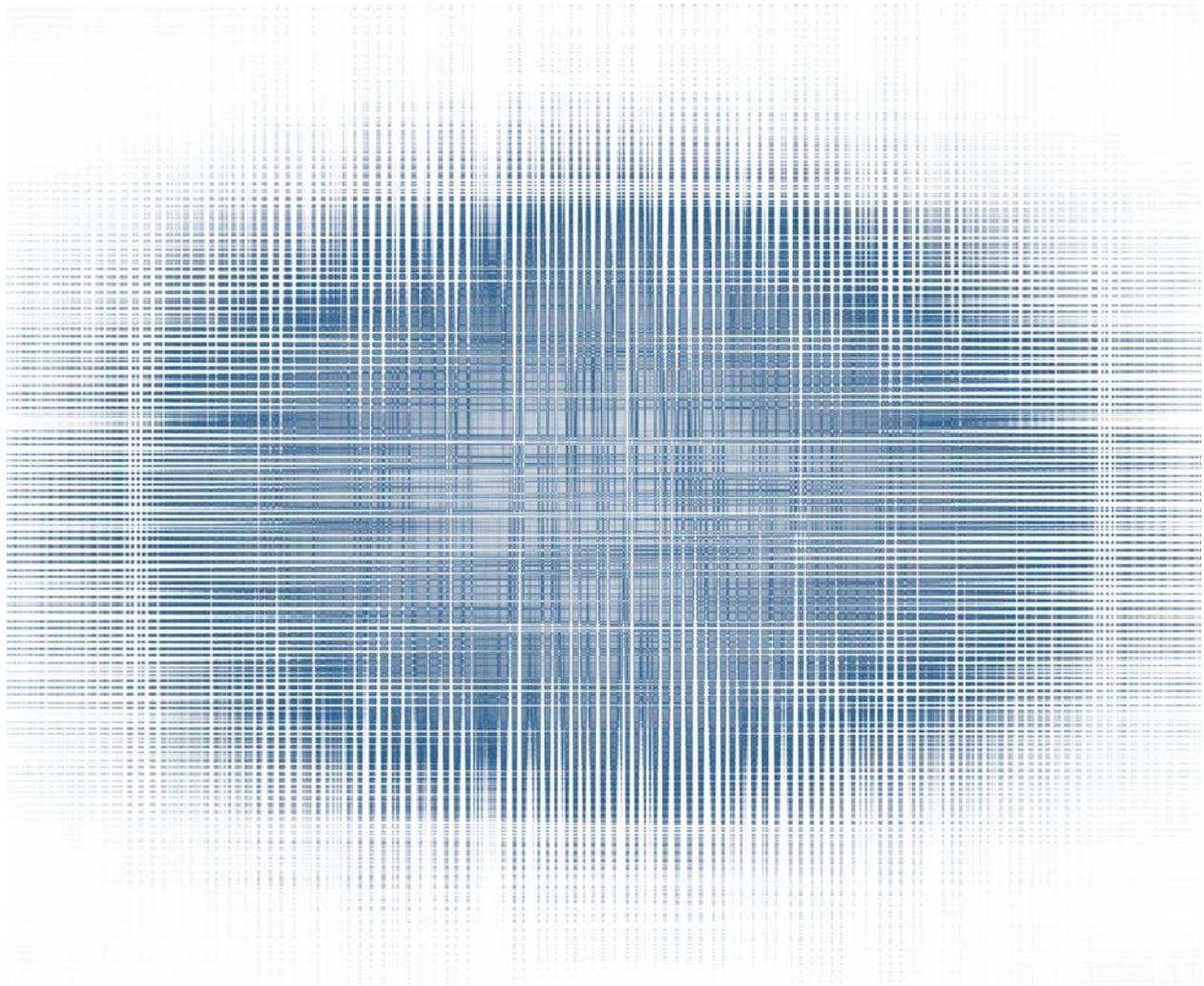




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RESEARCH & METHODS



## Evaluation of the Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) program pilot

**N Priest, O Alam, K Dunn, J Nelson, R Sharples, D Cronin,  
M Truong, K Francis, Y Paradies, P Curry and A Kavanagh**

CSRM WORKING PAPER

NO. 2/2020

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**ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods**

Research School of Social Sciences  
The Australian National University

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# Evaluation of the Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) program pilot

**N Priest, O Alam, K Dunn, J Nelson, R Sharples, D Cronin, M Truong, K Francis, Y Paradies, P Curry and A Kavanagh**

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The findings and views reported in this material are those of the authors, and cannot be attributed to any Australian state or territory government department.

### Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we work and meet, and pay our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging.

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## Acronyms

ANU	Australian National University
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ARCO	Anti-Racism Contact Officer
CSRM	ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods
DET	Department of Education and Training (Victoria)
DoE	Department of Education (NSW)
NSW	New South Wales
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SOAR	Speak Out Against Racism

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## Executive summary

The Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) project is a major research study focused on understanding and addressing experiences and attitudes to racism and racial discrimination, and bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination in Australian schools.

SOAR consists of two components:

- **SOAR survey** – a population-representative survey ( $n = 4664$ ) on the experiences, attitudes and intended behaviours of year 5–9 students in New South Wales (NSW) and Victorian government schools, and their teachers, in relation to racial discrimination, prosocial behaviour, bystander responses, health and wellbeing, and school connectedness.
- **SOAR program** – piloting and evaluation of a school-based bystander intervention program in six primary schools across NSW and Victoria to encourage students and teachers to act when they witness racism and racial discrimination.

This report presents findings of SOAR's second component.

SOAR was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant. It is led by the Australian National University, together with Western Sydney University, the University of Melbourne, the University of Technology Sydney and Deakin University, in partnership with the NSW Department of Education, the Victorian Department of Education and Training, and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

SOAR is a multilevel program comprising six components:

- **Teacher training and professional development.** Two days of face-to-face training for classroom teachers, followed by teacher coaching sessions via email and online.

- **Curriculum and classroom materials.** An 8-week unit of work for years 5 and 6.
- **Student support and development.** After the unit of work was completed, student leaders and influencers were selected from participating classes to form Team SOAR. Team SOAR was a student-led group that planned how to promote SOAR principles to their peers, parents and the wider community.
- **Parent and community involvement.** Team SOAR developed activities to engage their parents and the wider community in SOAR.
- **School audit tool.** Schools were provided with an audit tool to facilitate leadership review of policies and practices regarding racism and racial discrimination, and to develop a school-wide action plan.
- **Monitoring and reporting of racial discrimination.** Schools were given the opportunity to access school-level data from the SOAR survey.

The SOAR program was piloted across six primary schools in New South Wales and Victoria to assess feasibility and acceptability. Four schools received the program, and two schools were comparison schools. Comparison schools provided a way of considering whether the changes were occurring within schools anyway or could be attributed to the program. Student surveys were collected in each of the six schools before (February) and after (August) the program. Focus groups and interviews were held in program schools in August.

## Key findings

- Staff and students reported the **SOAR program was engaging, effective, structured well and supported**, and were **enthusiastic about it being expanded to other schools**.
- Staff and students felt the **SOAR program raised teacher confidence to discuss and address racism, student peer prosocial norms and school climate, students' racial literacy, awareness of racism, and knowledge and confidence to intervene proactively to address racism at school, as well as reduced racial discrimination at school**.
- Student survey data showed **statistical evidence of change over time in student prosocial skills and student perceptions of the teacher inter-ethnic climate** for schools receiving the SOAR program compared with schools that did not receive it.
- Survey findings also provided no statistical evidence of harm in terms of increased racial discrimination or total mental health difficulties, which can be unintended consequences of anti-racism programs with children.

## Qualitative data highlights

Findings indicated that SOAR provided schools with an opportunity to proactively engage with the topic of racism, created space for discussion, and equipped teachers with skills and resources to address a topic that was potentially intimidating:

*The lessons probably went beyond our expectations once we got going with them, because we really weren't sure how the kids were going to respond or we weren't really sure whether the kids would have enough knowledge to understand a lot of the concepts (NSW School B, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

*I didn't think they'd take to it like this, I thought they'd be very quiet on the matter ... would just go through the motions of it, but they seemed to have a lot of opinions about it and thoughts (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

Students and staff indicated that SOAR increased their confidence to speak out against racism, with some students stating it increased their confidence and self-esteem generally:

*It's building up professional practice in teachers where they can talk about an issue that's important. It's helping empower children, with the teams and the ideas they have so you're looking at making a safe space to talk about racism. You're upskilling teachers to deal with racism as an issue and then you're empowering children to be drivers of the cause, so I don't think there's a teacher out there that wouldn't think those are good things to have (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

Students described that SOAR equipped them with concrete skills to do something about racism. They appreciated that SOAR gave them safe ways to respond to racism:

*Just gave us more like solutions, just like kind of small situations that we could kind of – just in our own way we could kind of just like stop it ... it just showed us way we could deal with it in our lives, not just the whole big thing of racism sucks and we need to get rid of it (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

*Student: Everybody is nicer to everyone. They're treating them equally but before the SOAR program people are just pushing each other and fighting but then after the SOAR program they just learned that everyone has their own rights and that ...*

*Student: Everyone is an equal (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

*Doing playground duties, you can definitely see the different interactions of kids in terms of issues happening, a lot of them seem to be a bit more involved positively to try and fix it, which was cool to see (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

*Student: I've learned that it's not okay to be bullied just because you eat a different food to someone else or you have a different colour of skin or what you wear to someone else, we should all be treated the same because we're all humans.*

*Student: I definitely think it's very important because, as she said, we are all humans and*

*we all have a right to be ourselves and to be okay with that and nobody should be able to take it away. It's a really great and comforting program for those that have a different ethnicity or race to know that they're being supported by people. (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

Student-led activities via Team SOAR were positively evaluated by staff and students, although some expressed a need for more support to guide students through this process. Further enhancing Team SOAR may be one way of maximising the sustainability of SOAR:

*The ideas have just flown about how to get the word out and about how to develop the team so my – the kids have just been – inundated with ideas, it's been amazing. They brought out the 'SOAR patrol' logos and that sort of stuff and say why they are against racism, how they would get the message out through the school and how about going through the community, like community radio (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

*It was so good because when we came back out people were saying good job and clapping and when they put it on Facebook everyone all around the community saw it and they were moved by it and our teacher said that she knew we had done a good job because of that (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

Limitations for implementing SOAR included a lack of time and a full curriculum, as well as maintaining sustainability of program impacts and outcomes over the long term.

The qualitative data provided some evidence that SOAR reached parents and the broader community, primarily through Team SOAR activities but also through students discussing the classroom activities with their parents. Further exploration of ways SOAR can connect further with parents and the wider community may be an important area for development.

## Quantitative findings

Quantitative data showed statistical evidence of change over time in student prosocial skills and student perceptions of the teacher inter-ethnic

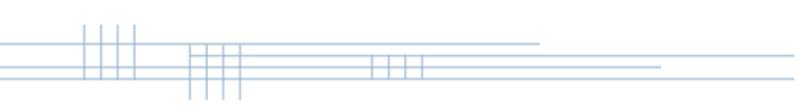
climate for the intervention group compared with the comparison group. These findings are consistent with the qualitative findings, which also suggest that SOAR had impacts on a number of areas not captured by the student survey – for example, racial and racism literacy, acceptance of difference, empathy, family conversations about racism and anti-racism, general confidence, and commitment to anti-racism action.

Key factors that may explain the lack of quantitative change on some measures include a) already positive levels of some outcome measures in schools with little further change possible, b) high levels of missing data on some of the bystander measures, c) a need for more sensitive and specific measures to capture changes described in the qualitative findings, and d) insufficient sample size to allow examination of effects across different types of schools and student demographics. Findings from the SOAR Student Survey (Priest et al. 2019), and repeated collection of this survey could be used to identify schools for the SOAR program.

It is also important to note that quantitative findings showed no evidence the program increased racial discrimination or mental health difficulties, which are identified unintended consequences of some anti-racism programs among children (Bigler & Wright 2014).

## Recommendations

- Further development of the SOAR program incorporating findings from this pilot study is needed. Implementation and testing of the program effectiveness at scale via a larger trial are then recommended. This is the next step in building rigorous evidence of effectiveness for complex multi-component programs such as this one.
- Evaluation findings should be interpreted as related to implementation of all five elements of the SOAR program together, as occurred in this pilot. They should not be interpreted in reference to individual program elements in isolation. Future implementation studies could help determine which program elements are most effective.
- Future effectiveness studies should incorporate measurement tools that capture some more proximal measures of change and domains highlighted by the qualitative findings, and include schools across a wide range of sociodemographics.
- Enhancing uptake of the school audit tool and maximising parent and community connections with the SOAR program are also areas for development in future implementation initiatives.
- Exploring ways the SOAR program can be embedded in, and complementary to, existing curriculum and school programs related to social emotional learning, mental health and resilience is also an ongoing priority.



# 1 Background

Racism and racial bullying are pressing issues in the lives of many Australian children and young people, including at school. Since childhood and adolescence are formative periods for future attitudes and behaviour, reducing racism and promoting diversity at this critical time through school-based programs can have lasting impacts.

The Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR) project, for the first time, provides a large-scale, population-representative study on experiences and attitudes to racism and racial bullying, and on bystander responses to racism and racial bullying, among Australian school students.

This project aims to reduce racism by encouraging bystander action within schools. Bystander anti-racism is defined as action that someone takes in response to witnessing racism, such as reporting the incident to an authority figure, seeking the help of others, comforting or supporting the target, or interrupting or distracting the perpetrator. Bystander anti-racism action and education aim to minimise the physical, psychological and social harms that result from racism and potentially prevent or reduce racism (Nelson et al. 2011).

SOAR consists of two components:

- **SOAR survey** – a population-representative survey ( $n = 4664$ ) on the experiences, attitudes and intended behaviours of year 5–9 students in New South Wales (NSW) and Victorian government schools, and their teachers, in relation to racial discrimination, prosocial behaviour, bystander responses, health and wellbeing, and school connectedness.
- **SOAR program** – piloting and evaluation of a school-based bystander intervention program in six primary schools across NSW and Victoria to encourage students and teachers to act when they witness racism and racial discrimination.

This report presents findings of SOAR's second component.

SOAR was funded by the Australian Research Council, the NSW Department of Education (DoE), and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). Project partners are the NSW and Victorian education departments, and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). SOAR was conducted by a team of researchers from the Australian National University, Western Sydney University, Deakin University, the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Melbourne.

## 2 Overview of the SOAR program

The SOAR program is a whole-of-school, multi-level, multi-strategy approach that aims to foster effective bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination in schools. This evidence-based program is informed by leading international and Australian theory and evidence on anti-bullying, anti-racism, child sociocognitive development and social conflict in schools.

SOAR has a multifaceted theoretical background. It draws on current evidence on reducing prejudice, enhancing inclusion, addressing racism, and promoting prosocial bystander action among children and young people that encourages:

- including all students – programs must support those who experience racism as well as those who do not (Walton et al. 2013, Bigler & Wright 2014, Cook et al. 2014,)
- focusing on age-related cognitive skills and processing such as perspective taking and empathy, multiple classification, dual identity, moral reasoning (thinking and feeling about fairness), not only on intergroup contact (Raabe & Beelmann 2011, Aboud et al. 2012)
- multi-level interventions that consider both stigmatised and nonstigmatised groups across intrapersonal/individual, interpersonal, and structural/systemic levels as these are the most effective (Cook et al. 2014)
- whole-of-school approaches that include school policies and guidelines, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher training and development, student support and development, parent and community involvement, and monitoring and reporting of student performance and racial discrimination (Greco et al. 2010)
- sustained, integrated programs over extended periods of time rather than brief, one-off sessions (Greco et al. 2010)
- raising awareness of racism and its impacts, and potential bystander roles related to racism, and building practical skills among children and young people to respond,

together with changing the social norms of the school and peer context regarding racism and responding to it

- changing social norms through peer ‘referents’ and peer-to-peer social influence, which are powerful ways to reduce school conflict (Paluck et al. 2016).

While there are theoretically sound, rigorously evaluated interventions that are shown to be effective at promoting prosocial bystander action in response to bullying (Salmivalli et al. 2011, Salmivalli 2014) and increasing the social norms within schools to reduce bullying conflict (Paluck et al. 2016), there is a lack of such evidence specific to racism, racial discrimination and racial bullying.

There remains an ongoing need for such programs to be evaluated rigorously, including their effectiveness in changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours over time (Raabe & Beelmann 2011, Aboud et al. 2012, Earnshaw et al. 2018).

As a multilevel program, SOAR spans six mutually reinforcing elements. Embedded across all six elements is a consideration of all groups of students, including supporting those who may experience racism. The SOAR program was developed with the sociocognitive skills of children of different age groups in mind:

1. Teacher training and professional development
2. Curriculum and classroom materials
3. Student support and development
4. Parent and community involvement
5. School policies and guidelines
6. Monitoring and reporting of student performance and racial discrimination.

## 2.1 Teacher training and professional development

- Training workshops: Two days of face-to-face training were provided for classroom teachers (year 5/6 teachers) delivering the SOAR curriculum and classroom materials, as well as any other interested school staff. These training workshops were presented by research staff from the Australian National University (NP, MT), together with school support staff from Foundation House. NSW DoE staff attended the NSW training and development workshops.
- Teacher coaching sessions: Coaching/debrief sessions were delivered throughout the program to enable staff to debrief with the research team regarding the delivery of SOAR and troubleshoot any issues. These were available both online via email and via the phone as requested by teachers. Emails were sent to classroom teachers delivering the program fortnightly, with follow-up via email and phone or Skype provided as needed and as negotiated with schools and teachers.

## 2.2 Curriculum and classroom materials

The SOAR classroom materials were delivered to students in years 5 and 6.

The SOAR classroom materials constituted an 8-week unit of work: 'Speaking Out Against Racism' that included suggested activities and questions to guide learning.

This unit of work and classroom materials were developed by the research team (NP, OA), and then workshopped with classroom teachers and school support staff who had experience working with children from culturally, racially and religiously diverse communities. Project partners (NSW DoE, Victorian DET, AHRC) also reviewed and provided comments on the unit of work and classroom materials.

These lessons were facilitated in class by classroom teachers, and culminated in the development of a class charter on proactive anti-racist bystander action in the final week of term.

## 2.3 Student support and development

Team SOAR student-led sessions: At the end of the 8-week unit of work, student 'influencers' were selected from year 5/6 classes to promote the principles of SOAR to their peers and the wider school community during the following school term. These influencers were known as 'Team SOAR'. They held meetings to develop promotional materials and activities for distribution around the school. Students decided on the best means to promote SOAR principles – for example, posters around the school, a SOAR presentation to the school. Some schools chose to hold Team SOAR activities during class time and others during lunchtime.

## 2.4 Parent and community involvement

Team SOAR students created materials to engage with parents and the wider community, and to communicate SOAR principles and activities more broadly.

## 2.5 School policies and guidelines

An audit tool was provided to school leadership and discussed during the teacher training and development sessions. The audit tool was designed to facilitate leadership review of policies and guidelines regarding racism, racial discrimination and racial bullying, and to develop a plan for future action in this area.

## 2.6 Monitoring and reporting of student performance and racial discrimination

Intervention and comparison schools were provided with the opportunity for school-level reports on the baseline and follow-up survey data.



## 3 Methods

This study aimed to investigate the feasibility and acceptability of SOAR, a novel, multi-component intervention program to promote proactive bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination in Australian primary schools.

### 3.1 Study design and approach

Best-practice guidance for the development and evaluation of complex interventions, defined as interventions with several interacting components, recommends that they are developed systematically using best available evidence and appropriate theory, and then tested using a carefully phased approach, starting with a series of pilot studies (Medical Research Council 2006). Pilot studies that assess feasibility and acceptability of the intervention are thus considered critical to the development and evaluation of complex interventions, and provide valuable insights regarding the appropriateness of procedures, recruitment and retention, and acceptability of the program to participants. They also contribute important information about how the program can be modified before a more definitive effectiveness evaluation (Medical Research Council 2006). The use of mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, is considered particularly important to feasibility pilot studies (Medical Research Council 2006).

Following this guidance, a mixed-methods, longitudinal quasi-experimental design was used in this study. Qualitative data, including interviews and focus group discussions, enabled an understanding of how the program was experienced by school students and staff. Quantitative longitudinal measures of change were collected via student questionnaires administered at baseline and follow-up. The inclusion of comparison schools provided a way of considering whether the changes were occurring within schools anyway or could be attributed to the program.

The acceptability, appropriateness, feasibility and impacts of SOAR were examined using qualitative data to explore student and staff experiences of the program, including:

- understandings of the need for the SOAR program in schools
- strengths and challenges of the SOAR program implementation
- impacts of SOAR on students, staff and the school community
- limitations of SOAR and suggested improvements.

Quantitative data from student surveys used several outcome measures to assess the effectiveness of the SOAR program. The program effects were examined by comparing intervention-school students and comparison-school students at two time points: at the beginning and at the end of the program. The study was pre-registered with the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry. Primary outcomes were student-reported bystander responses, self-efficacy to intervene, peer prosocial norms and perceived school climate. Secondary outcomes were student social and emotional wellbeing, school connectedness, sleep and experiences of racial discrimination.

### 3.2 Procedures

To recruit schools, emails describing the SOAR program were sent in late 2017 to primary schools in NSW and Victoria. Information about the study was disseminated via community and education networks. This information described the goals and content of SOAR and included details about how to join the study. Four volunteer schools (two in NSW and two in Victoria) agreed to participate in the study as intervention schools. Two volunteer schools in NSW agreed to participate as comparison schools. All students in years 5 and 6 in each participating school were invited

to participate in the study. Ethics approval was obtained from the Australian National University and from each state government education department; permission was obtained from each participating school principal and staff member; and parent consent and student assent were obtained.

Qualitative data collection took place in August and September 2018, after the SOAR program in intervention schools was completed. Key informant interviews with school staff and focus groups with students were conducted. Ten staff interviews were conducted across the four intervention schools in NSW and Victoria (five in each state). Interviewees were teachers responsible for delivering the SOAR program ( $n = 6$ ; 3 in each state), school leadership staff such as assistant principals ( $n = 2$ ; 1 in each state) and affiliated staff such as Anti-Racism Contact Officers (ARCOs;  $n = 1$ ) and wellbeing coordinators ( $n = 1$ ).

Nine focus groups with students were conducted across the four intervention schools in NSW ( $n = 5$ ) and Victoria ( $n = 4$ ). Focus groups ranged from two to eight participants, with most containing six participants, and were 18–25 minutes long. Teachers selected students who they believed were information-rich sources and included a diverse range of students, where possible. Demographic questions were not part of the interview schedules for teachers or students. All qualitative data collection occurred on site at the participating schools, and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Quantitative data collection took place at the beginning of term 1 in February 2018 and again at the end of term 2 in 2018 after the SOAR program was completed in both intervention and comparison schools. Students completed online or paper surveys in classrooms supported by SOAR research staff. Each school negotiated their preferred survey mode (online or paper) before data collection. A total of 645 students completed surveys across the six participating schools: 252 students in comparison schools and 393 students in intervention schools.

## 3.3 Measures

### 3.3.1 Qualitative data

#### **Staff and student experiences**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore staff views and experiences of the need for the SOAR program in schools; implementation of SOAR; impacts of SOAR for staff, students, parents and the wider school community; and suggestions for improvements to SOAR. School leadership staff were asked additional questions regarding the impact of SOAR on the whole school.

Semi-structured focus groups were conducted to explore students' experiences of participating in SOAR, their learnings from participation in the program, and their views about what worked about the program and what they thought could be improved.

### 3.3.2 Quantitative data

#### **Primary outcomes**

##### *Bystander responses*

Students were asked 11 items about their bystander responses adapted from the participant role questionnaire (Salmivalli et al. 1996). Items comprised three subscales: 'assistant', 'defender' and 'outsider'. Students were asked how often they did each response (e.g. I joined in, I helped the student being treated badly, I didn't do anything) when they saw other students treated unfairly because of their race/ethnicity/cultural background. Response options were Never/Hardly ever/Sometimes/Most of the time/Always, scored as 1–5. Sum scores of items were created for each scale, with high scores indicating a negative outcome for assistant and outsider scales and a positive outcome for defender scales.

##### *Self-efficacy to intervene*

Students were asked four items about their self-efficacy to intervene when they saw other students treated unfairly because of their race/ethnicity/cultural background. They were asked 'How confident are you that you could ... stop it; help them feel better or cheer them up; go to a teacher for help; go to another adult for help'.

Response options were not at all confident/ not Very Confident/Neither Confident nor Unconfident/Confident/Very Confident, scored as 1–5. A sum score of these items was created, with a high score indicating a positive outcome (Stevens et al. 2000, Andreou & Metallidou 2004, Andreou et al. 2013).

### ***Peer prosocial norms***

Students responded to five questions about their perceptions of the prosocial norms of their school peers. They were asked ‘How many students at your school ... Stand up for students who are made fun of or bullied?; Help other students even if they don’t know them well?; Care about other people’s feelings?; Help stop arguments between other students?; Are nice to everyone, not just their friends?’ Response options were Hardly any/ Few/Some/Most/Almost, scored as 1–5. A sum score of these items was created, with a high score indicating a positive outcome (Spivak et al. 2015).

### ***Perceived school climate***

Students were asked seven questions about their perceptions of the inter-ethnic climate of the school, adapted from the School Interracial Climate Scale (Green et al. 1988). Three questions were about the teacher climate and four about the peer climate. Response options were Strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/ Agree/Strongly Agree, scored as 1–5. A sum score of these items was created, with a high score indicating a more positive climate.

### ***School connectedness***

Five items asked students about their connectedness at school (Benner & Graham 2009) – for example, ‘I have nobody to talk to’; ‘It’s easy for me to make new friends’; ‘I can find a friend when I need one’. Response options were not true at all/hardly ever true/sometimes true/ true most of the time/true all of the time, coded as 1–5. Items were reverse coded as required, and a sum score was created, with a high score indicating a negative outcome.

### ***Teacher empathy***

Students were asked four questions about their teachers’ empathy, adapted from the Victorian DET Attitudes to School Survey – for example, ‘My teachers care about me’; ‘My teachers are

good at dealing with racism when it happens’. Response options were strongly disagree/ disagree/neither agree nor disagree/agree/ strongly agree. A sum score of these items was created, with a high score indicating a positive outcome.

### ***Inter-ethnic contact***

Five questions asked about students’ inter-ethnic contact – for example, ‘I have participated in cultural events with people from other racial/ ethnic/cultural backgrounds’ (Spivak et al. 2015), adapted from Phinney (1992). Response options were strongly Disagree/Disagree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Agree/Strongly Agree, scored as 1–5. A sum score of these items was created, with a high score indicating a positive outcome.

### ***Socioemotional adjustment***

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief questionnaire assessing the psychological adjustment of children and youth (Goodman 2001). The youth-reported (11–17 years) SDQ consists of 25 items across five subscales. All 25 items were asked of students. To indicate various symptoms of mental health difficulties, we examined the total difficulties, conduct and emotional scales of the SDQ, the latter of which reflect externalising and internalising problems (Bayer et al. 2011). We also examined child strengths in relation to prosocial behaviour. The SDQ is not intended to be used as a diagnostic instrument; rather, it indicates problematic emotions and behaviours across a range from normative to highly elevated (Stone et al. 2010). Although cut-points have been developed for the SDQ, these have not been validated for ethnic minority youth; continuous scores are analysed herein.

### ***Sleep problems***

Sleep duration was self-reported, with students asked what time they fall asleep and wake up on a usual school day and on a nonschool day. Sleep duration was calculated as the difference between reported sleep time and reported wake-up time, separately for school and nonschool days. Sleep latency was measured using a single item: ‘During the last four weeks, how long did it usually take for you to fall asleep?’ A three-category analytic variable was created: 0–30, 30–60 and >60 mins (Kelly et al. 2018).

Sleep disruption was measured using a single item: 'During the past four weeks, how often did you awaken during your sleep time and have trouble falling back to sleep again?' A three-category analytic variable was created: none/a little, some/a good bit, most/all'. These items have previously been used with children and adolescents from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Kelly et al. 2018).

### ***Experiences of racial discrimination***

**Direct racial discrimination** was reported by students using 10 items drawn from the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (Fisher et al. 2000), together with two items used previously with diverse Australian school students (Priest et al. 2014). Items assessed discrimination by peers at school (four items), by school staff (three items) and by others in the society (five items). Each discrimination item was then followed by the attribution ('because of ...') with 'your race/ethnicity/cultural background' being one of three non-mutually exclusive options. 'Culture' is commonly used to refer to race or ethnicity in Australian community vernacular so was included in the attribution following previous approaches (Priest et al. 2014, 2016). Frequency of each experience was indicated by 0 = This did not happen to me, 1 = Once or twice, 2 = Every few weeks, 3 = About once a week, or 4 = Several times a week or more. Following previous approaches (Fisher et al. 2000), subscales were created for each source of discrimination (peer, school, societal) by calculating the mean frequency rating for relevant items (Priest et al. 2020, in press).

**Vicarious racial discrimination** was reported by students using five items drawn from previous Australian studies; four items assessed discrimination from peers at school, and one item assessed discrimination from teachers (Priest et al. 2014). Students were asked how often they had seen other students treated unfairly – for example, treated with less respect by other students because of their race/ethnicity/cultural background (four items), and how often they had seen 'Other students being picked on or treated with less respect by teachers at this school because of their race/ethnicity/cultural background' (one item).

Response options were 0 = Never, 1 = Hardly ever, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Most of the time and 4 = Always.

## **3.4 Data analysis**

### **3.4.1 Qualitative**

Following transcription of the recordings, interviews and focus groups were thematically coded and analysed through NVivo. Staff and student data were analysed separately. The coding framework was developed inductively from the data gathered, and ultimately contained 10 thematic nodes: activities undertaken as part of SOAR, mechanisms for change, evaluative comments and suggestions, future for SOAR within schools, groups under discussion, impact of SOAR – conceptual categories, implementation of SOAR, method, role, and school. These 10 nodes then fed into the four main themes, with many nodes contributing to many or all of these themes: understandings of the need for the SOAR program in schools; strengths and challenges of SOAR program implementation; impacts of SOAR on students, staff and the school community; and limitations of SOAR and suggested improvements.

### **3.4.2 Quantitative**

For the demographic information, the number and proportion of students by individual school and by study arm (control and intervention) were described. For the outcome scores that were continuous, the mean (and standard deviation), median and interquartile range (25th–75th percentile) are reported.

Multi-level mixed-effect models were used for analysis. This modelling accounts for the non-independence in the data – in our case, paired data on individual students within a school. A linear mixed model was used for continuous outcomes and a logistic mixed model for the categorical outcomes.

## 4 Qualitative findings

Findings from the qualitative data regarding the SOAR program showed that, overall, teaching staff and students felt that SOAR had been successful in raising students' racial literacy and confidence to intervene in incidents of racism and racial bullying at school. Findings are discussed below under four key themes:

- understanding the need for the SOAR program in schools
- strengths and challenges of SOAR program implementation
- impacts of SOAR on students, staff and the school community
- limitations of SOAR and suggested improvements.

### 4.1 Understanding the need for SOAR in schools

Staff and students discussed what they knew about the SOAR program before it commenced, the expectations that they had of the program, and their views of the context and need for such a program. The key themes that emerged from focus groups and interviews were as follows:

- Proactive programs such as SOAR are needed in schools to address racism.
- SOAR addressed perceived curriculum gaps while also being consistent and complementary with wider school priorities and programs.
- Participants had positive expectations for SOAR's impact.
- Participants' initial reservations were later overcome.
- *Racism is predominantly seen as interpersonal behaviours.*

#### 4.1.1 Proactive programs such as SOAR are needed in schools to address racism

There was a general awareness among teachers and members of the school leadership team of the need to address racism in a proactive way that focused on the entire school. Staff participants understood that SOAR was intended to provide training and resources that would enable primary interventions against racism and other forms of cultural intolerance, rather than reacting to events of racism and racist bullying:

*In the past we probably hadn't done a lot of sort of proactive you know activities, programs, it was more just reacting to kids with issues and trying to sort them out ... You know bring in as many different professionals and groups and ideas that would help us sort of yeah have the teachers have the knowledge to help the kids build themselves up rather than waiting for problems to occur (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

They also saw how it was intended to open up the ability to speak with students about issues of racism:

*But there's probably nothing directly in the curriculum about racism as such so it's kind of a good thing to touch on, I think and yeah, there are so many things that we teach and so crowded that yeah, there's a million things we could be doing but I think it's probably really important to have those discussions (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff).*

*Make it more of a prevalent topic for the teachers to discuss with their kids ... I thought if they can get some guidance on this topic ... like everyone that works here's fairly passionate about multicultural communities and so I thought if they had some resources coming down to help them speak on that sort of topic that it would be good for them (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

School staff were quite adept at understanding that SOAR was not just about students and their attitudes and behaviours, nor about community relations in the school. They understood that SOAR was also about teachers and school leaders:

*It's building up professional practice in teachers where they can talk about an issue that's important. It's helping empower children like with the you know the teams and the ideas they have so you're looking at yeah, I guess – and making a safe space to talk about racism. You're upskilling teachers to deal with racism as an issue and then you're empowering children to be drivers of the cause so I mean I don't think there's a teacher out there that wouldn't think those are good things to have but maybe you need it (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

*But it's not so much the children, it's probably more so some of the staff (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

#### **4.1.2 SOAR addressed a curriculum gap while being consistent and complementary with wider priorities and programs**

Some staff perceived the study of racism to be a gap in curriculum and programs, and saw SOAR as filling that void. In general, staff thought that the program was about the management of cultural diversity. This was particularly the case for schools with greater degrees of cultural diversity. In these schools, there was much less comment on the role of SOAR in influencing the broader community, although staff predicted that SOAR would help students who are exposed to racism outside of school, which was seen as 'a really big eye-opener' (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher):

*In the real world in like when you're around adults like more often that [racism] can happen a lot more (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

Some stressed the potential impact upon younger students:

*So I think one of the greatest benefits would be like passing it down to the younger ones (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

Many identified the SOAR intervention as complementary to state-level imperatives, such as the resilience agenda and antibullying programs:

*I think it came quite hand in hand with the resilience project that they've got going at the moment. So a lot of the time they were interrelating information from one to the other ... they were using the terminology that we'd used ... the resilience project has taken off so big with the schools that every school I've heard of at the moment seem to be doing something with it (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

*Because you know, we have to do child protection and we have to do drug ed and we do road safety and we did safe living, so instead of sort of safe living we sort of incorporated, that was what we sort of did (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

*... [SOAR concepts were] crossing over into like, we were talking, we had a bullying day and the kids were using like bystander and those types of, that language (NSW School A, Interview 3, teacher).*

A few respondents referred to links between SOAR and multicultural education or anti-racism policies of the state education departments. One teacher stated, 'there's probably nothing directly in the curriculum about racism as such so it's kind of a good thing to touch on', by providing life and people skills (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff). A student in the same school stated the program was 'really applicable to the real world' (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).

In summary, school staff participants reflected on the way the SOAR program provided them with an opportunity to proactively engage with the topic of racism, and created space to engage with this potentially challenging topic. The SOAR program equipped teachers with resources to approach teaching about productive responses

to racism and racial bullying. Some school staff perceived connections between SOAR and other programs run at their school.

#### 4.1.4 Positive expectations exist for SOAR's impact

Teachers and members of school leadership teams referred to a number of expectations that they had had before starting the SOAR program. A handful of respondents reported that they had positive expectations for the SOAR program, including the positive imagery and branding it could create, the opportunity for students to learn how to be a more prosocial citizen, and the enhancement of students' understanding of global citizenship and knowledge of multiculturalism:

*I didn't put too much thinking into like is this a good thing or not? I was like yeah, that's something that can really fit sort of our profile (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

*My parents thought it was good for the school because we have a lot of like Muslims and like different cultured people, so they thought it would be good for the school (NSW School B, Focus Group 1, student).*

*I think I mentioned it to my parents and they thought it was a good idea that we're learning about it and thinking about it, it's not just in our school, it's happening all around the world and in public areas and sporting events and everywhere (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

For these participants, SOAR was seen as a timely program because of the demographic profile of the school itself and because of the way that racism was manifesting in the world globally. Others alluded to the fact that SOAR could help to develop conscious and active citizens for the future. There was agreement that SOAR was important because it provided skills for students for when they would be exposed to both cultural diversity and racism, either after school or if they moved to another locality.

#### 4.1.4 Initial reservations were later overcome

Some participants – particularly staff members – indicated that they had had some reservations about the SOAR project in the beginning, but for the most part these were addressed and their expectations were exceeded. The major anticipated challenges discussed in the interviews were that the material would not be satisfactorily engaging or would be too difficult conceptually for students; that the word 'racism' would be problematic to use; that there would be racist opposition; or that there was a lack of staff confidence and clear school direction:

*I wasn't sure where it was going to go, I wasn't sure how the kids would react to it and I didn't know ... The lessons probably went beyond our expectations where we, once we got going with them because we really weren't sure how the kids were going to respond or we weren't really sure whether the kids would have enough knowledge to understand a lot of the concepts (NSW School B, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

*I didn't think they'd take to it like this, I thought they'd be very quiet on the matter ... would just go through the motions of it and – yeah, but they seemed to have a lot more opinions about it and thoughts (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

*We weren't really sure ... how much they would possibly understand, but the concepts are very universal and our children were really receptive, highly engaged, looked forward to the program every week (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

*I think that we actually could then see how good it was to do this stuff with the kids because they're going, you know, once they leave [NSW School A] when they grow up, they're going to be faced with people from all different types of walks of life and yeah (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

Both students and staff members anticipated discomfort associated with the word 'racism'. Many staff commented that they had anticipated students would not have the skills and confidence to engage with racism, and expressed feelings of

nervousness, discomfort and uncertainty about how the lessons would go:

*I was actually a bit nervous at the start because I suppose I never received anything like this when I was a kid so I didn't know how I was going to handle it personally (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

*I wasn't sure where it was going to go, I wasn't sure how the kids would react to it and I didn't know, I guess whether, you know, not that I'm not the right person, but I hadn't taught that before so when you haven't taught something before, sometimes you're a little bit nervous about how it might play out (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

Some students were also initially anxious about the term 'racism':

*I think when I heard the word racism, I thought that it was evil and I thought that we were going to learn bad stuff (NSW School B, Focus Group 1, student).*

A handful of respondents felt that there was a lack of a clear direction from their school leaders on the SOAR involvement:

*I didn't know what to expect because ... from the school, where we were taking it you know ... are we extending it somehow and I was keen to get other things – other things moving but I didn't know what the school perspective was ... we didn't know much about the program beforehand, we were just told you're going to this PD (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

Overall, however, staff indicated that the program was highly effective at negotiating perceived major blocks to anti-racism training, and that fears of student non-engagement or hesitancy about the topic did not eventuate. Despite their initial apprehensions, staff participants articulated their surprise at how accessible the materials were, and how well the students engaged, which was an important outcome of the SOAR program. It is clear too that strong and consistent internal communication within schools is an important contributor to the success of SOAR in schools, including between school leadership and classroom teachers delivering the program, as well as between classroom teachers to discuss

and debrief about experiences and impacts of the lessons and the wider program.

#### **4.1.5 Racism is predominantly seen as interpersonal behaviours**

School staff predominantly described racism in terms of interpersonal behaviours in the classroom or schoolyard, such as name-calling or, in some cases, violence. SOAR aimed to expand understandings of racism to include systemic and institutional levels, as well as these more commonly discussed interpersonal forms. This view of racism as an interpersonal behaviour meant some staff did not consider racism a problem in their school:

*Well there wasn't really race bullying in the school yard to begin with (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*There weren't really any kind of racial issues coming up in my room. Plenty of other issues (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff).*

*A couple of parents said we didn't know that racism was a problem here, and I said well it's not a bad problem, there is that little bit there but it's not to the degree that I think you have it in society (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

In some of these cases, the opinion that racism did not occur in their school came from staff who believed themselves to have less culturally or religiously diverse cohorts than the national average in Australia:

*I haven't noticed any difference because our school isn't actually very culturally diverse – like it's really not like I don't think there's much that you can stand up for 'cause it's not like interesting school, really, in culture (Victorian School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

Other forms of minimisation stressed the success of diversity in their school, although there were no clear reasons given for its perceived success:

*There's not much racism 'cause there's so much like cultures around, there's like diverse ... (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

*They don't believe there's an issue in our school which is amazing to see like you watch them at lunchtime you know on the oval, there's a cluster of kids and there's like 30 in that group and they're all playing soccer together and it's multicultural (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

## 4.2 Strengths and challenges of SOAR program implementation

This section outlines participants' thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of SOAR in their schools. Participants indicated that the pedagogical approach taken by SOAR, lesson plans and classroom activities, teacher training and student-led activities were highly effective, but voiced concerns over the sustainability of the program given some of the limitations posed by the school environment and heavy workloads. The themes explored in this section are:

- teacher training and professional development
- SOAR lesson plans, classroom activities and resources
- Team SOAR.

### 4.2.1 Teacher training and professional development

Teachers responded very favourably to the teacher training and ongoing professional development provided through SOAR, and described positive impacts for them and their teaching and learning:

*I think there was a big impact really for the teachers because we were having discussions and you know, we probably shouldn't say things that way or we should probably rethink how we do that and just incidental things of you know, how we talk about different things, you know what I'm saying, that's probably not really, even though there's no malice behind what we were saying it just might not be the most appropriate way to talk so yeah, so we're just sort of thinking, so ... (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

Encouragingly, staff members were of the view that the training and resources provided by SOAR staff as part of their professional development had given teachers the necessary skills to engage with this potentially challenging subject matter. One teacher described their professional development training as a 'mind-opener', and said that it changed the way she approached the world even outside school:

*Yeah, I sort of appreciate it more when I'm sort of out and about and see it like on the weekends and that sort of stuff. And now that I know sort of not to be a bystander and step in ... But yeah now I think it's more – for me personally it's just a mind-opener (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

There was a view from some that the enthusiasm and passion of the trainers were a key factor in inspiring the teachers to support SOAR, even in cases where they could not initially see the need for the program:

*I got to see how passionate you guys were about it and it sort of rubbed off on us and we were talking about it on the way home, you guys obviously, you're passionate about this and we were happy to be on board because we could, as I said, at first I couldn't see where we were heading but the more times we met and talked I could see where it was going and yeah (NSW School A, Interview 3, teacher).*

Confidence was a key issue alongside the enthusiasm of the trainers. Participants recognised that some teachers would be better at engaging this material with students than would others, with one Victorian school teacher stating, 'a topic like racism often the people that are strong communicators, or have these really strong relationships with kids, they find it quite easy to say you know we need to talk about this' (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).

One staff member provided suggestions for how to improve the training, and indicated that the information provided in the workshops was helpful but could be condensed given the time constraints that teachers are often under – for

example, by not going through each lesson plan individually:

*Probably didn't need to go through each lesson plan, it probably didn't need as much time for that because it's there, we can obviously see it and just talk about it briefly, if you go through the unit ... But yeah, because we could do that anyway, read through the units. Just if anyone was to save a bit of time doing that and yeah, I think it's like being out of the classroom for some time a week ... Some things could have been condensed, I think, and we can read ... and stuff like that ourselves, but yeah (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

One staff member felt that they had not received enough notice and information about the program, and would have preferred more lead time to prepare and familiarise themselves with the materials. This indicates that ensuring schools are given adequate time and information to pass on details to staff is crucial in order for staff to feel prepared and confident:

*Our problem was that we didn't know much about the program beforehand, we were just told you're going to this PD and that made it difficult because when we got to you guys, you guys were so passionate about it all and we're going well hang on a second, we're at this PD just to learn about racism and that was about it. So if we had a bit more information beforehand in how you guys want to implement it ... (Victorian School B, Interview 2, teacher).*

Finally, staff were given evaluation forms and asked for feedback on the workshops directly following the training. One of the suggestions for improvement provided on the forms was changing the mode of delivery, with one participant expressing that the lecture method of delivery was not useful, and another indicating that more videos and animations would have improved the workshops. Other feedback included wanting more student-centred scenarios in the unit of work, resources such as posters to help with delivery in the classroom, and more ideas on how to talk to children with experiences of racism.

## 4.2.2 SOAR lesson plans, classroom activities and resources

The pedagogical approach of SOAR regards children as experts and engaged learners, and the program structure and classroom materials were designed with that in mind. Overall, students and staff were very positive about the way that SOAR had been implemented in their schools and classrooms, describing it as 'fun and engaging' and a 'very engaging program' (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student). Teachers stated that the students 'all reacted really positively' (Victorian School B, Interview 4, teacher), were willing to offer their ideas and opinions and were 'passionate' (Victorian School A, Interview 3, teacher) and comfortable to discuss the topics. Many felt that there had been an overall improvement in the way the students engaged with one another.

The students welcomed the hands-on activities within the SOAR program, including the making of posters, performances and discussions. They referred to writing down 'their own opinion' (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student), and many indicated that they enjoyed the opportunities for input that the SOAR program provided:

*Student: It was fun.*

*Facilitator: It was fun, yeah? Not boring?*

*Student: We had a lot of fun like making stuff like the hands and posters and activities (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

*[SOAR provided] forums for them to be able to do – explore it a bit more, I think as it develops having more of those – I think this group of kids, the more of those technology-based things that they could do (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

These aspects of independent learning clearly provided a sense of pride in the work they had done and being able to share it with their parents:

*When it was parent teacher meeting I showed her [Mum] the poster and she's like so that's what you've been telling me about. It's like really cool how she can like see what we get to do and we got a chance to do it (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

In general, teachers acknowledged the well-structured and scaffolded nature of the SOAR program:

*The lessons were great and you know, the way we sort of introduced it at the very beginning was really good too, like you know, the whole, yeah, just some of those activities were really good and it generated really good discussion with our kids across all classes ... as far as the program itself, yeah, I thought it was really good how it ran and it was a good mix of discussion and there were a few videos and there were a few activities (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

*The fact that there were some resources provided for the teachers, some structured lessons, things like that that's given them a platform to yeah raise the topic in class with a little bit of credibility whereas some people might feel like oh I'm not sure what to say or I don't know how to broach this subject (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

Some teachers went as far as to say that the SOAR materials prompted them to re-think the way they approached their teaching generally:

*It was good to like follow the script and do it, lessons that I probably wouldn't normally do it that way and then I think well hang on, that really worked quite well, maybe I need to look at the way I'm teaching (NSW School A, Interview 3, teacher).*

The feedback from staff participants indicates that SOAR's pedagogical approach provides a sound foundation on which classroom teachers can build on when teaching their students about racism and anti-racism.

As part of the SOAR classroom curriculum, some of the activities included a 'hand' activity to explore questions of identity, and similarities and differences between students and their peers; developing posters depicting bystander qualities such as courage, empathy and kindness; and watching videos depicting bystander anti-racism scenarios. These were highlighted when students

discussed what they enjoyed about the SOAR program:

*One of my highlights, when we got to make these posters and it was basically saying what you think of like racism, bullying and all that stuff so it was like really cool to see all the different posters. There were a lot of similarities and a lot of differences that people put on their poster so I thought that was cool (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*I love how we did the hand and then we did five describing things about you and that was, it made people happy and it made their day (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

*Other than school-based issues everything was fine, like the content was very relatable and the videos and different hands-on type, like the poster activity and the videos were cool, like the kids really enjoyed that (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

*The hands one was really good because they were writing lots of interesting things and the posters were great because of the conversations that came up around what the children had written on the posters ... The conversations I think were the most powerful of all (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

In the interviews and focus groups, the students and staff reflected on the specific activities involved in the SOAR program. Students enjoyed the activities that gave them opportunities to be involved – where they were *doing* anti-racism activities themselves, where they were watching depictions of experiences of racism and their impacts, and then provided space to discuss what they had seen.

The videos produced by the Challenging Racism Project<sup>1</sup> and included in the SOAR training were described by staff and students as engaging and fun. Teachers observed that it was much easier to generate student engagement by 'showing' rather than 'telling' them about racism. Watching the

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1 [https://westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism/challenging\\_racism\\_project/our\\_research/bystander\\_anti-racism](https://westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism/challenging_racism_project/our_research/bystander_anti-racism)

videos prompted important conversations about experiences of racism:

*Student: I would say it was pretty cool 'cause I liked the videos, I think they were really realistic.*

*Student: Engaging, moving (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

*The videos yes, they could see them and put like comparisons of things that had happened to them or scenarios (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

The videos were valued for raising awareness of racism and its effects on different people:

*I think lots of like, the racism videos and the bullying videos really helped like a lot of the kids that haven't actually seen or confronted that type of stuff and it helped them understand what it can be like, I think, yeah, like what it's like in public and how people actually confront people about it and stuff ... just realise that how harsh racism can be (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

*We watched some videos in class about racism and bullying happening in like public places, like on a train or in a football stadium and it just like shows it happens all the time, not just at school and things, it's everywhere (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

Most of the positive commentary about the short videos referred to the bystander options and tools that were demonstrated, and the way they opened up the possibilities of prosocial action:

*We learned about bystanders and how you can, instead of like if you're not confident to go up and actually confront the person who is being racist you can comfort the person who's being racially abused (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

*We watched videos of different scenarios through different roles that were played in racism. And we learned about what you could do and how you would ask for help and what maybe you wouldn't do (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

Many students referred to the different options of direct independent action against a person behaving in a racist way, such as reporting to a

security guard, teacher or principal. They were also made aware of the impact of supporting other people who speak up or take action.

A number of staff participants and students reflected on the powerful effect of the videos in terms of generating discussion, including detailed dissections of dialogue, actions and scenes from the videos:

*I think probably the lesson the kids liked the most was the videos, yeah, I think they liked that kind of visual and real life experiences so – but yeah, there were some really good discussions and some kids got quite emotional at some stages so found it quite confronting so obviously triggered some experiences that they'd had (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

Some students were disappointed that the punishment and reprimands for racists were limited to being ejected from a stadium, train carriage or shop, stating that there should 'be charges and stuff' (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student):

*It really annoys me like about the video, it's just this – the only thing that happened was the security guard just came over and told them to leave like it just wasn't – like it just feels like it's not a good enough solution (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

In general, the students and teachers thought that more videos would be useful, including some that were set within schools:

*That would be a great thing moving forward if we could produce more kind of school-based ones would be yeah (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

Constructive feedback for improving the SOAR program centred heavily on the need for more multimedia content and opportunities for online engagement, as well as appropriate 'warm-up' activities and a greater range of scenarios that illustrated the situations in which racism could occur. Warm-up activities were suggested as a way to get students energised and excited for the lesson, and also tied in with how other subjects in the curriculum were run:

*I think some good little games or warmups would be really good as well. I feel like they*

*kind of get straight into it, do you know what I mean? And I know all of our lessons for reading or for maths or whatever we always have a warm-up and a game and something to make it a bit more like you know doing a poster and things was great but for some kids it's not that engaging to get them motivated or inspired, you know what I mean? They've got nothing to kind of draw on as a warm-up (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

Teachers agreed with the suggestion that warm-up activities could enhance the lessons by making them more fun, an outcome that could also be achieved through additional resources such as relevant picture books and YouTube videos. Comments about the need to use a variety of multimedia options made reference to primary school students preferring 'visual' stimuli, as well as referring to the fact that children today are accustomed to learning through technology-based activities:

*Well from the kids' perspective obviously it gave it a real positive light to it and responding to the different ways that it was presented and having those different multimedia, the videos and having other forums for them to be able to do – explore it a bit more, I think as it develops having more of those – I think this group of kids, the more of those technology-based things that they could do (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

*I want to do more stuff on computers ... Like I really wanted to do like research on other cultures and finding out what they do as traditions and stuff. Yeah, I really want to go and look (NSW School B, Focus Group 1, student).*

*But I definitely think for probably other kids who learn more hands-on like I do more interactive things would be probably better for them to be able to, I learn a lot better with lots of interactive ... (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

The above quotes highlight the importance of a variety of delivery techniques to school students' structured learning and self-learning. Additionally, staff suggested that a variety of scenarios

illustrated by the bystander anti-racism videos could help to broaden students' knowledge about situations in which they could speak out against racism, specifically school-based scenarios:

*Yeah, maybe some videos more like classroom or school-based would be good as well (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

*Yeah and I think maybe we could get like – make like more videos to like watch and like I don't know, like more bigger situations like people like they won't know what to do or stuff like that that we could learn from (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

Some students had made their own school-based videos or performances:

*We're actually going to make a movie about what is racism and how does it affect you at school and that sort of stuff. These guys are going to do the videoing so they're actually going to go and incorporate it with the rest of the school so they're keen as mustard for that (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

*We all made a video each with like a group and we made a play of how racism like affects people around you (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

Overall, staff and student participants were positive about the approach of SOAR that engaged children as experts and engaged learners. They described the program as fun and engaging, resulting in positive responses from students, and comfort and willingness to discuss topics of racism. Teachers were also very positive about the well-structured nature of the SOAR program, with one teacher saying that the approach had resulted in them rethinking their teaching styles more broadly. Students and staff were positive about the hands-on activities of SOAR, including when they were 'doing' anti-racism themselves, and making posters, performances and discussions, as well as the videos produced by the Challenging Racism Project. More opportunity for multimedia activities and school-based video content and scenarios, as well as warm-up activities, were suggested as potential improvements.

### 4.2.3 Team SOAR – ‘the SOAR patrol’

The approach of SOAR that considered students as engaged and expert learners, and ‘doing’ aspects of SOAR were especially valued by students. As well as the class lessons, the SOAR program included student leadership groups referred to as ‘Team SOAR’ or, in one school: ‘the SOAR patrol, they call themselves’ (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher). This aspect of SOAR was designed to be student-led – ‘the students just run that and do that’ (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher):

*Our teacher was making it clear that, she wasn’t making it clear like super-duper clear, but she was like it’s up to you guys because it’s like, yeah the other teacher’s class was going to help, like the other senior class, but it was up to like us (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

The SOAR teams in the participating schools collectively worked on posters, badges, performances, speeches the school assembly and T-shirts. These collective endeavours, around which the students mobilised and found conviction, also provided satisfaction and identification. Team SOAR occurred in some schools during class time and in other schools outside of class time, as decided by each individual school:

*The ideas have just flown about how to get the word out and about how to develop the team so my – the kids have just been – just inundating with ideas, it’s been amazing. They really want to – brought out the SOAR patrol logos and that sort of stuff and say why they represent racism and you know or against racism, I should say, how they would get the message out through the school and how about going through the community and that sort of stuff like community radio and they’ve just gone mental (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

*It was so good because when we came back out people were saying like good job and like clapping and when they put it on Facebook everyone all around the community saw it and they were moved by it and our teacher said that she knew we had done a good job*

*because of that (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

Team SOAR was able to garner involvement from students from across the school:

*So the kids took it on and then we decided that every child, every teacher, and every parent that was around would get one of these bracelets, so then it madly went from the SOAR team to ending up having 40 and 50 children coming in at a recess and lunchtime making them ... I mean it spread madly throughout the school, throughout the community and then we had an assembly where we spoke about what the SOAR program was (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

There was a suggestion from one school that it may have been better to get SOAR leadership teams active earlier in the interventions. This was based on the perceived success of those leadership groups. Another school struggled to activate their SOAR team, and speculated that cross-over or duplication of other leadership groups (e.g. student representative council) was the issue.

Staff from NSW School A indicated that they found it a struggle to incorporate Team SOAR into their school due to time and workload constraints. They also identified their student demographics, school structure and existing student bodies as barriers to Team SOAR’s success:

*Just because of our setting I think, and work load too, because we already have a student council, already have a student group so were kind of making another student group sort of next to it and then yeah, and just we’re struggling there a bit (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff)*

Such comments align with the general limitations of SOAR as identified by participants, which are discussed in greater detail in following sections.

Overall, there was strong student and teacher support for Team SOAR, which allowed students to lead anti-racism initiatives within their school and community, with institutional support. Given its success, it may be worth exploring further the optimal timing of forming Team SOAR, as well as how to integrate it into other student

leadership activities within schools. Students were particularly passionate and energised by the student-led activities designed to respond to racism within their schools.

### 4.3 Impacts of SOAR on students, staff and the school community

Staff and students at all participating schools expressed positive views about the overall success of SOAR at their school, and indicated that SOAR had created a 'big change' both in the school climate and for individual students.

This section reports on these impacts, which were:

- overall positive impact on the interracial climate at the school
- increasing racism literacy
- creating space for racism-related discussions through classroom activities
- developing a prosocial disposition, empathy and tactics
- championing commitment to anti-racism
- promoting intercultural understanding.

#### 4.3.1 Overall positive impact on the interracial climate at the school

Students and staff reported that the SOAR program had led to a more inclusive and friendly environment in the school, particularly as it related to the interracial climate and racial bullying:

*Student: Everybody is nicer to everyone, yeah, they're treating them equally but before the SOAR program people are just pushing each other and like fighting but then after the SOAR program they just learned that everyone has their own rights and that ...*

*Student: Everyone is an equal (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

*I think people have definitely like taken away from it positively because they've been like not joking about things like this anymore or like a lot of immature people have not been so*

*ignorant or just one-minded (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

*Definitely, definitely school, I know it was only stage three [year 5 and 6] but doing playground duties, like you can definitely see just the different interactions of kids in terms of issues happening, a lot of them seem to be a bit more involved positively to try and fix it which was cool to see, like walking around on playground duties and stuff (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

Even students and teachers who suggested that racism was not a big issue in their school agreed that SOAR was an important program to run in schools. They often pointed to the fact that school dynamics may change as student demographics change, and added that students are also part of a wider community in which racism does occur. They referred to a generally improved school climate in which there was now a greater sensitivity to difference, and to social exclusion:

*But if anything I think that children at school not just feel safer about accepting other people but like beyond the school grounds like someone in a shop, someone down the road that you're just going for a daily walk just to smile at them and not to steer away (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

*There wasn't racism in the first place but like I feel like when we go out and like people ask about your school and you say that that's helping the community get – stop racism as well (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

*They might not have it at the time but like as like the – like people leave the school and come in, it could like at some point come in so like if they keep doing that program it's going to like drain it out, make sure this never comes in (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

While some concerns were raised about whether SOAR would have a lasting impact (examined in Section 4.4), other students and staff were hopeful about the potential change SOAR could

generate as the young students involved went on to high school:

*For us, I think it's still been a really powerful program to do and I think it's empowered these young students hopefully going onto year seven, be nice to see some follow up when they get to the high school (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

*Facilitator: What did they think was good about it?*

*Student: That it's helping stop – like it's helping stop like at a young age, stopping it like so it doesn't happen when they're older.*

*Student: Yeah 'cause if you got like some little tiny kid like literally year 1, he's growing up in a world where you can't really stop racism 'cause it just happens (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

#### 4.3.2 Increasing racism literacy

Involvement in SOAR increased teachers' and students' knowledge of what constitutes racism, how racism is constructed, and the pervasiveness and role of racial stereotypes. Participants perceived that this would generate confidence in people within a school setting, and perhaps in the wider community. Some students felt that their eyes had been opened to the prevalence of racism in schools and in the world generally:

*Racism is a worldwide problem that needs to be solved (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Student: It's a fantastic program that should be used in each school and it's great for like children to learn about and learn about all the races and the bullying that's happening everywhere.*

*Student: Yeah, I agree, it should be taken to other schools because if it's happening a lot in other schools well then they'd be able to learn about it and realise that it's not okay (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

Staff saw this acknowledgment of racism as a major benefit of the SOAR program:

*If we're talking about racial discrimination and sure they need to know about it because you know, it could be something that comes up, and they're bound to come across it (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

The SOAR program was seen to impart insight into key forms of knowledge of the 'real world,' and provide students with important life skills:

*It was really helpful like I definitely learned a lot and I think it – there's a lot of stuff that I kind of heard about that I didn't – like I hadn't really heard of before like things that are going on in our world that aren't really okay and it kind of inspired me to want to do something about it (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

The students and teachers described the specific content they had learned, including knowledge about what constituted stereotyping, its normalisation and the effect of that on people from minority cultural groups:

*Stereotype like I heard people like talking about stereotypes but I never really knew what it meant until we were talking about different types of stereotypes ... – there's like lots – there was like lots of ones that we learned about and the meanings of them. (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

They also discussed how the SOAR program taught them to recognise and acknowledge racism, a necessary first step to taking bystander anti-racism action:

*... set up a space for children who felt very comfortable learning about the social, I suppose, constructs of racism and how we can be proactive and look at ways to help people in that situation so I think it was really successful (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

*We also learned that children can't just be born racist, they have to learn racism and inherit it (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

The focus groups and interviews highlighted the increased confidence and changed behaviours that can follow on from a grasp of the key concepts around racism and anti-racist action:

*Because of the knowledge and stuff it's given you a lot of reasons to back yourself up and like not to just run away or like you can speak up for yourself (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

Students reflected on how this confidence extended to their home environment. They were able to engage with their parents and other family about stereotyping and racism, as well as within the community:

*I think I agree with [other student] because if you might not have the best relationship with your mother or father, if you like – if they come on like the day and then if they go home you both have a conversation to talk about at least and it's actually a good conversation 'cause they will tell you what's right and what's wrong and then how to protect them and like cyberbullying and all that kind of stuff so yeah (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Well it teaches kids not to like be influenced by their parents and not to be racist like their parents are and they should like be friends with every person ... You should actually get to know them, get to know who they are, how they are before being so quick to judge someone so yeah (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

The latter quotation shows how SOAR training can also provide an alternative perspective on negative racial attitudes and beliefs that may exist within a student's home. Students also described that SOAR would help develop citizens who would address these problems within the community now and in the future:

*Outside of the school so I think we should like help people and stuff ... So like they are going to be bigger problems including racism so we need to teach them basically they're not right (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

The interviews and focus groups demonstrated that the SOAR program and school staff were successful in raising racism literacy across the board. Opposition and awkwardness among parents and colleagues to discussing racism within the school had initially been anticipated as issues in some schools, but were managed by school leaders who worked with their staff, and students and their parents to raise understanding about the need to name and discuss racism within schools:

*There was one parent who had a bit of an issue with it. This particular parent didn't feel*

*it was our place as a school to be discussing issues such as racism for whatever reason (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff).*

*There were some staff who were quite confronted with the terminology and the extensive posters and the word racism, so we had to work to probably alleviate their worries and concerns that it was going to be bringing out a lot of negativity ... We worked really hard to ensure we can't shy away from the word, we can't pretend it doesn't exist (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

It is evident from the quotations in this section that the SOAR program addressed the need for greater racism literacy in schools and the broader community, which was identified by participants as one of their key concerns.

### **4.3.3 Creating space for racism-related discussions through classroom activities**

The teachers noted the success of SOAR in providing a space to broach an often sensitive and controversial topic within a school setting:

*It's always just good to open up a discussion, I think it's always good to talk about things like this with the kids 'cause I think sometimes prejudices and things like that stem from – or usually they stem from a lack of understanding or a lack of education so having a conversation about something's always going to be a good way to start education (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff).*

Teachers found SOAR useful because it provided a conversation starter and a set of learning modules to guide their discussion of racism in the classroom, giving students a comfortable and 'safe time and place' (Victorian School A, interview 1, teacher) to express themselves:

*Negative things are said within homes and things like that so for them to actually come in and be able to talk comfortably about that type of stuff I think was really, really beneficial for them and to feel comfortable and safe to have those discussions because we, you have that discussion and whatever we talk about in*

*here, you know, you're safe to talk about things (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

They asserted that the teacher training and student unit of work generated heightened levels of confidence to act against racism, and they identified that a key impact of SOAR was that it successfully upskilled teachers and empowered students:

*It's building up professional practice in teachers where they can talk about an issue that's important. It's helping empower children like with the you know the teams and the ideas they have so you're looking at yeah, I guess – and making a safe space to talk about racism. You're upskilling teachers to deal with racism as an issue and then you're empowering children to be drivers of the cause so I mean I don't think there's a teacher out there that wouldn't think those are good things to have (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

It is noteworthy that this particular positive impact of the SOAR program was a frequent comment from teachers but less so from students.

#### **4.3.4 Prosocial disposition, empathy and tactics**

One of the main objectives of the SOAR program is to introduce the context of bystander action and the options for intervention when witnessing racism. The aim is to leverage from people's prosocial disposition and encourage action or 'upstanding'. These concepts were a foundational element of the program. Another set of concepts are the different roles of protagonist, target and witness (bystander). The interviews and focus groups indicated that teachers and students gained knowledge in this area, mentioning key terms such as bystander and upstander, and discussing the key forms of action and what is appropriate for various settings, without being prompted by the interviewers. The students and teachers felt that the SOAR training had provided them with personal resilience and preparation for high school and for the world outside of school.

Some described how these tools had been applied or put into practice:

*I've heard of bystander but I just never knew what it meant ... Upstander, like I had no idea what that word was and I'd never heard of it until like we had to do the plays (Victorian School A, Focus Group, student).*

*I like watching the video like to understand like what people could do and what people didn't do and like how – like different ways to stop it and like stop it (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Just gave us more like solutions, just like kind of small situations that we could kind of – just in our own way we could kind of just like stop it ... it just showed us way we could deal with it in our lives, not just the whole big thing of racism sucks and we need to get rid of it (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

Students and staff were of the view that prosocial attitudes and activity had improved since participating in the SOAR program. Students stated that, since SOAR came to their school, students were more likely to stand up for one another instead of relying on their teachers to intervene. They indicated that, in the past, teacher intervention was not always effective because teachers usually told students to 'ignore' the perpetrator, which did not always work:

*I think that how SOAR helps [Victorian School A] in a way is basically I felt like before our school ... like people would get bullied basically and no-one would actually ... stand up, the teachers would probably like try to stitch, like make everything better but it wouldn't ... since SOAR ... like came in our school, we've seen videos, we've seen our thoughts and it just kind of made our school better, a happier place and safer place as well (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Student: I think maybe they might think that maybe doing this program, it could help with a lot of situations, that instead of just always coming to the teacher maybe could like sort – maybe sort something out or something like that. Student: I think our teachers loved it because I'm pretty sure they're getting sick and tired of*

*trying to handle it (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

SOAR also had a positive impact on students' and staff's confidence to speak out against racism. Students indicated that SOAR made them feel more 'brave' when it came to standing up for other students, which transferred to other aspects of their lives. A critical feature in generating this change appeared to be the confidence that SOAR placed in students, positioning them as agents capable of responding to racism in the community and at home:

*Student: It can make them feel more confident to stand up for people like people might – little – like they might not feel that confident but then once it happens they just feel a lot more confident about –*

*Facilitator: So being in the program made you feel a bit more confident to do that kind of stuff?*

*Student: Yeah, to stand up to people (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

*I just think when – if we show other schools we can boost their confidence as well 'cause there are probably support in like SOAR, it's like that's kind of made me come out of my shell and like made me more confident and more like – I feel more like brave, probably. Like I will start putting my hand up even when they'll probably – like say maths or something and the answers for them, it just gives me the courage just to put my hand up even more so like it gives you the chance to speak your opinion as well (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*My mum personally, she really supports just like community, I would say. She really likes it because she – like she noticed when my confidence boost went up as well (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

Participants identified some of the specific strategies that they had learned from SOAR in the interviews and focus groups that helped them feel more confident to speak out:

*I think students I think felt like they had a lot more insight and when to, you can do something about it, even if it's not affecting you, that was a really good way to show*

*power, I think that they will, maybe somehow get involved, getting between and supporting each other and observe or if someone's being harassed by checking in on them, giving them some support, just really a nice way to be and really good skills and strategies for our global citizens (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

*Student: We learned how not to be a bystander, when people are being, getting called names or like other people are being racist to them.*

*Student: Like if you see it and you don't help you shouldn't like join in and stuff, you should help ...*

*Student: Distract the person bullying, yeah ...*

*Student: Or help the person who's being bullied, lead them away (NSW School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

A key lesson of the SOAR program is to know that different forms of action are more appropriate in some settings than others (different spaces, groups, power dynamics), and that there is nearly always something that can be done about an incident of racism that is witnessed:

*Student: Like you could go over and comfort and ask them if they wanted to play the game you're playing ...*

*Student: You could confront the bully and say, or the racist and say I don't like what you said or something like that, if you're brave enough to do that.*

*Student: Yeah, only if you're confident enough.*

*Student: Also you could tell a parent or any other responsible adult that you know is around.*

*Student: Like if it happens on like public transport and you're going home on a bus or something you can always tell like the bus driver or a parent (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

*And also we learned that sometimes we have to think about if we should be a bystander or not or go and get a teacher because if you – some – because some situations if you go in there and help you may get hurt so ... Yeah so we have to go and get like a teacher or an adult (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

Some staff members were of the view that the SOAR training had generated life preparation among the students. They felt that another aspect of resilience had been added, that would equip them for higher level of schooling, and for later life:

*... to prepare them, what can they do because a lot of them now will say well we need to walk away or we need to say to this person are you okay, so I think that learning those strategies of what to do and that if you're a bystander, that's the one that really interests me with the kids, you know, but did you stand there and let that happen? What should have you done? So I think those, learning about those roles I think is a really important thing, and that will fit in really well with our PBL [positive behaviour for learning] here at school (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

*... It's going to help them when they find themselves in positions where you know maybe someone else is demonstrating racism and they don't know you know whether they should step in or how to step in and so I'd probably kind of go from that angle that you know it will give them life skills. And yeah, people skills, really. It's going to kind of equip them with strategies for dealing with situations that come up. And awareness (Victorian School B, Interview 4, school leadership staff).*

A number of staff participants and students talked about how they had reflected on bystander action since the training:

*And we had an incident recently where we were able to bring up what a bystander issue again and reflect on it. We had a computer messenger video incident, we were able to talk about what a bystander was again and the kids knew and even though they weren't a successful bystander on this occasion they were able to reflect and know what that is and know what they should do next time so I think that's really important because it's inevitable that's going to happen regularly (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

Although feedback from parents appeared to be limited, some teachers did remark that most

parents generally seemed pleased with the program:

*Some, some were happy we were doing it, some, there was nothing negative about it, some had had conversations with their kids who'd mentioned something that they'd been talking about or watching, a lot of the parents their kids went home and told them to watch and then come back and they've sort of said well okay that is powerful, that's, we're glad our kids are learning to speak up (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

The focus groups and interviews indicated that the SOAR program led to an enhanced understanding of what it means to be an active bystander and prosocial citizen when witnessing racism. Teachers and students alike stated that SOAR had given them greater insight into the actions available to them as bystanders, and that knowing that there were more options than simply confronting the perpetrator made them feel more confident to be an active bystander. Some participants also expressed that they felt more committed to advocate against racism more generally, and not just in situations where they witness racism interpersonally in their schools. These matters of anti-racism advocacy are taken up in more detail in the next section.

#### **4.3.5 Championing commitment to anti-racism**

SOAR is focused on generating prosocial action, but it also instils a general commitment against racism and for anti-racism programs. In encouraging upstanding, it is a program that overtly champions anti-racism. Anti-racism was a theme among the responses of student participants in the focus groups and staff interviews. They felt that there was an enhanced awareness of an anti-racist position, as well as the capacity of students to advocate for it.

The staff and students reflected on the enhanced awareness of racism that SOAR brought about:

*It really does change your outlook on life 'cause I had awareness about racism but now I – it's more so I'm aware (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

*Some of the things that the kids spoke about to me were like wow, that's you know, I would have never imagined that you know, not being, shopkeepers, not wanting them to be in their shop because they're black, like really, does that still happen in this day and age? But it does. And when you've got kids sitting and saying oh yeah, we went in the shop and you know like we got told not to come back. Wow, you know, so when you hear those comments it really makes it real (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

In the above quotation, the teacher's eyes are opened to the everyday racism that is experienced by the students at the school when at the shops and in other spaces. These experiences became perceptible through the conversations facilitated by SOAR. They had the effect of confronting denial, enhancing acknowledgment and generating an anti-racist disposition.

The stated intention of SOAR is to upstand, which includes speaking up. The acronym itself uses the term 'speak out' and so it is not surprising that students made overt reference to the importance of speaking out:

*And also like what SOAR means, it's like speak out against racism which I think it's a really good like thing and like X said, it like gets people to have more confident in their self and like just speak out and like just sort of have like an opinion and like tell them what's actually happening (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

One teacher discussed how SOAR had empowered them to challenge racism expressed by their family:

*Yeah, massively comfortable and now I tell my dad to be quiet and shut up, you know? Sort of thing because you know it's important to – you know? (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

Inspired by some of the themes, examples and stimuli provided by SOAR, students embraced a strong rights discourse in the interviews:

*Student: I think I've learned that it's not okay to be bullied or, yeah, to be bullied just because you eat a different food to someone else or*

*you have a different colour of skin or what you wear to someone else, we should all be treated the same because we're all humans. Student: I definitely think it's very important because like as she said we are all humans and we all have rights to be ourselves and to be okay with that and nobody should be able to take it away. It's a really great and comforting program for those that have a different ethnicity or race to know that they're being supported by the people (NSW School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

#### 4.3.6 Promoting intercultural understanding

Earlier sections described how SOAR had expanded racism literacy and how this included awareness raising about stereotyping. SOAR also had positive influences on intercultural understanding. Although SOAR was not seen as a program designed to celebrate cultural diversity, there were nonetheless some comments on how students had come to have a greater appreciation of cultural diversity because of the SOAR program.

An enhanced interest in learning about different cultures was one perceived benefit of the SOAR program:

*Student: And that also helps like people to connect with their culture.*

*Student: And it teaches others about their cultures, about other cultures too (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

One student also remarked on how SOAR had highlighted the value of diversity at their school:

*Because it's showing how diverse like the school is and how like – like how we can try and change the whole of Australia and maybe the whole world (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

Some students talked about how they had come to see diversity as a positive attribute in their school. They also commented on how they had realised that it was important to respect diversity, and students' differing cultural backgrounds and lifestyle:

*Student: That it's okay to be different.*

*Student: Yeah.*

*Student: Yeah, and that everyone is different in their own ways that they can't change what they are.*

*Student: And if everyone was the same it would be so boring.*

*Student: It would be boring.*

*Student: Imagine watching one TV show ...*

*Student: Peppa Pig, every day ... Peppa Pig ... (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

*Learning about everyone's culture and like say if someone has to wear a hijab like X, she, it's like a part of her culture, we can't say take that off or stuff like that (NSW School B, Focus Group 1, student).*

The SOAR approach contrasted with students' discussions about previous ways in which they had learned about racial and cultural diversity at school, such as via national landmarks and events for specific groups (e.g. Afghan Day, Polyfest Day, African Pride Day). They described these past activities as valuable for the way they 'helps like people to connect with their culture', 'teaches others about their cultures' and 'showing how diverse like the school is' (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student). They also valued the sharing of culturally specific food (NSW School B, Focus Group 1, student).

Cultural celebrations have a role to play in anti-racism initiatives but can carry the risk of essentialising and objectifying cultures if they are not also accompanied by critical reflective thinking. As such, SOAR had a strong anti-stereotype focus, including teaching students why both positive and negative stereotypes can be harmful. This was one of the key features of SOAR that differentiated it from programs with a focus on multiculturalism rather than anti-racism. As such, SOAR encouraged students to consider their own biases and prejudices, and think reflexively not just about diversity but about racism and its impacts. For example, the SOAR program includes an activity where students challenge and confront stereotypes in class. Both teachers and students reflected on how effective this aspect of the SOAR program had been, largely because students were able to lay out and

challenge their own stereotypes, and understand the source of these (e.g. parents, media):

*Stereotype like I heard people like talking about stereotypes but I never really knew what it meant until we were talking about different types of stereotypes like for example Asians are smart (Victorian school A, Focus Group 2, student).*

*The kids, they're old enough, teaching 10 or 11 year olds they're old enough to know what, get what they hear mum and dad and their friends talk about like in terms of stereotypes (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

Students understood that such stereotypes could have material prejudicial effects on people:

*You're applying for a job and then the person applying say I can't take you because I've had other people from the same country that did bad like they can't do that 'cause they don't know whether you're going to be the same or not and things like that (Victorian School A, Focus Group 2, student).*

Following involvement in SOAR, students and staff members discussed that they had a better understanding of racism and anti-racism, and were able to name and challenge their stereotypes.

#### **4.4 Limitations of SOAR and suggest improvements**

Although the vast majority of staff and students interviewed described the SOAR program as having a very positive impact on the school climate, peer relationships and teacher knowledge, reflections on the limitations of the project were also discussed. The most common concern was about the sustainability of SOAR, and questions about the longevity and depth of its impact. Some students and teachers expressed hope that it would create a fundamental change in the students who participated, which they would take with them as they moved through their schooling and life outside. Knowledge of these limitations is crucial to informing future strengthening and development of SOAR.

Key limitations identified in the fieldwork, and discussed here, are:

- time and space in the already crowded curriculum
- sustainability and longevity
- other limitations.

#### 4.4.1 Time and space in the already crowded curriculum

School time was the most commonly identified limitation for a program such as SOAR. Teachers and school leadership staff participating in the research invariably mentioned a lack of time. Finding space within the schools' already crowded curriculum was seen as a challenge by many of the teachers. Teachers made reference to related programs that they needed to teach, including resilience, Cultural Connections Day, leadership training and of course academic content. One participating school was simultaneously involved in both SOAR and a major school review, which involved a large commitment of time:

*... we've been in a school review this year so what that means is it's a huge collection of information from all aspects of school life from classroom teachers, from all the specialists, from the support aids, from – just everyone was required and mainly in term 1 the teachers were doing a lot of sort of testing their kids, reading tests and things like that so they were sort of under the pump like we all were but the teachers were quite stressed and so the disadvantage of it was probably that it probably just happened at the wrong time (Victorian School A, Interview 3, school leadership staff).*

*Time management is the thing, and to do it justice you can't just do just a little bit here and a little bit there, you did have to have a whole session in one, it needs to be a session and get it finished, but yeah, time is just, it is the hard thing, but I mean we just replaced it with the topic ... (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

While time to undertake the SOAR program was identified as a challenge for all of the schools, participants also indicated that there was strong

student interest in the program, with one Victorian teacher stating 'they've been wanting to do more of it and again we struggle to fit everything in' (Victorian School A, Interview 1). There were also suggestions about the appropriate timing of SOAR, with one school suggesting that it be undertaken at a time when schools are not also involved in a school review process. Another school managed the time constraints by incorporating SOAR into the existing curriculum.

Under the pressures of time and a crowded curriculum, school and teacher commitment to the SOAR program become key variables. There was variation in the extent to which school executive and teachers expressed that SOAR, or anti-racism, should be prioritised among the competing commitments of a school. The schools that described themselves as having less cultural diversity were more likely to indicate that they would not prioritise this program should they have too many commitments. There was concern among some staff that these activities were an extra add-on to the core curriculum, which had implications for staff and student break time: 'more kids have to miss lunchtimes and stuff like that' (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher):

*... we don't really kind of look into racism that much because as you're probably aware the teaching curriculum is extremely overloaded. These poor teachers are just flat out and I'm not saying that as a sympathy-type thing, I'm saying that to be a realist. The amount of work that's on these teachers is full-on (Victorian School B, Interview 5, teacher).*

*That way maybe, yeah, I mean we're having issues with Team SOAR, just because of our setting I think, and workload too, because we already have a student council, already have a student group so we're kind of making another student group sort of next to it and then yeah, and just we're struggling there a bit ... I could only imagine in schools like [NSW School B] that have high ethnic background that these issues come up all the time you know, and it's stuff that they are dealing with all the time, whereas for us, we just don't (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

The above quotations highlight the need for SOAR to be integrated appropriately into the school

curriculum, with thought given to its timing in the school year as well as other programs being run within the school.

#### 4.4.2 Sustainability and longevity

Some students expressed concerns about the long-term effectiveness of SOAR, and of bystander anti-racism generally:

*Something that kind of annoys me about racism or just people saying stuff is like you can do something about it, you can stop them from doing it and you can stop them from saying that stuff but they're still going to – they're not going to change their opinion on it, you're not going to like stop them saying it forever, you're just going to stop that one time and that just – it really annoys me like about the video, it's just this – the only thing that happened was the security guard just came over and told them to leave like it just wasn't – like it just feels like it's not a good enough solution (Victorian School B, Focus Group 3, student).*

Others expressed the perception that, once the SOAR program was finished, students may 'move on' and forget what they had learned:

*I kind of sort of agree with the boys here like our school was sort of - like in my opinion I think it was kind of bullying and kind of not at the same time. I just felt like when we were doing SOAR it was sort of better out there but since we finished there was more things that were going bad so I feel like it was like we finished it, we moved on and I feel like people forgot about it (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

The above comments reveal pessimism among some students about the long-term effectiveness of bystander anti-racism training in changing attitudes towards racism in Australia or about changing social norms about expressing racist sentiments. The ability of bystander responses to undermine deepseated, institutionalised, historical racism remains a challenge.

Both staff and students raised the possibility of undertaking the training with younger children, as a means of making SOAR more sustainable. Involving children in years 3 and 4 would mean

there was a longer time available for them to 'spread it through the school' (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student):

*Yeah, it's only in the [years] five and six, so that's probably, it would be, we'd probably see more if it was with everyone, but the only thing that I saw I guess was towards the end when we were making those bracelets and that was just spread, that was just like contagion, you know, and it just spread out and I guess those conversations that the kids were having in amongst themselves while they were making it, that was our way of spreading it across so I think if you did so it across the school you know, especially maybe the little ones, that's probably difficult for them, but even to stretch it down into stage two [year 3 and 4], you know, I think that would have more impact (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

The continued impact of SOAR was dependent on the extent to which the program became embedded within the school. The potential for SOAR to have an ongoing impact in terms of encouraging students to respond to racism was stronger in schools where the program led to the development of a group of passionate students with a drive to continue the activities. The opposite was the case in schools where the Team SOAR initiative had not been as successful:

*So we've been trying to meet every fortnight but a lot of things in-between on Fridays so – but when we have – they have just – the ideas have just flown about how to get the word out and about how to develop the team so my – the kids have just been – just inundating with ideas, it's been amazing (Victorian School A, Interview 2, teacher).*

*I think we're still a little bit floundering a little bit with the Team SOAR side of things, we probably need, we still want to get involved, it's not sort of something that we want to leave by the wayside but we haven't moved forward as much with that as we probably would have liked but I think that's because of the structure of our school (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

It was clear that the implementation of Team SOAR needs more support in schools that do not

have the appropriate structures in place for it to be a success.

#### 4.4.3 Other limitations

In addition to the concerns raised about time constraints, an already full curriculum and the sustainability of SOAR, a number of other issues were raised that should be looked into and addressed in future implementations of SOAR.

As the SOAR program for students was very discussion based, this posed challenges for one teacher at a very linguistically diverse school with many students who were still developing English skills and so needed high levels of support to engage in the program:

*Because of the nature of some of it being so language based, talking based, the kids who don't have English as a first language they need to be a lot like, more scaffolded ... the other kids who didn't they missed a big chunk of it, don't have access to Dari, have a predominant language here, yeah, so I think they didn't get as much out of it as they could have (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

Although students were largely positive about SOAR, some focus group participants mentioned that they thought SOAR had had little impact. One student stated that classmates were making fun and laughing during the lessons, which she found concerning:

*There were some people that like might as well – like they didn't get it sort of and they would like make fun and start laughing and stuff and it was like in the dark point and they thought it was funny and everything when there probably are other students that might maybe be feeling that way so that could hurt them at the same time ... And something to add on is like that people lose their confidence when they're in their own dark place and they don't come out of their shell and stuff like they just keep it like ... Quiet and to themselves and then it just keeps getting worse and worse and they're at the point which they don't know what to do (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

This comment emphasises the need for teachers to be well trained and equipped for dealing with any issues that SOAR raises for students.

Discussions around race, racial identity and racism require thoughtful and sensitive oversight by teachers, which is why SOAR involves professional learning.

Other perceived limitations related to the usefulness of the material at schools 'where there's not many issues like that', as one NSW teacher suggested (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher). A perceived lack of racism within a school was linked to the view that students found it 'a bit tricky' to relate to the SOAR materials (NSW School A, Interview 1, teacher). Another teacher at the same school said the program was 'less day-to-day relevant, it's not a thing that they're dealing with every day like ...' (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership member). Indeed, the most common reason given by participants who did not perceive any change in the school was that there was not much change to be had, as racism and racial bullying were not seen to be issues in the classroom or schoolyard:

*Not really, the school was already pretty racist-free, pretty bully-free like – (Victorian School B, Focus Group 4, student).*

In some cases, this was attributed to the perceived monoculture within the school. Some staff indicated that the lack of racism was due to a lack of targets of racism – in other words, that there were few or no students of diverse background in their classrooms:

*I haven't noticed any difference because our school isn't actually very culturally diverse, it's – like it's really not like I don't think there's much that you can stand up for 'cause it's not like interesting school, really, in culture (Victorian School A, Focus Group 3, student).*

*I haven't seen anything necessarily change within my group, probably just because that's not something that we were necessarily coming up against in the first place. I mean we've got a couple of kids who kind of have you know like great-grandparents and things like that but wouldn't – I don't think I've got any sort of kids with migrant back – like recent migrant backgrounds and things like that (Victorian School B, Interview 4, teacher).*

The limitations identified by staff and students varied depending on each school's environment, structure and calendars, but it was evident that overcrowded curriculums and concerns about the sustainability of SOAR in the long term were issues that require significant consideration in future implementation.

Staff and students were asked for their suggestions on how to improve the SOAR program for future use. They identified a number of areas, including frequency, timing and duration of SOAR lessons, content and activities; support for teachers; and communication with other schools and the wider community.

#### 4.4.4 Frequency, timing and duration of SOAR lessons

Participants felt that extending the SOAR program to include more lessons would be helpful to ensuring that the message of SOAR was embedded within the school. They agreed that additional lessons or refresher lessons throughout the year would mean that students would continue to spread the principles of SOAR beyond the school term:

*Maybe a few more like extra lessons instead of just like we finished it, now we go to some – like resilience so like we could maybe touch on it here and there just to remind the kids (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Yeah and like maybe a touch up on it like every now and then and just like read, just like read only like talk about like what we've done and then what we've learned and like – (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

One teacher stated that they had noticed significant changes in student interactions and prosocial behaviours during the course of the unit of work, and that this could be aided with the use of refresher lessons:

*Teacher: Look, as I was saying the language, like, you know, kids saying, like someone would say something and you're being aggressive or I'm not going to be bystander and this and that sort of stuff.*

*Interviewer: So the kids are actually saying that ...*

*Teacher: They say it, I mean we probably really*

*need to have a refresher every now and then but yeah, they were saying a lot when we were doing it but the whole, between the eight lessons we did they started saying it so, yeah (NSW School A, Interview 3, teacher).*

As introduced earlier, the timing of the SOAR program – piloted among year 5 and 6 students – was also the subject of some feedback, with teachers and students alike proposing that running such a program in younger years might have wider benefits for the school because many of the students who participated in the program would be at the school for some years to come:

*Student: And it lasts longer with them because they're younger years and if you do it with just year five six, year fives have only got one more year left, year six are leaving that year, so if we did it with them and then that would make it a whole much better because they can ...*

*Student: They'd still be here ...*

*Student: They can spread it along to the kindergartens and the year ones and ... (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

*That's why we need to push it onto year three and four, so they can carry that on and spread it through the school because they're here longer than the year fives and sixes (NSW School B, Focus Group 2, student).*

Years 3 and 4 were singled out in particular, with students in the lower years deemed as too young to understand the concepts:

*I don't know how it would work in the junior school. I actually believe that it'd be very useful and easily adapted to stage two [years 3 and 4] (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

#### 4.4.5 School support

SOAR teachers provided some reflections on the need for school support and ongoing, appropriate professional development to ensure that the SOAR project was running effectively. They suggested that strong support from the school leadership staff for bystander anti-racism initiatives would see a more integrated whole-of-school approach succeed:

*But the executive [school leaders] needs to be supportive of the whole school yes, so if you have someone that's appreciative of the*

*program and feels, well, there's value behind it, if the people at the top see value in it then it's easier to share with staff (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

Staff also stated that it was important for teachers to know that they had the support of their school leadership staff, and other avenues for information and advice in case they were not confident about the material they were teaching their students:

*Make sure that the teachers feel confident, you know, so if they're not what level of support are they going to get from their school (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

*Just knowing there's someone they can then talk to ... We've done that like on some levels for an Anti-Racism Contact Officer for when you run stuff like SOAR it sort of amplifies the need to have that information shared more regularly or frequently (NSW School B, Interview 2, ARCO).*

The interviews with staff suggest that it is imperative that the school leadership staff ensure that the integrity of SOAR's whole-of-school integrated approach is upheld by filtering the principles of SOAR throughout the entire school, and not just in the participating classes.

#### **4.4.6 Family and community engagement**

Students and staff at one school felt that SOAR could be improved by involving parents in the program and informing them about what their children were learning in a more systematic way. This is important feedback given that one of the key principles of SOAR is parent and community involvement in the program:

*Like what [other student] was saying, that like telling your parents but like also in parent teacher interviews like you could get like to show like your parents and things like your guardian or something like what you do and like speak to them about it and just telling them like things like that and I think that's awesome idea like to get parents or something to get onto this or something.  
... they could just sign it or they just have to return the form or something. And they*

*can just give it back to the teacher and the teachers can give it back to you and see how many parents will be coming and you can just maybe have a decorated room and talk about – parents could have a seat or something (Victorian School A, Focus Group 1, student).*

*Parents have obviously been supportive of it ... – I've spoken a lot to the parents about it, that would probably be another step, even getting more of the community involved with the situation. And as the SOAR team developed more within a school I think that might start to come up more. But we have such huge Afghani population and that as well, probably wanting to, I don't know, maybe be able to help in that some way if they knew more about it so yeah, promotions with the community as opposed to just within the school (Victorian School A, Interview 1, teacher).*

Although teachers were given some general ideas for how to include parents and the community in SOAR, they were not given additional tools or resources to facilitate that involvement, signalling an area for future consideration.

#### **4.4.7 More collaboration between schools**

Some of the staff from NSW schools indicated that they would have preferred more collaboration and communication with other program schools to be built into the program itself:

*I would have liked to have somehow maybe chatted with [NSW School B] or you know, maybe with another class and spoke about what they did, what we did, that would have been good, just for the kids to get a little bit more of a view on other kids and other classes and ... (NSW School A, Interview 2, school leadership staff).*

*The feedback from [NSW School A] and see how it works in their school, we didn't get a chance to do the cross-over or the linking of classes, I think that should have maybe been a followed through (NSW School B, Interview 1, teacher).*

The above quotes from the two NSW schools highlight that school staff find it useful to discuss strategies and share ideas with teachers from

other schools. One staff participant added that it would be particularly helpful where the demographic profile of the schools were quite varied. The professional communication platform 'Yammer' was used to connect staff from NSW schools and was built into the SOAR program for this reason, but largely went unused. It is clear that they need to be promoted more to be used effectively, or alternatively that communication mechanisms between schools need to be more thoroughly integrated into the curriculum materials.

Overall, staff and students were able to identify specific ways to improve the SOAR program based on their experiences at school, and these suggestions will be reflected upon and implemented as appropriate.

The audit tool was not mentioned by any staff in the key informant interviews, and did not appear to be taken up in an in-depth way by any schools as far as the research team could determine. Exploring ways in which schools can be further supported to engage in the audit tool process is an area for development in future implementation of the SOAR program.

## 4.5 Summary of qualitative findings

SOAR provided schools with an opportunity to proactively engage with the topic of racism, created space for discussion, and equipped teachers with skills and resources to engage with a topic that was potentially intimidating and controversial for some. Students and staff alike indicated that SOAR made them feel more confident and empowered to speak out against racism inside and even outside of school, with some students stating that it increased their confidence and self-esteem more generally. Students were positive about the fact that SOAR equipped them with practical skills that allowed them to *do* something about racism, alongside developing literacy about racism and racial bullying. They appreciated that SOAR upskilled them by giving them safe and adaptable ways to respond to racism.

Student-led activities – for example, through the leadership of Team SOAR – were positively

evaluated by staff and students. These types of activities created space for student leadership, although some expressed that more support was needed to guide students through this process. Further enhancing Team SOAR may be one way of maximising the long-term impact and sustainability of SOAR in schools.

The limitations of SOAR included a lack of time, a full curriculum and sustainability.

The qualitative data provided some evidence that SOAR reached parents and the broader community, primarily through Team SOAR activities but also through students discussing the classroom activities with their parents. Further exploration of ways SOAR can connect further with parents and the wider community may be an important area for development in future implementation studies.

Overall, the focus groups and interviews in participating schools suggest that SOAR was an effective and valued program, with students and staff voicing enthusiastic support for its expansion across other schools.

## 5 Quantitative findings

A total of 252 students completed surveys across the two comparison schools and 393 students across the four intervention schools. Student demographic characteristics by school, and by intervention and comparison group are shown in Table 1. Gender and year level were relatively balanced across all schools, and across intervention and comparison groups. Similar proportions of students identified as Indigenous across comparison (6%) and intervention (6.4%) schools, although these students were concentrated in schools and not evenly distributed across schools in the intervention group and the comparison group. In contrast, only 4.7% of students in the comparison schools identified as Middle Eastern, African, Pacific Islander or Latin American, compared with 12.7% in intervention schools; and 32% in comparison schools identified as Asian compared with 14% in intervention schools. In comparison schools, only 36% of students identified with no religion, 9% identified with other religions, 2% identified their religion as Islam, and 53% identified their religion as Christian. In the intervention schools, 48% of students identified with no religion, 32% identified their religion as Christian, 10% identified their religion as Islam, and 10% identified with other religions.

Results comparing study outcomes pre- and post-intervention across comparison and intervention groups are shown in Table 2.

There was statistical evidence of change in the students' prosocial score in the intervention group compared with the comparison group over time, with evidence of an interaction between intervention and time. The intervention group had an increased Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) prosocial score at follow-up, while those in the comparison group had a reduced SDQ prosocial score at follow-up, compared with baseline. The items in the SDQ prosocial scale reflect student perception of their own prosocial behaviour (I try to be nice to other people, I usually share with others, I am helpful if someone is hurt, I am kind to younger children, I often volunteer to help others).

There was also statistical evidence of change in student-reported teacher inter-ethnic climate in the intervention group compared with the comparison group, with evidence of an interaction between intervention and time. The intervention group had an increased student rating of the teacher inter-ethnic climate at follow-up, while student rating of the teacher inter-ethnic climate did not change in the comparison group compared with baseline. This scale includes items such as 'Teachers encourage students to make friends with students of different racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds' and 'Teachers here like students of different racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds to understand each other'.

There was no statistical evidence of change resulting from the intervention across any of the other study outcomes. As well as the evidence of positive change on two of the study outcomes (prosocial skills and teacher inter-ethnic climate), this indicates that there is no evidence that the intervention did harm in terms of increasing racial discrimination, or increasing mental health difficulties or sleep difficulties.

It is also important to note that baseline levels of outcome measures across groups were all at relatively positive levels before the intervention commenced, meaning that further improvement on these already positive levels was difficult to achieve. Assistant scores were particularly close to the lowest score possible, with defender scores showing a little more, but not a lot of, room for improvement. Overall, bystander response scores and reported racial discrimination scores were more positive than the state population levels reported using the same measures (Priest et al. 2019).

There were high levels (23–40%) of missing data in the bystander response measures, by far the highest of all of the survey measures included. This suggests that this is not the most appropriate survey measure to capture bystander responses, and alternatives are needed for future studies.

**Table 1 Student survey (n = 645) demographic characteristics by intervention and comparison group and by school**

Characteristic	Comparison				Intervention				
	Total (n = 645)	School A (n = 81)	School B (n = 171)	Total (n = 252)	Vic school A (n = 108)	Vic school B (n = 111)	NSW school A (n = 30)	NSW school B (n = 144)	Total (n = 393)
<b>School characteristics</b>									
ICSEA	-	914	1177	-	968	1104	924	937	-
Students in lowest quarter of ICSEA (%)	-	47	1	-	45	7	56	47	-
Total enrolments	-	668	732	-	469	282	196	693	-
Indigenous students (%)	-	32	0	-	0	1	9	17	-
LBOTE students (%)	-	7	55	-	70	14	74	4	-
<b>Student characteristics</b>									
<b>Gender</b>									
Female	332 (51.5%)	46 (56.8%)	81 (47.4%)	127 (50.4%)	55 (50.9%)	52 (46.8%)	15 (50.0%)	83 (57.6%)	205 (52.2%)
Male	310 (48.1%)	35 (43.2%)	88 (51.5%)	123 (48.8%)	53 (49.1%)	59 (53.2%)	15 (50.0%)	60 (41.7%)	187 (47.6%)
<b>School year</b>									
5	318 (49.4%)	41 (50.6%)	88 (51.8%)	129 (51.4%)	47 (43.5%)	63 (56.8%)	9 (30.0%)	70 (48.6%)	189 (48.1%)
6	326 (50.6%)	40 (49.4%)	82 (48.2%)	122 (48.6%)	61 (56.5%)	48 (43.2%)	21 (70.0%)	74 (51.4%)	204 (51.9%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>									
Indigenous	40 (6.2%)	15 (18.5%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (6.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (4.5%)	3 (10.0%)	17 (11.8%)	25 (6.4%)
Middle Eastern, African, Pacific Islander, Latin American	62 (9.6%)	2 (2.5%)	10 (5.8%)	12 (4.8%)	32 (29.6%)	6 (5.4%)	10 (33.3%)	2 (1.4%)	50 (12.7%)
Asian	135 (20.9%)	10 (12.3%)	70 (40.9%)	80 (31.7%)	38 (35.2%)	4 (3.6%)	7 (23.3%)	6 (4.2%)	55 (14.0%)
Anglo/Euro	339 (52.6%)	42 (51.9%)	78 (45.6%)	120 (47.6%)	27 (25.0%)	82 (73.9%)	6 (20.0%)	104 (72.2%)	219 (55.7%)
Other/missing	69 (10.7%)	12 (14.8%)	13 (7.6%)	25 (9.9%)	11 (10.2%)	14 (12.6%)	4 (13.3%)	15 (10.4%)	44 (11.2%)

continued

Table 1 continued

Characteristic	Total (n = 645)	Comparison			Intervention				
		School A (n = 81)	School B (n = 171)	Total (n = 252)	Vic school A (n = 108)	Vic school B (n = 111)	NSW school A (n = 30)	NSW school B (n = 144)	Total (n = 393)
Country of birth									
Australia	523 (82.0%)	72 (88.9%)	133 (80.1%)	205 (83.0%)	66 (61.7%)	100 (90.9%)	14 (46.7%)	138 (95.8%)	318 (81.3%)
Overseas	115 (18.0%)	9 (11.1%)	33 (19.9%)	42 (17.0%)	41 (38.3%)	10 (9.1%)	16 (53.3%)	<10	73 (18.7%)
Religion									
Christian	253 (39.8%)	34 (43.6%)	97 (57.1%)	131 (52.8%)	24 (22.4%)	25 (23.4%)	12 (40.0%)	61 (42.7%)	122 (31.5%)
Islam	44 (6.9%)	2 (2.6%)	3 (1.8%)	5 (2.0%)	24 (22.4%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (46.7%)	1 (0.7%)	39 (10.1%)
Other religion	62 (9.8%)	8 (10.3%)	15 (8.8%)	23 (9.3%)	31 (29.0%)	3 (2.8%)	2 (6.7%)	3 (2.1%)	39 (10.1%)
No religion	276 (43.5%)	34 (43.6%)	55 (32.4%)	89 (35.9%)	28 (26.2%)	79 (73.8%)	2 (6.7%)	78 (54.5%)	187 (48.3%)

-- = not applicable; ICSEA = Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage; LBOTE = language background other than English; NSW = New South Wales; Vic = Victoria

**Table 2 Outcome scores pre- and post- intervention by intervention and comparison**

Outcome <sup>a</sup>	Comparison		Intervention		B coefficient (95% CI) for interaction between intervention and time	P value
	Pre (n = 252) mean (SD)	Post (n = 252) mean (SD)	Pre (n = 393) mean (SD)	Post (n = 393) mean (SD)		
<b>Bystander responses</b>						
Assistant (2–10)	2.3 (1.2)	2.3 (0.8)	2.5 (1.4)	2.4 (1.1)	-0.04 (-0.34, 0.26)	0.8
Defender (7–35)	24.6 (8.1)	23.6 (8.3)	26.4 (7.2)	26.1 (7.4)	0.41 (-1.12, 1.94)	0.6
Outsider (2–10)	4.2 (2.0)	4.3 (1.9)	4.0 (2.1)	4.2 (2.0)	0.09 (-0.35, 0.53)	0.69
<b>Prosocial norms and self-efficacy</b>						
Prosocial norms (2–20)	17.6 (4.4)	17.1 (4.3)	18.3 (4.4)	17.9 (4.4)	0.3 (-0.53, 1.14)	0.47
Self-efficacy to intervene (4–20)	15.9 (3.3)	15.6 (3.5)	16.5 (2.9)	16.5 (3.3)	0.31 (-0.34, 0.96)	0.35
<b>School inter-ethnic climate</b>						
Peer inter-ethnic climate (4–20)	15.8 (2.9)	15.9 (2.9)	15.6 (2.8)	15.8 (2.7)	0.27 (-0.3, 0.83)	0.35
Teacher inter-ethnic climate (3–15)	11.5 (2.2)	11.5 (2.4)	11.9 (2.2)	12.4 (2.4)	0.5 (0.02, 0.98)	0.04
<b>Secondary outcome: social and emotional wellbeing</b>						
SDQ: total (0–40)	15.0 (4.3)	13.1 (5.1)	15.4 (4.7)	14.1 (5.2)	0.34 (-0.49, 1.17)	0.42
SDQ: prosocial (0–10)	8.2 (1.7)	8.1 (1.6)	8.0 (1.7)	8.2 (1.7)	0.3 (0, 0.6)	0.05
<b>Secondary outcome: school connectedness</b>						
Teacher empathy (0–8)	7.2 (1.4)	7.0 (1.7)	7.4 (1.2)	7.2 (1.5)	-0.01 (-0.3, 0.28)	0.96
Loneliness at school (5–25)	9.1 (3.7)	8.4 (3.4)	9.3 (3.4)	8.9 (3.4)	0.29 (-0.32, 0.9)	0.36
Inter-ethnic contact at school (5–25)	19.5 (3.5)	20.2 (3.4)	19.6 (3.6)	20.6 (3.5)	0.29 (-0.35, 0.93)	0.37
Sleep duration	574.9 (64.8)	577.5 (64.4)	580.0 (84.1)	580.6 (62.6)	11.93 (-5.75, 29.62)	0.19

*continued*

Table 2 continued

Outcome <sup>a</sup>	Comparison		Intervention		B coefficient (95% CI) for interaction between intervention and time	P value
	Pre (n = 252) mean (SD)	Post (n = 252) mean (SD)	Pre (n = 393) mean (SD)	Post (n = 393) mean (SD)		
Sleep latency						
0–30 minutes	110 (55.8%)	122 (64.6%)	212 (65.2%)	211 (68.5%)	0.23 (–0.46, 0.91)	0.52
30–60 minutes	58 (29.4%)	41 (21.7%)	71 (21.8%)	57 (18.5%)	–	–
>60 minutes	29 (14.7%)	26 (13.8%)	42 (12.9%)	40 (13.0%)	–	–
Sleep difficulties						
Mild (a little of the time/none of the time)	31 (15.5%)	25 (13.2%)	67 (20.6%)	43 (13.8%)	–0.05 (–0.64, 0.54)	0.87
Moderate (a good bit of the time/some of the time)	60 (30.0%)	41 (21.7%)	82 (25.2%)	76 (24.4%)	–	–
Sleep problem (all of the time/most of the time)	109 (54.5%)	123 (65.1%)	177 (54.3%)	193 (61.9%)	–	–
Racial discrimination						
Racial (0–48)	1.5 (4.1)	1.2 (3.1)	1.8 (4.8)	1.4 (4.0)	–0.05 (–0.89, 0.79)	0.9
Vicarious discrimination (0–20)	4.3 (4.2)	3.9 (3.6)	3.6 (4.0)	3.1 (3.9)	–0.22 (–0.91, 0.46)	0.52

– = not applicable; CI = confidence interval; NSW = New South Wales; SD = standard deviation; SDQ = Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; Vic = Victoria

<sup>a</sup> Possible score ranges for each scale denoted in brackets



## 6 Overall summary of qualitative and quantitative findings

Overall, the qualitative data from staff and students in participating schools suggest that SOAR was an effective and valued program, with students and staff voicing enthusiastic support for its expansion across other schools.

Findings suggest that SOAR provided schools with an opportunity to:

- proactively engage on the topic of racism
- create space for discussion
- equip teachers with practical skills and useful resources to engage with a topic that was potentially intimidating and controversial.

Some articulated that SOAR addressed a key gap in current school programs.

Findings from the qualitative data regarding the SOAR program showed that, overall, teaching staff and students felt that SOAR had been successful in raising students' racial literacy and confidence to intervene in incidents of racism and racial bullying at school. Students and staff alike indicated that SOAR made them feel more confident and emboldened to speak out against racism inside and even outside of school, with some students stating that it increased their confidence and self-esteem more generally. Students were positive about the fact that SOAR equipped them with concrete skills that allow them to *do* something about racism, alongside developing literacy about racism and racial bullying. They appreciated that SOAR upskilled them by giving them safe techniques that can be adapted to respond to racism in a range of situations.

Student-led activities – for example, through the leadership of Team SOAR – were positively evaluated by staff and students. These types of activities created space for students to run activities, although there were some concerns about potential problems arising in schools where not much structure was provided to help guide

the students through it. Given the concerns about sustainability of SOAR, building and investment in Team SOAR is one potential way of embedding learnings within the school, and increasing the longevity and impact of the program.

Limitations of SOAR included a lack of time and overcrowded curriculum, sustainability, and some denial of racism within schools. The qualitative data provided limited evidence that SOAR reached parents and the broader community, despite it being one of the key tenets of SOAR. Strategies for ensuring that this outcome is achieved need to be developed and tested further.

Quantitative data showed statistical evidence of change over time in student prosocial skills and student perceptions of the teacher inter-ethnic climate for the intervention group compared with the comparison group. Findings also showed that the intervention did not do harm – specifically, it did not increase levels of racial discrimination or total mental health difficulties.

Findings also suggest that more sensitive measures of several constructs included in the quantitative survey may be required to capture change in more detail – for example, confidence to intervene, awareness of bystander roles and prosocial school climate. They also suggest that SOAR had impacts on a number of areas not captured by the student survey that need to be measured in future studies – for example, racial and racism literacy, acceptance of difference, empathy, family conversations about racism and anti-racism, general confidence, and commitment to anti-racism action at school and beyond.

Key factors that may explain the lack of quantitative change on some measures include a) already positive levels of some outcome measures in schools with little further change possible – for example, more positive levels of

bystander roles and reported racial discrimination than the population average; b) high levels of missing data on some of the bystander measures; c) a need for more sensitive and specific measures to capture changes described in the qualitative findings not captured in the quantitative survey; and d) insufficient sample size to allow examination of effects across different types of schools and across different student demographics, particularly those with higher levels of racial discrimination and poorer bystander behaviours. Findings from the SOAR Student Survey (Priest et al. 2019), and repeated collection of this survey in future years, could be used to identify schools most in need of the SOAR program.

It is also important to note that quantitative findings showed that the program did not increase levels of racial discrimination or of mental health difficulties, which are common unintended consequence of anti-racism programs among children and adolescents (Bigler & Wright 2014).

Meaningful quantitative data via surveys could not be collected from teachers in this study due to the small number of participating schools, but exploration of opportunities for testing the effects of SOAR for teachers across a larger sample of schools is needed. Qualitative data from school staff about SOAR implementation and impacts are considered appropriate in pilot studies such as this evaluation.

Further development of the SOAR program, and implementation and testing are recommended. This should incorporate measurement tools that capture more proximal measures of change and domains highlighted by the qualitative findings. It should also include schools across a wider spectrum of levels of racial discrimination, such as those with high and medium as well as low levels of reported racism. Schools with a range of student demographics, including proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; students from a diverse range of refugee, migrant, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds; and schools with variations in school size, composition and location should also be included in future evaluation of the program. Exploration of ways the SOAR program can be embedded in, and complement, existing curriculum and

school programs – particularly those related to social and emotional learning, mental health and resilience – is also an ongoing priority.

Evaluation findings should be interpreted in relation to implementation of all five elements of the SOAR program together, as occurred in this pilot, and should not be seen in reference to individual elements of the program. Future implementation studies could help determine which program elements are most effective.

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