



# BRUCE ROCK DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL TRUE BLUE DREAMING MENTORING PROGRAM EVALUATION



Evans C.A.  
chris.evans@rdawheatbelt.com.au

## Forward by the Bruce Rock District High School TBD Mentoring Coordinators

Since its inception and small beginnings in 2011 we have seen, with pride, the benefits that have followed our vision of support for our students at Bruce Rock District High School (BRDHS).

With the intention of broadening the outlook of our secondary students and offering each one of them support, with regular contact, from a one on one mentor from outside the Bruce Rock community, we have seen satisfying and often amazing results. Each year genuine and honest feedback from mentees and their parents, and mentors, has provided information to us to modify and improve the program. The collection of consistent and honest feedback has provided the backbone for this very successful evaluation.

Our Bruce Rock District High School True Blue Dreaming Mentoring program delivers a unique set of opportunities. It is inclusive of all of our secondary students and the Year 5/6 class, and our secondary students also mentor the junior primary students. We deliver this program with great pride.

Addressing the needs of our young people in the Wheatbelt is critical to their development, future education and choices, and their further opportunities. We identified this need in our community and decided to address this in our school setting to ensure all of our young people could gain the same opportunity.

As an efficient and cost effective program our passionate vision is that this evaluation will contribute to providing support to many more students in Regional, Rural and Remote Western Australia. We thank Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt Inc for the effort and encouragement to pursue this evaluation.

The Shire of Bruce Rock and other sources of sponsorship have provided support to the program since it began. Our thanks goes to our students and their parents, staff and our volunteer mentors who have contributed to the outstanding success of the program and provided the invaluable, honest feedback for this evaluation. Without you all, these achievements would not have been possible.

Janine Dayman  
Deputy Principal

Karen Strange  
Co coordinator

## A message from the P&C President

“The outstandingly positive outcomes identified in the evaluation of the Bruce Rock DHS True Blue Dreaming Mentoring program, are the result of initiatives, actions and the underlying support of a number of committed organisations and individuals, who have contributed to making a positive difference for young people in Bruce Rock.” Said P&C Chair Ms Melody Paxman “This report is the culmination of a long held aspiration to measure and substantiate the positive effects of the Program that have certainly been observed over the past seven years”.

## Introduction

The Bruce Rock District High School's (BRDHS), True Blue Dreaming mentoring program was implemented in 2011 with the Year Nine and Ten cohorts. In subsequent years it was extended to the Year Seven and Eight cohorts, with a further extension to the Year Five/Six cohorts more recently. Since its inception it has become an important feature and a constant in the lives of Bruce Rock DHS students, staff, parents/primary carers and the Shire of Bruce Rock and its community due to its success.

## Conceptual approach of the program

The conceptual approach of the program was grounded on the principles that all the students of Bruce Rock DHS were in a position of disadvantage due to the remoteness and relative social isolation of Bruce Rock. The social disadvantage was further compounded by the degradation of year cohorts and social networks with the exodus of large numbers of students to continue their secondary education in Perth or other regional Senior Secondary Education Institutions.

In addition to the student's diminished social networks, senior staff at the school felt that the relatively confined experiences of life and people outside of Bruce Rock were acting as a constraint on students educational and career aspirations.

To meet these needs, True Blue Dreaming (TBD) was approached in 2011 to collaborate with the school to deliver a mentoring program to the students. The choice of TBD was influenced by an association with the founder of TBD, past awardee of Young Western Australian of the Year (2001), Dr James Fitzpatrick (Patches Paediatrics). In assessing the needs of their students the Bruce Rock DHS TBD program developers chose to use mainly university students, along with some young adults without a tertiary background but with relevant career and life experiences. This aligned with the overarching objective of the program which was to give the students exposure to the world outside of Bruce Rock and give them a different or new perspective on their future.

## Bruce Rock DHS TBD mentoring program model

The mentoring intervention model the Bruce Rock program developers structured their approach on was a School Based Mentoring (SBM) program primarily utilising an electronic platform. This was complemented by organised and less formal face to face meetings, visits and activities. It was possibly at this point that the uniqueness and flexibility of the Bruce Rock DHS TBD mentoring program, that has come to characterise the program, was indemnified.

While it was a SBM program it was not confined to the school boundaries or school hours. Student mentees were and are, under parent/carer supervision, allowed to skype, phone or text their mentor from home and can meet their mentor in Perth or meet with their mentor in Bruce Rock outside normal program activities. Equally the program moved away from an accepted approach of sourcing mentors from within the community and instead sourced mainly university students from Notre Dame University and University of WA.

Neither did the program have a professed academic focus. Nor as a youth mentoring program did it specifically target 'at risk' or highly disadvantaged young people. It was intended to be a wholly inclusive program that acknowledged that all adolescents share an overriding disadvantage. Similarly as a mainly electronic based program, it also integrated face to face meetings, mentor visits to Bruce Rock, camps and other shared activities. The benefit of the combination and flexibility of communication types allowed mentees and mentors to choose the space in which to develop and build constructive relationships.

The flexibility in the approach of the program has not only delivered beneficial outcomes for the majority of mentees but has also led to the development of a mentoring culture in the school, with the secondary students mentoring the Junior Primary students.

Underpinning the overall success of the program is a dedicated group of volunteers from Bruce Rock DHS that have developed a highly flexible and responsively agile organisational structure that has incorporated a continuous year on year evaluation process. This has given the coordinators the capacity to develop consistently high standards in the delivery of the program. Additionally these structures have enabled coordinators the ability to detect the emergence of potential issues and address such issues before they become problems and cause harm.

### What does the School say?

#### *Principal Fiona Yeats*

The True Blue Dreaming Mentoring program has developed into an invaluable program within our school to support students. From humble beginnings it has been evaluated and continually adapted and refined to best suit the needs and context in which it is delivered. The opportunity for every secondary student to have a personal mentor, external to family and the school, has been extremely beneficial. It has also helped to bridge the city-country divide and provide students with a much greater awareness of 'the world outside of Bruce Rock'. Most significantly, it has planted aspirational seeds in many of our student's minds regarding their future education and careers. An unexpected outcome has been the extent to which it has provided the mentors with a greater sense of living in the country and working with teenagers, and with so many mentors being medical students this will be beneficial in their working lives.

### Evaluation Measures

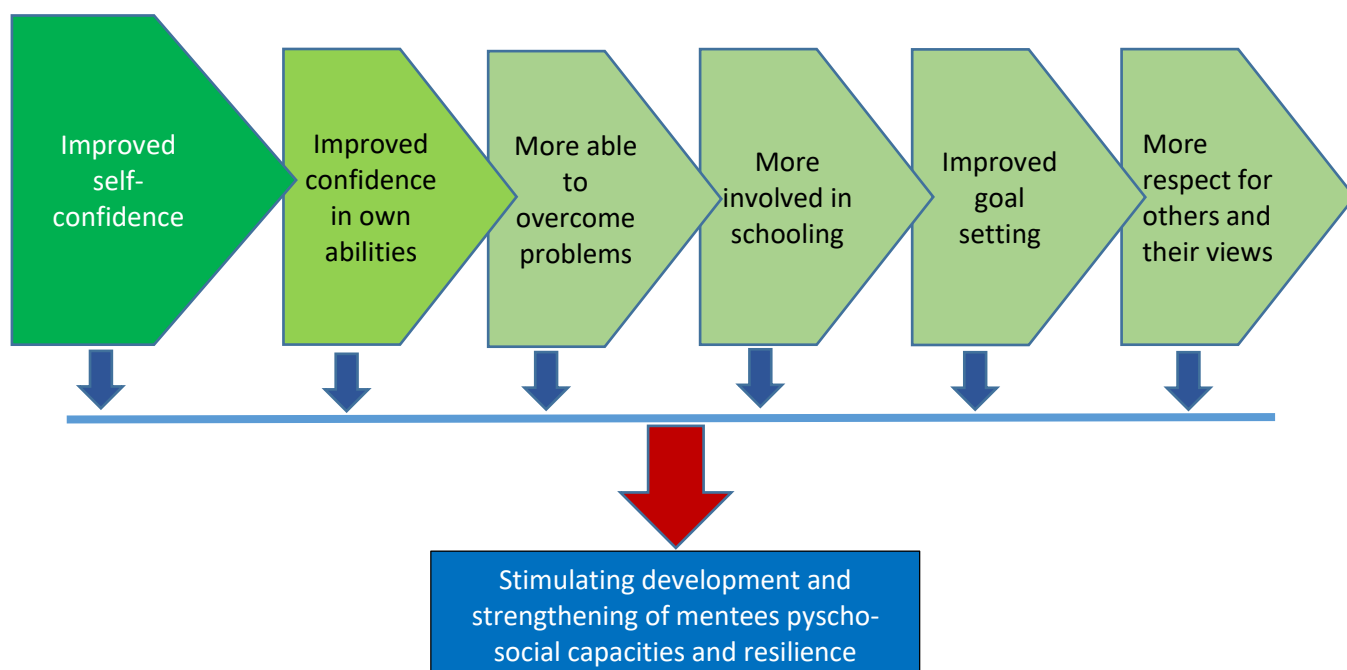
The evaluations presented in this report were drawn from data collected by the Bruce Rock DHS TBD Mentoring coordinators since the inception of the program in 2011. The measures used in the data collection aligned with the objectives and aims of the program.

### Report on mentee outcomes

Mentees responses showed unequivocally that the program was delivering beneficial outcomes and that outcomes had improved as the program had become more established.

Responses	2012-2014	2015-2017
Improved self-confidence	73%	94%
Improved confidence in their own abilities	73%	90%
More able to overcome problems	71%	89%
More involved in schooling	65%	86%
Improved goal setting	62%	85%
More respect for other people	88%	93%
More able to see other people's point of view	73%	90%

There was a significant association between improved self-confidence as the dependent variable, with: improved confidence in own abilities; more able to overcome problems; more involvement in schooling; improved goal setting; respecting others and respecting other people's points of view.



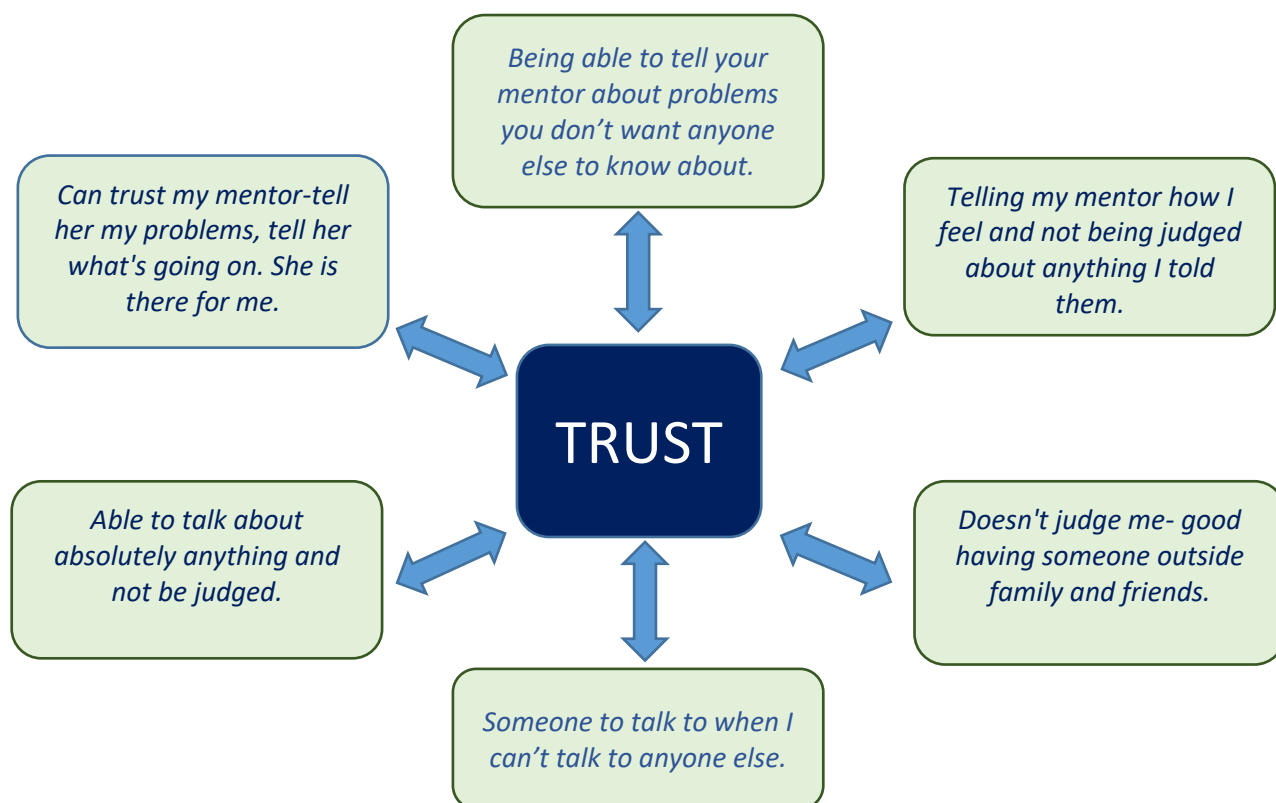
However these outcomes and the other derived beneficial outcomes did not spontaneously occur because a mentee was simply matched to a mentor. Rather the outcomes were derived from relationships developed within a framework of trust, respect and non-judgement.

From the perspective of the majority (86%) of the mentees, this framework broadly encompassed having someone who would listen when there was no one else or no one who would listen (This increased from 73% between 2012 and 2014 to 94% between 2015 and 2017). Mentees further quantified the specifics of what this meant for them in the following groups of responses.

Responses	2012-2017
Someone to talk to.	27%
Someone to talk to outside the community.	26%
Someone to talk to with the experience and who understands.	25%
Helps with personal problems that can't be discussed with anyone else.	20%
Someone to help with problems or issues.	15%

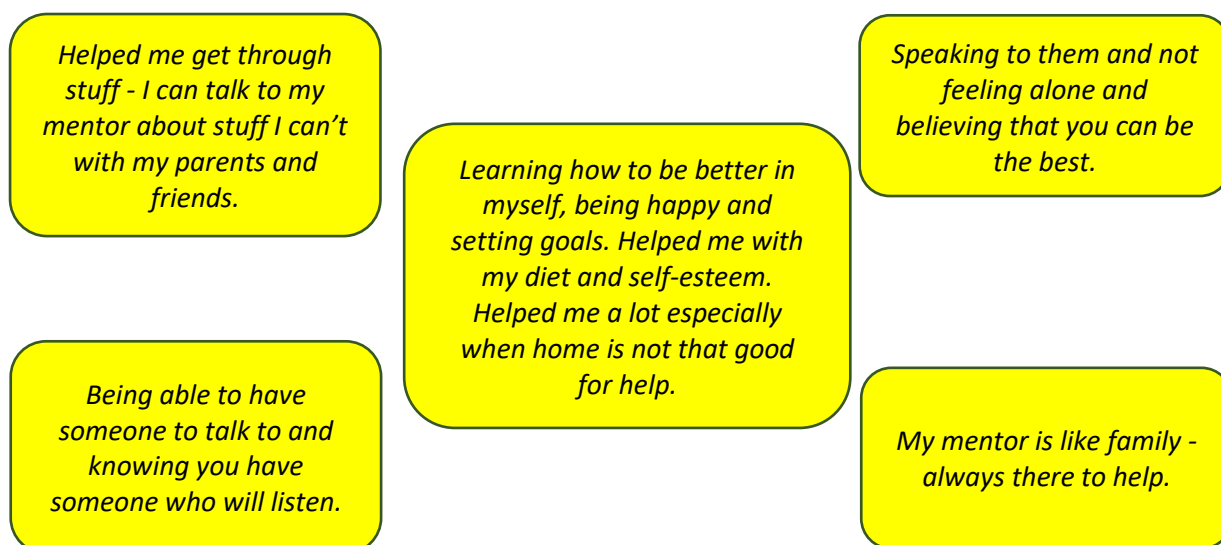


The importance of the trust framework is captured in the individual comments of mentees.



The value of the program is not only restricted to improvements in self-confidence and associated attitudinal behaviours. Some mentees were also struggling with the emotional tensions of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood with 20% of responses nominating having someone to 'help with confidential personal problems'. Given that the program did not have a specific focus on targeting 'at risk' young people, the level of response illustrated crucial value of the program and validated the organiser's decision to make it wholly inclusive of all students.

Effectively the mentors have become another layer in the psycho-social support fabric for young people in Bruce Rock.

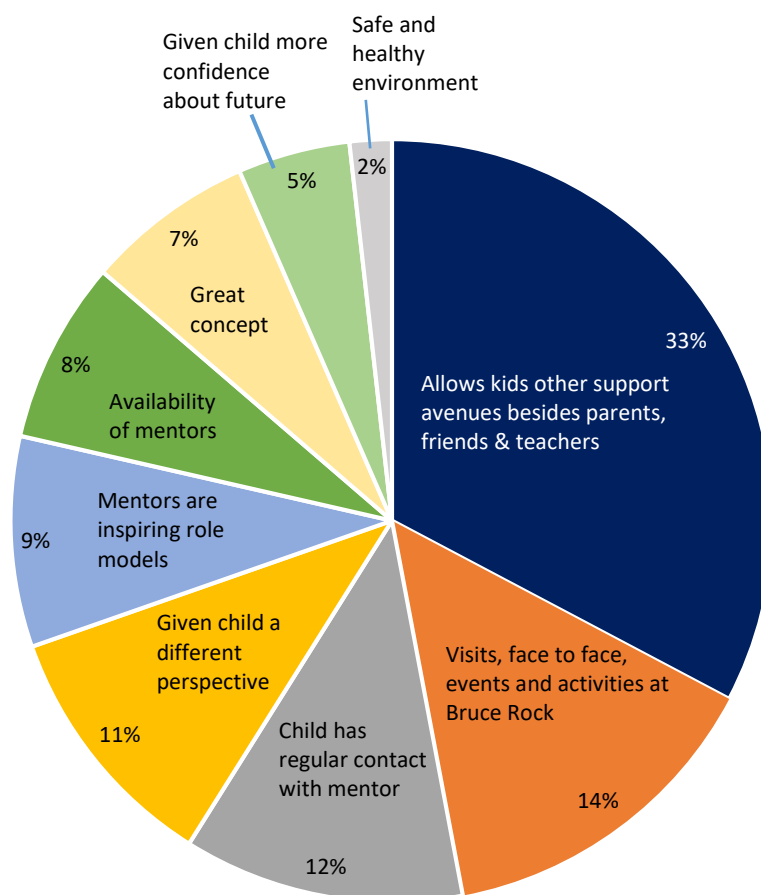


## What do/did parent or carers think about the program?

In the initial stages of the program, a program coordinator observed that many parents/carers did not see the point of the program. However this has changed over time.

91% of parent/carers responses referred to positive aspects of the program.

Responses	2012-2017
It is an amazing/terrific/great program.	38%
Has benefited our child/children.	29%
Given children another avenue of support outside of parents, teachers, friends and peers.	22%
Lucky to have the program and or it should continue.	17%



### What do parents/carers say about- the program

*I very much appreciate it. It makes a big difference to our children. It's great to have it.*

*It's amazing and fantastic. I would like to see it continue. We are lucky that we have the opportunity to be involved.*

*Good program. We are lucky to be involved. The children get a different perspective to the farming community which broadens their world.*

*It's a great program and I would love to be involved as a mentor.*

### What do parents/carers say about- the mentors

*Our child is still in contact with their mentor having left Bruce Rock DHS and catch up regularly. The kids really like the program and we hear more and more about it. It's very good and should continue. It's great to have someone from a different background mentoring them- someone that they would normally never have met.*

*One of our sons brought their mentor home to meet us. We are planning to catch up in Perth. It's good, glad the school is doing it. Country kids don't meet Uni students and see that they are normal people.*

*The mentor will help them in life and with difficulties that mum and dad aren't aware of. They have someone else to talk to.*

### What do parents/carers say about- implementation and coordination of the program

*It's a good school that can be bothered - tries to get as many opportunities for the kids as it can.*

*We would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this program work.*

*We appreciate the time and effort that has been put into the program by Karen, Janine and the other staff. Thank you.*



### Who were/are the mentors and what did they say?

Since 2012, 76 mentors have participated in the program. Most (70%) of the mentors have been female although in the past few years there has been an increase in male mentors.

At the time of writing, well over half (58%) of the mentors had spent more than 12 months in the program with 24% of those involved for 36 months and 5% for 48 plus months. The remaining 13% were mentors who had only been involved in the program in 2017.

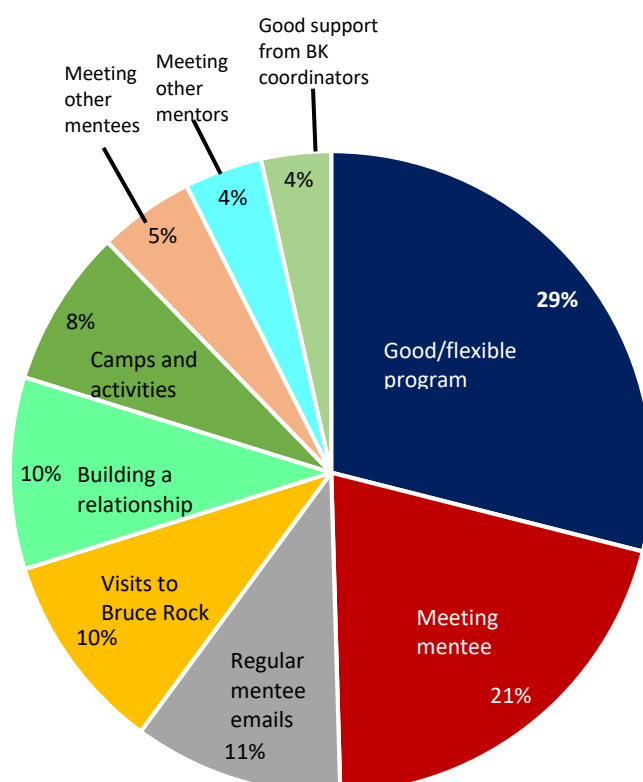
The program has recorded a high retention rate with 98% of first year mentors returning and 80% returning for multiple numbers of years. This compares favourably with the Raise Youth Mentoring Foundation evaluation (2017) that found 98% of their mentors enjoyed the experience and 79% would return the following year.

### What do/did mentors like about the program?

*“Easy to mentor re-how the program was structured.”*

*“Doing the mentoring in my own time-can fit it to my schedule.”*

*“The support, simplicity of the program. Very rewarding.”*



*“Meeting face to face dramatically improved the relationship-I like the concept. I feel like I am a resource for a young person which makes me feel useful.”*

*“Meeting my mentee and attending the activity together. Easy to mentor because of how the program was structured.”*

*“It’s a great idea- email communication- unique and great aspect- opens up a lot of opportunities for rural students- it could be expanded largely.”*

*“Liked the direct involvement with mentee. Regular access to email and no delay in interaction.”*

*“Liked the weekend in Bruce Rock and enjoyed the time with the students. Gave me an appreciation of the differences between city and country.”*

*“The chance to visit the kids in Bruce Rock and have them visit Perth. Getting to see my mentee referee a sporting match on a Saturday and doing activities together.”*

*“I liked the visits and interactions with the wider groups of mentees and mentors and the connection to the Bruce Rock community.”*

*“The best aspects were the Bruce Rock trips, face to face and having Karen and Janine on the coal face rather than higher up people in charity. Have done other work for charities and found them to be top heavy.”*

*“Liked that Bruce Rock is proactive in management of the program-well organised.”*

*“I liked the school and people we work with- good community atmosphere and most welcoming.”*

The high retention of mentors both contributed to the successful delivery of the program and also reflected the closeness of the relationships as well as the high level of organisational support and matching.

## Mentors assessment of mentoring outcomes

Mentoring outcomes	
Successful relationship	96%
Close relationship	82%
Characteristics of positive relationships	
Constant contact	17%
Talked in-depth	17%
Talked easily	14%
Meeting face to face strengthened the relationship	11%
Similar interests	9%
Relationship improving	8%

## What contributed to positive mentoring relationship outcomes

### Constant contact

*Email weekly. The relationship is open and sharing and there is always something to talk about.*

### Talked in-depth

*Have been successful in talking about issues, family, friends and school.*

### Talked easily

*They email quite often and are easy to get along with.*

### Meeting face to face strengthened relationship

*Since the face to face it has improved with more trust and engagement. There is room for improvement but we are beginning to share more.*

### Similar interests

*Have been able to establish good rapport early helped with sharing common interests. Able to focus on these interests in the relationship. Was able to provide extra support being outside of the community.*

*Both similar- nerdy! - likes his tech, sci-fi. Common interests. His emails are better than mine.*

### Improving relationships

*At the beginning it was superficial but the relationship has progressed as we have got to know each other better. Good conversations, sharing closer details.*

### Or simply helping

*Hugely- this year my mentee needed someone and I was able to be there. Happy to be that person.*

Similarly other mentors were honest in their appraisal of why relationships were not close or could have been closer.



While for others, busy schedules made developing a close relationship difficult.



These comments reflect the high personal expectations of mentors in their involvement and commitment to the mentees and the program. This was shown in mentor's judgements of whether they had made a difference to their mentees life.



At the same time, the mentors themselves gained new perspectives and understanding.



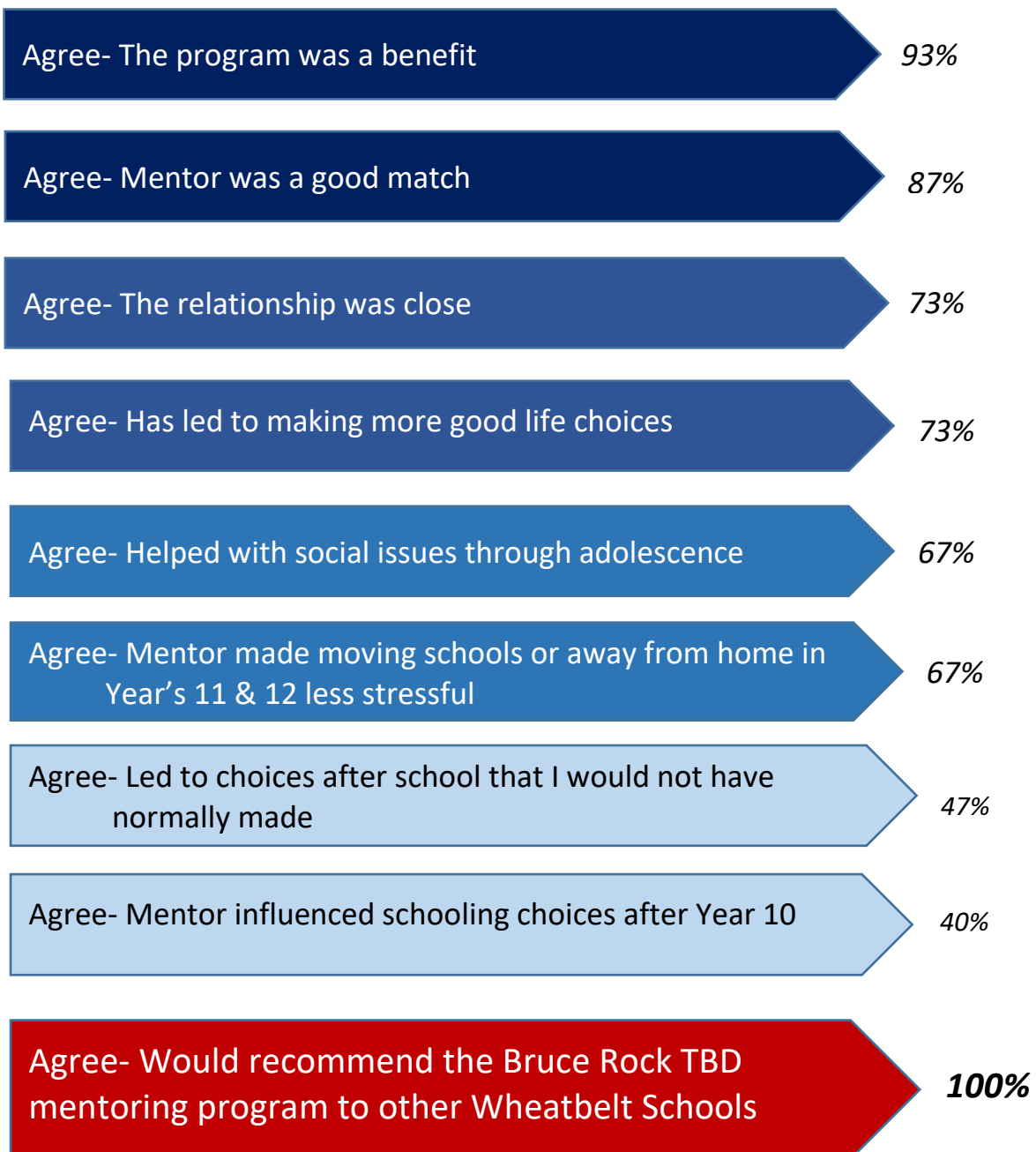
But perhaps what mentors gained was best articulated in the following excerpt of a speech made by a mentor in the presence of the then Governor of WA, Her Excellency, the Honourable Kerry Sanderson.

*One of my fondest memories of the program was when my mentee's Father came up to me after the local footy game and said:*

***"You know what you guys are doing here is so special.  
I'm really grateful that you can do this for my boys."***

Given the suite of positive comments from mentees, mentors and parents along with the derived positive outcomes, the final question was: what were past mentees' views of the program.

### What did past mentees say?



*Of the 12 students that comprised the 2012 Bruce Rock DHS Year 7 cohort, four are attending university in 2018, including one student who is the first of their family to do so.*



## Discussion: Unique flexibility of the program

Although it was a School Based Mentoring (SBM) program it was not confined to school boundaries or school hours.

*"...my mentor came up in the holidays to watch me play netball."*

*"Meeting my mentor and sharing pizza in the park and just getting to know them and share a laugh."*

In addition, while delivery of the mentoring was largely structured on a digital platform, face to face interactions, both planned and informal (with appropriate parental/carer supervision) were incorporated and encouraged.

*"Spending time with my mentor-both face to face and emails."*

*"My mentee talks about lots of topics and she requotes my quotes back to me. Has visited me. We share a similar environment in growing up and moving away to boarding school which means we can talk about it."*

Also the program did not have a specific focus on students who were 'at risk' or may have needed psycho-emotional support. Yet through its encompassing inclusiveness, the program ensured there was that layer of support available.

*"XXXX has helped me through tough situations and has guided me through last year easily and with a brilliant understanding..."*

*"Able to talk about absolutely anything and not be judged. My emotions can run wild. Got advice on how to do things better."*

*"My mentee has opened up about XXXX issues and is now attending counselling."*

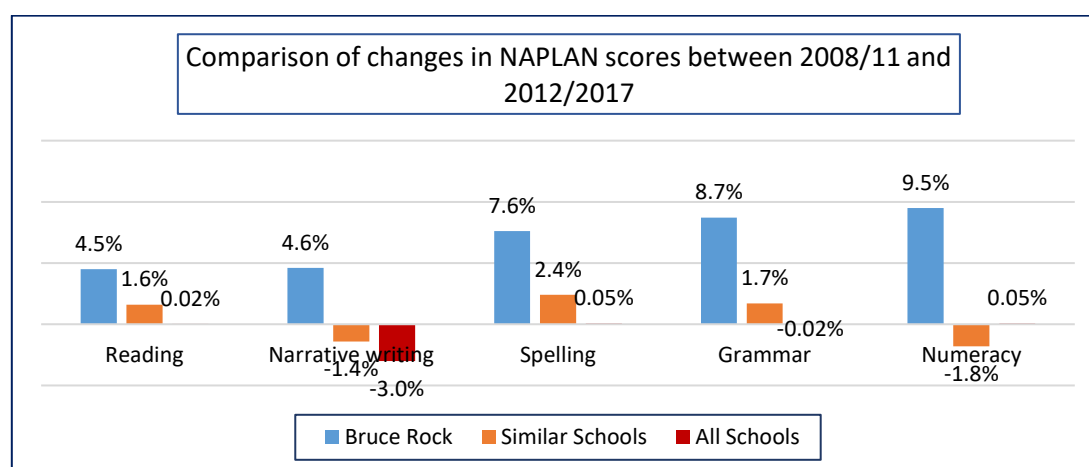
Nor did the program have a particular focus on improving academic outcomes but...

*"I have become more confident- learned I can ask questions- has helped improve my studies and gave me the belief that I can actually do something."*

*"Someone I can talk to about issues at school and school work and how to get through it."*

*"My attitudes have changed towards school and other people."*

It could be proposed that these changes in attitudes to school and study are reflected in the improvement in the Year Nine NAPLAN results since the implementation of the program.



But perhaps the overarching qualification of the program's uniqueness was that meeting the other mentors was a positive experience for mentees whose mentor was unable to attend the activity.

*"Didn't meet up this time but bowling was fun and it was great to talk to other mentors."*

*"Being able to have a couple of days with mentors and getting to know them and have fun. Even though they were not my mentor, it was good to talk to them and receive advice."*

## Conclusion

In conclusion the results of the analysis and evaluation demonstrate that in mentoring terminologies, the Bruce Rock DHS TBD mentoring program is an appropriate and effective program for delivering mentoring to high school students at Bruce Rock DHS. The development and evolution of the program has resulted in the establishment of a program model that is unique compared to other SBM and youth mentoring programs.

This uniqueness of model is delineated in a number of ways including the program being school based but not being restricted to school hours or boundaries or specifically focused on academic outcomes. Neither does it have a particular focus on 'at risk' or highly disadvantaged students but has ensured that any such students are included in the program by default, thereby ensuring that no student 'falls through the cracks' and all students have someone they can trust and rely on.

In addition, although the main form of contact is via electronic mediums the program could not be described as an Electronic Based Program as most mentees meet their mentors through a number of organised visits and events as well as informal visits.

It could therefore be proposed that these adaptations have contributed to meeting the needs and requirements that were relevant to the young people of Bruce Rock. That by all indications that the program is appropriate and effective may be attributed to the overall flexibility in the structure of the program and the responsive agility within the organisation and administration of the program, particularly from the Bruce Rock side of the enterprise.

The contributory factors to this flexibility have emanated from both the formal and informal structures of the program which have allowed a more comprehensive interface between the mentee, mentors and broader social environment. Through the process this has contributed to what could be considered the key fundamental benefit of the program which was and is the improvement of the mentee's self-confidence. Based on the results of the analysis, it would be reasonable to assert that the improvement in self-confidence has underwritten all the other derived benefits of the program.

Therefore, this evaluation, based on the measured improvement in self-confidence along with the other indicators of improvement, considers the Bruce Rock DHS TBD program an effective program and a suitable mentoring model to employ in other rural, regional and remote areas in WA and Australia. A view endorsed by a mentee in a speech made before the then Governor of WA, Her Excellency, the Honourable Kerry Sanderson in 2015, who said:

*"I have no doubt that the True Blue Dreaming Mentoring Program is a huge success and I hope it has a long, vast future ahead, where more students can access it."*