RESTORATIVE ACTION PROGRAM

Outcome Evaluation Phase 1: Review of Successful Cases

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

CENTRE FOR FORENSIC BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE AND JUSTICE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
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Outcome Evaluation Phase 1: Review of Successful Cases

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REPORT SUMMARY

WHAT DID WE DO?

Using a qualitative method, we looked in-depth at what the Restorative Action Program experience is like from the perspective of people who directly benefit from RAP services in their schools. We conducted a series of interviews with people who were identified as having had significant positive experiences with the RAP to learn more about what made the program useful to them and what outcomes they experienced.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

We spoke to several current and former students as well as school staff from across a selection of RAP schools, representing a diverse range of successful program experiences. We also spoke with the RAP workers themselves to gain additional insights into how the themes that were raised in the program recipient interviews were reflected in their practice.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We learned that highly successful RAP recipients:

1. Accessed RAP from many different pathways
2. Were intensive program users who received support for a wide range of issues
3. Received a similar range of services and benefits, including:

   Immediate conflict management support, emotional support, practical support, access to leadership and community engagement opportunities, and a strong, positive relationship with their RAP worker

4. Reported outcomes consistent with the RAP program model, including:

   Learning and applying new skills to deal with difficult personal and interpersonal situations, developing and discovering positive attributes, prevention and reduction in severity of future conflicts, and increased school retention and academic perseverance

5. Attributed their successes to similar program factors, including RAP's:

   Accessible, safe environment and approachable, supportive staff

6. Believed that RAP made a unique, positive contribution to their success

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

IS RAP'S PROGRAM THEORY SUPPORTED BY RECIPIENT EXPERIENCES?

- All of the program recipients described receiving core RAP services and direct outputs consistent with RAP's service model
- Multiple participants described effects consistent with the RAP outcome model and attributed these outcomes directly to RAP's services

There is reasonable evidence to support the plausibility of RAP's theory of change in terms of its intended results and the contribution of RAP's services to these outcomes. Further evaluation is needed to assess whether these outcomes are being achieved for all program recipients.

WHAT FACTORS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO RAP'S SUCCESSES?

The primary factors identified by participants as being significant to their success in the program were the openness and accessibility of the program and the RAP workers themselves in terms of their supportiveness, approachability, and ability to form strong relationships with students and staff. The importance of RAP workers' relationship skills was reiterated several times throughout the evaluation.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The resulting recommendations are made based on the findings of this evaluation:

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- CLARIFY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AS A PROGRAM COMPONENT including how this component is to be implemented and what it is intended to achieve
- PROMOTE THE SELECTION, SUPPORT, AND RETENTION OF AN EFFECTIVE RAP FRONTLINE STAFF by ensuring there are clear hiring guidelines and the necessary training and resources available to them

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- CONTINUE WITH THE NEXT PHASE OF OUTCOME EVALUATION, using quantitative methods to determine the scope of the program's outcomes
- CONSIDER ASSESSING PROGRAM AWARENESS within the schools in response to comments that awareness is low at some sites

INTRODUCTION

This report describes and documents the first phase of RAP's outcome evaluation, a qualitative study of RAP 'success cases' using a series of interviews supplemented with program data to gain a better understanding of how RAP helps those who access the program in their schools.

BACKGROUND

THE RESTORATIVE ACTION PROGRAM (RAP) is a community-based non-profit initiative developed and supported in partnership between the Rotary Clubs of Saskatoon, the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, and Saskatoon Public Schools. RAP currently services nine secondary schools in Saskatoon and has also recently begun expanding to other sites in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The program provides support to students and staff in addressing conflict and bullying in their schools through conflict management and leadership development.

RAP has been in operation since 2003 when it opened in Mount Royal Collegiate. The program has undergone significant development and transformation over that time. In 2010, a partnership was formed with the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies at the University of Saskatchewan to evaluate the program's services. A phased approach has been employed to comprehensively assess the program's elements and its effects on young people in Saskatoon.

To date, the evaluation of RAP has included:

- Evaluability assessment to identify RAP's program model and evaluation needs[1]
- Development and implementation of a comprehensive program performance monitoring system to understand and support RAP's program delivery[2]
- Outcome evaluation strategy planning[3]
- Literature review of similar programs and supportive research[4]

All past evaluation reports are available on RAP's program website. The present study represents the first phase of RAP's outcome evaluation.

[1] Camman & Wormith, 2011
[2] Camman & Wormith, 2013, 2014 & 2015b
[3] Camman & Wormith, 2014
[4] Camman & Wormith, 2015a

EVALUATION PURPOSE

THE PURPOSE OF the current evaluation is to support the program's development by establishing whether the experiences of its most successful recipients are consistent with the program's expected effects and identifying its most important features as well as areas for change and improvement as the program continues to grow. This particular stage of the evaluation aims to address two central questions:

Q1: Is RAP's program theory supported by recipient experiences?

Q2: What factors are contributing to RAP's successes?

IS RAP'S PROGRAM THEORY SUPPORTED BY RECIPIENT EXPERIENCES?

All programs are based on assumptions about how their services contribute to changes in the service recipients and other beneficiaries. Defining these assumptions and turning them into explicit statements about what the program is meant to do and how it is expected to bring about change is known as articulating the program's **theory of change**.[5]

RAP's theory of change was first articulated during its evaluability assessment[6] and has been refined as more information about the program has been gathered. Part of the goal of the current evaluation was to compare RAP's expected outcomes based on its program theory with the outcomes reported by actual program recipients. We have focused on the experiences of successful participants because they provided the most likely cases where RAP's program theory will have been fully realized.

This evaluation method cannot establish RAP's overall effectiveness for all students, which requires the use of methods such as surveys of a representative sample of program recipients. Instead our aim was to conduct a preliminary assessment on the plausibility of RAP's model using qualitative methods to provide more detailed, contextualized insights about the program's functioning before moving on to more global assessments. This is consistent with the recommendation in the literature to used mixed-methods evaluation approaches which rely on both qualitative and quantitative sources of evidence and to employ converging lines of evidence when evaluating a program's impact.[7]

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[5] Weiss, 1995
[6] Camman & Wormith, 2011
[7] Camman & Wormith, 2015; Shadish, 1993

RAP'S THEORY OF CHANGE

RAP's program model has been revised and refined at several points during the program's lifespan, most recently during the strategic planning process undertaken by the RAP Board of Directors (see Jones, 2016).

A simplified version of this model which draws on that strategic planning document as well as previous versions (Camman & Wormith, 2013, 2011) has been created for this report to illustrate the theory of change being tested. The model has been organized in three components:

1) Operational model
2) Service model
3) Outcome model

The **operational model** (see Figure 1) describes what goes into RAP's operation and organizational structure. The **service model** (see Figure 2) describes what its services are and how these are delivered to recipients. Finally, the **outcome model** (see Figure 3) shows the changes that the program is intended to bring about in those who are involved in its services.

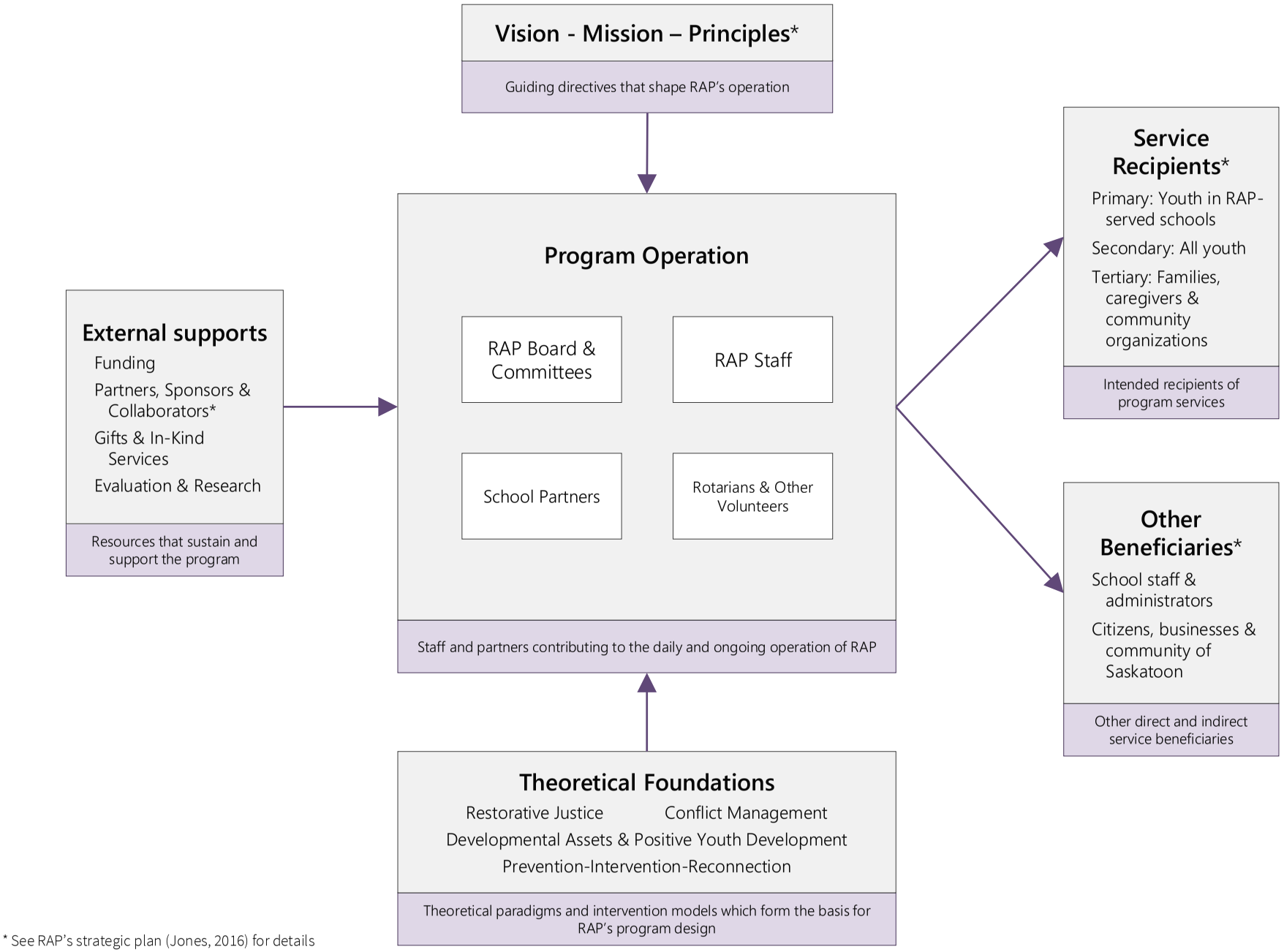
Within each model, similar elements have been grouped together under headings and arrows are used to show relationships between different elements. In the outcome model, the arrows represent causal or influencing relationships (e.g., applying conflict management skills contributes to reductions in the frequency and severity of conflicts). Although not shown, relationships also exist between the models, with the operational structure leading to service delivery and services contributing to outcomes.

WHAT FACTORS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO RAP'S SUCCESSES?

Using a qualitative approach allowed us to gather rich, complex data about program recipients' unique experiences in their own words. Participants reported not only if they experienced positive changes as a result their involvement in the program, but also described the nature of these effects, how these were related to RAP's services, and what factors they felt contributed to their successes in the program.

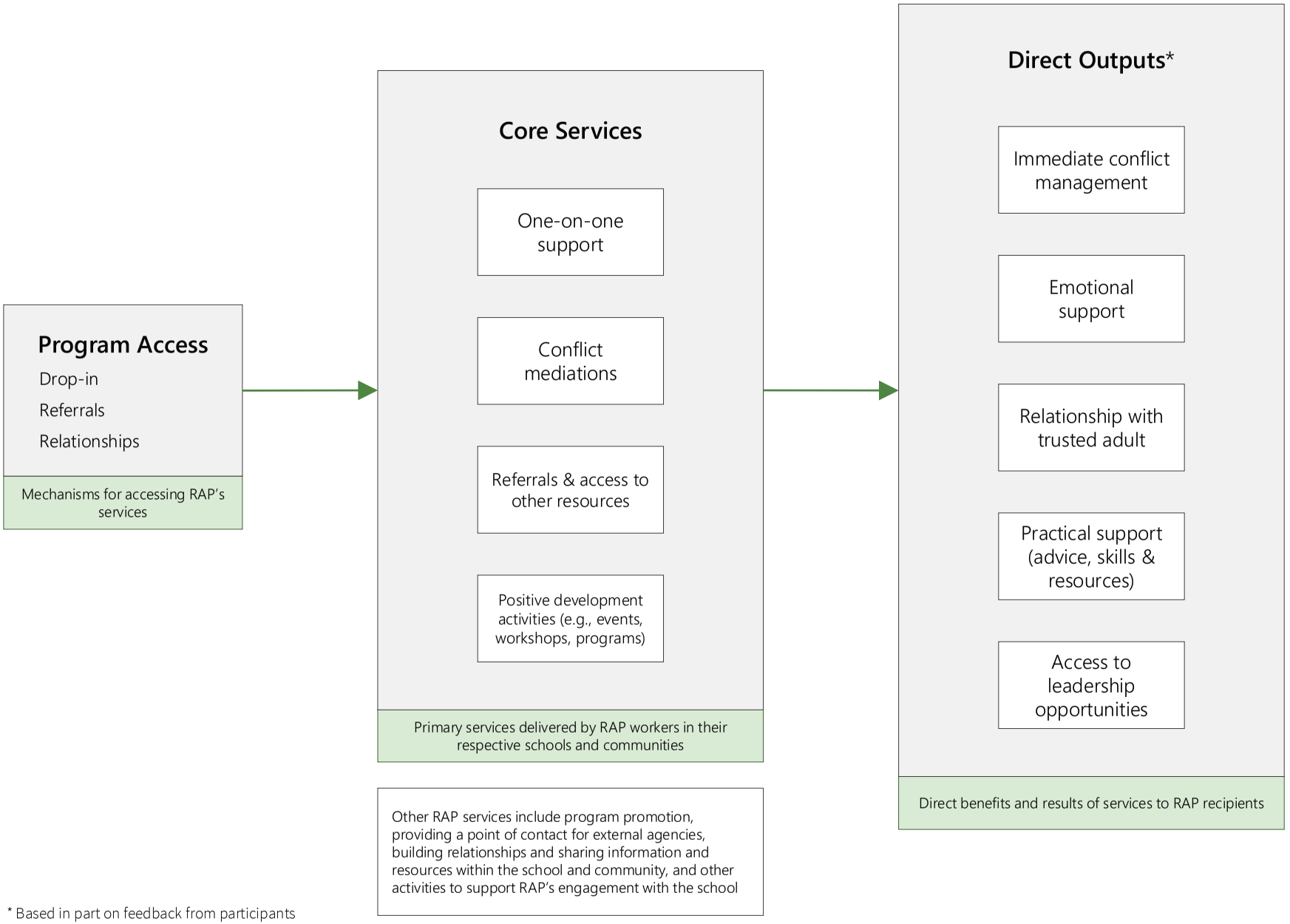
There are some limitations with the present method. For instance, participants may not have been aware of or able to articulate all of the aspects of the program that affected them and how. However, this process has provided insights into what aspects of the program are most valued by successful program recipients and what helped engage them in RAP's services. This in turn highlights what aspects of the service are likely to be significant in engaging other youth in RAP.

FIGURE 1. RAP OPERATIONAL MODEL



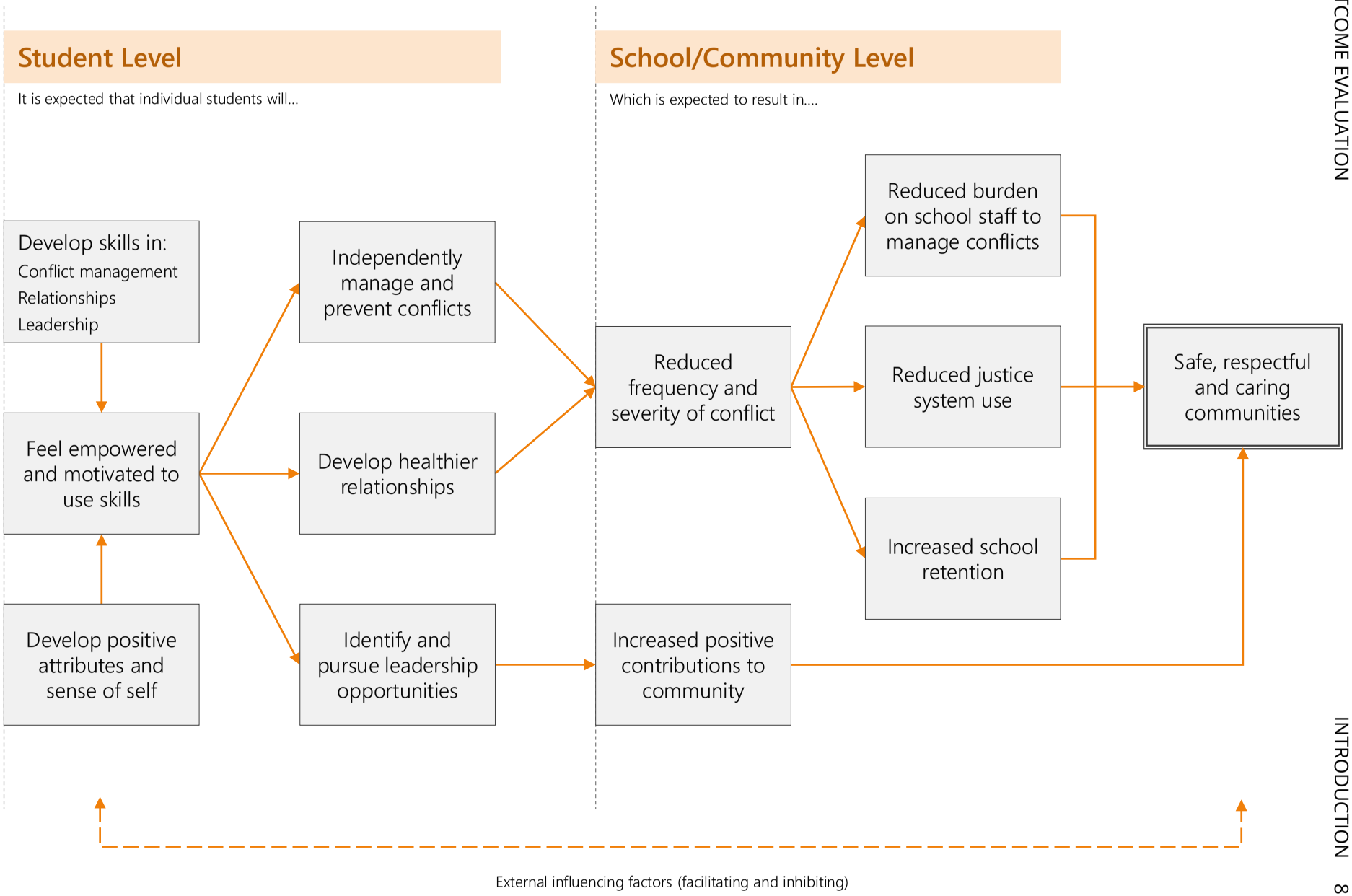
* See RAP's strategic plan (Jones, 2016) for details

FIGURE 2. RAP SERVICE MODEL



* Based in part on feedback from participants

FIGURE 3. RAP OUTCOME MODEL



WHAT ARE OUTCOMES?

In evaluation, it is important to distinguish between **program outputs** (what the program does) and **program outcomes** (what changes the program contributes to).[8]

What happens in the service model is largely under the direct control of the RAP program administrators and staff. For example, RAP workers can choose how often they offer conflict mediations and expose participants to conflict management skills, which are program *outputs*. However, they cannot decide whether the students learn these skills, apply them in their day-to-day life, and reduce conflict in their lives as a result, which are *outcomes*.

Until now, the focus of the evaluation process has been on establishing what the program services and outputs are and how well these are being delivered. In outcome evaluation, the focus has shifted to identifying whether the changes the program intends to create are being realized among its recipients and how.

These changes can occur over different timespans, from the immediate to the long-term, and at different levels, from individual to school-level to community-wide changes. Outcomes are also influenced by a range of **external factors** which can both facilitate and inhibit the achievement of the program's goals independent of RAP's influence. The more complex and less immediate the outcome is, the more likely it will be affected by other factors and the more challenging it is to attribute it to a single intervention.

The role of outcome evaluation is to identify what changes have occurred in the target population and, where possible, link these changes to the program services.

[8] Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004

METHODS

THE APPROACH USED for this evaluation was the **success case method** developed by Brinkerhoff.[9] This method is used to understand what aspects of an intervention are working (and what can be learned) by looking at its most successful implementations. While success cases are by definition not representative of the average experience, the goal of this method is not to understand what is typical about a program but rather to assess its 'best case scenario' in order to understand and generalize from these instances. With respect to RAP, the rationale for using this method was to confirm anecdotal reports of program success with a systematic approach and to verify the plausibility of the program model under favourable conditions before conducting more extensive outcome evaluation.

PROCESS

To conduct the current evaluation, we:

- Received permission from the Saskatoon Public School Division and Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division to invite all RAP-supported schools to participate in the study
- Contacted principals at each school with information about the evaluation and a request to include their school in the study
- Asked RAP workers at participating schools to identify at least two interview candidates who:
    1. Had experienced some kind of significant or extensive positive involvement with RAP
    2. Were current or former students or school staff members who had directly participated in RAP services in some way
- Followed up with interview candidates who agreed to be contacted with more information about the evaluation to request their participation
- Interviewed the consenting participants; interviews were semi-structured and conducted by phone between March and June, 2016
- Transcribed the interviews and analyzed them for themes and trends
- Conducted verification interviews with RAP workers to confirm that general themes identified by the participants were consistent with their practice and to gain further insight into these themes

See Appendices A and B for information and consent forms and the interview question protocol.

[9] Brinkerhoff, 2002

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

One challenge in conducting a qualitative study with a small sample is preserving confidentiality. To protect participants' privacy and uphold their right to determine the use of their data, we took a number of steps:

ONE: While it was necessary to ask RAP workers to identify and carry out the initial contact of potential interview candidates, they were not informed about which candidates chose to take part or what they chose to share. Verification interviews focused on general themes and not specific experiences.

TWO: All names have been removed from quotes included in this report, including names of interviewees, other school staff and students, and the schools themselves. The names of individual RAP staff have been changed to "the RAP worker".

THREE: Quotes are not linked with specific individuals by name or alias to prevent cross-referencing of responses.

FOUR: Participants were given multiple opportunities to affirm or revoke consent, before and following the interview, including specific questions about what could and could not be included. For participants under the age of 18, we also obtained parental consent before conducting their interview.

PARTICIPANTS

In total, 13 interview candidates were put forward, eight of whom took part in the evaluation, including six current and former students and two school staff members. Five schools across both school divisions were represented by the participants, with the other four schools represented indirectly through the RAP program staff, all of whom contributed responses in the theme verification interviews. Additional feedback was also provided by the Executive Director, representing the broader program perspective.

Because of the small sample size, the non-representative sampling technique, and the need to uphold participant privacy, it was not a priority in this study to assess and draw conclusions based on demographic characteristics of the interviewees. However, nearly all interview candidates, whether they chose to participate or not, were female and, among the students, were either in Grade 12 or had graduated high school already. Although the older age of the participants was expected given our focus on long-term successful program recipients, the relative lack of male participants is challenging because nearly half of all RAP recipients every year are male.[10] It is unclear if male students are less likely to be significantly successful in the program or if there was another factor leading to their lack of inclusion in this study, but future outcome evaluations should take this into account.

[10] Camman & Wormith, 2013, 2014, 2015b, 2016

RAP worker with students in mock mediation

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IMAGE CREDIT: NINA HENRY

FINDINGS

Analysis of the interviews generated several themes with respect to the RAP recipients' individual narratives and what effects they saw RAP having on them and their school experiences. From these, six overarching themes emerged which are grouped under three categories:

COMPARISON TO OTHER RAP RECIPIENTS

1. They accessed RAP from many different pathways, with different referral sources and reasons for getting involved
2. They were intensive program users who received support for a variety of issues

The first two themes relate to the similarities and differences between the sample of highly successful participants and the overall profile of RAP recipients from the annual program data. While not intended to be a representative sample, the participants we interviewed were consistent with the overall recipient profile in terms of the diversity of how they accessed the program and the types of issues they dealt with. They differed primarily in their high level of service use.

CONSISTENCY WITH RAP PROGRAM MODEL

3. Despite the differences among them, they received very similar services from their RAP workers
4. They also reported outcomes which were largely consistent with RAP's program model

The next two themes address the comparison of the interview responses with RAP's intended services and outcomes. The participants not only reported similar results despite getting involved in the program for different reasons, but their accounts were also fairly consistent with RAP's program model.

FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESS

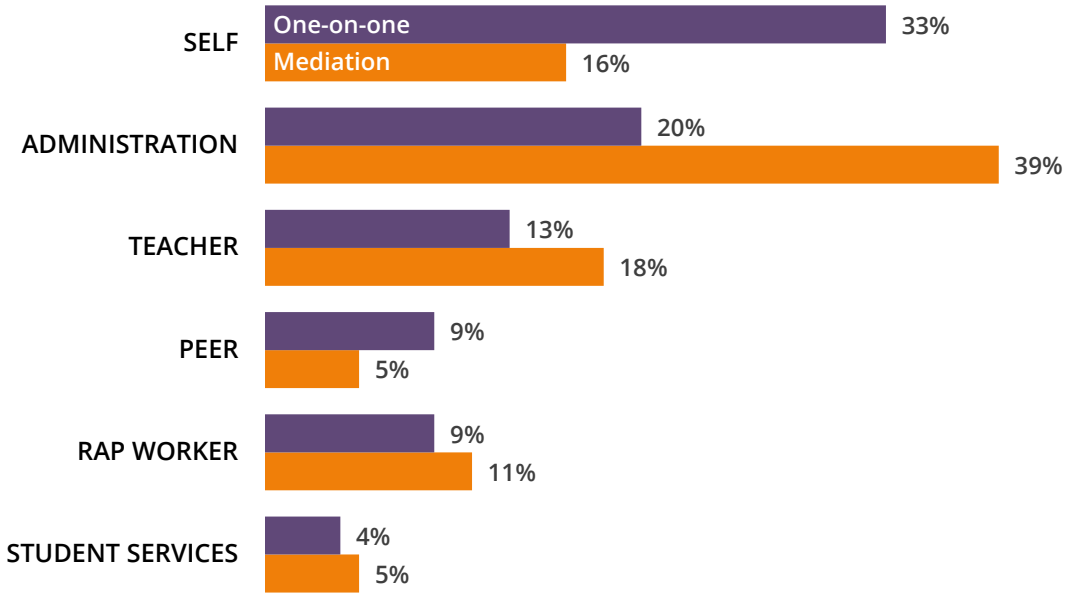
5. They attributed their successes with the program to similar program factors
6. They all believed that RAP made a unique, positive contribution to their success

Finally, there was also a high degree of consistency in what factors the participants felt made RAP a success and their general positive perspective on the program. The following sections will explain each of these findings in more detail.

1. THEY ACCESSED RAP FROM MANY DIFFERENT PATHWAYS

PARTICIPATION IN RAP is driven largely by referrals from various groups both within and outside of the school. Annual program data have consistently identified six primary referral sources for both one-on-one cases and conflict mediations. Last year, these accounted for 88-95% of service contacts, depending on the type of service:

FIGURE 4. MOST FREQUENT REFERRAL SOURCES (2015-16)[11]



The remaining referrals came from a range of sources, including parents, other school staff, various external service agencies, school and community resource (police) officers, and community members.

This diversity of pathways into the program was also apparent for the program recipients interviewed for this evaluation. Both staff and students reported a variety of experiences in learning about and accessing the program for the first time (see Figure 5).

[11] Camman & Wormith, 2016

FIGURE 5. DIVERSE PATHWAYS TO RAP FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM RECIPIENTS

SELF-REFERRAL TO TALK ABOUT PERSONAL STRUGGLES AT HOME	"I WENT TO see the RAP worker in the first place because of my home situation. I was dealing with a lot of stuff at home. So I went to her just to talk to her about what was going on at my house and for that extra support."
REFERRED BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS ALTERNATIVE TO PUNITIVE MEASURES	"OUR PRINCIPAL AT the time called us down to the RAP office and this girl was able to tell me that she was scared to come to school because she was scared I was going to kick her ass."
SELF-REFERRAL BY TEACHER FOR SUPPORT WITH CONFLICTS OCCURRING IN THE SCHOOL	"I IDENTIFIED WITH the fact that we have a strong RAP worker and that if it works for the students, then it should be able to work with staff and students as well."
REFERRED BY PEER FOR HELP WITH INTERPERSONAL ISSUES	"ONE OF MY friends explained that he had gone to see the RAP worker and thought she was really helpful and thought she'd be good for me so he marched me to her door and then I met her. So that's how I got involved with it initially."
IDENTIFIED BY RAP WORKER AS NEEDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION	"WHEN I STARTED high school I wasn't in a good place. I was aggressive. I was really just angry all the time. And the RAP worker just grabbed me one day and asked me what was up, and I told him what was going on, and from then on out he became my go-to."
IDENTIFIED BY RAP WORKER FOR DEMONSTRATING INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT	"IN GRADE 9, I started slowly getting into volunteering and I guess I got noticed for that, and that's when the RAP worker started asking me to help her with other volunteer things around the school."

The school staff we spoke to confirmed making referrals to RAP on behalf of students in their various roles as teachers, guidance counsellors, and administrators. It is also notable that while the majority of first-time program contacts were driven by conflicts and personal difficulties, one person reported an initial contact based on their proactive involvement in volunteer and leadership activities.

CHALLENGE: RAISING PROGRAM AWARENESS

Some of the participants felt that awareness of the program in their schools was low, either due to their own unfamiliarity with RAP prior to getting involved or a perception that their peers did not know about RAP and were therefore not accessing it.

While the program data show that student-driven referrals (both self- and peer) do account for a substantial proportion of RAP's service delivery activities and other interviewees reported high awareness in their schools, it may still be beneficial to conduct an assessment of RAP's program promotion activities and general program awareness in the schools to identify areas for improvement.

"A LOT OF students don't even know RAP is a program or that it's in the school or anything. And I think if they just knew how helpful it is and were able to use it more, I think it would become a lot better."

"WHEN I FIRST got involved, I didn't even know what it was. He told me he was the RAP teacher, and when we did orientation in Grade 8, I didn't understand what they meant. … When we start Grade 9, we sit down and have a big grade meeting and they talk about what certain people do in the office, but I don't think they ever actually explain enough about what the RAP worker actually does and what he's there for. I know he sees lots of kids, but I think if more kids knew, they would go."

2. THEY ARE INTENSIVE PROGRAM USERS WHO RECEIVED SUPPORT FOR A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES

FREQUENCY OF PROGRAM USE

ALL OF THE students interviewed were intensively involved in the program, having received support for multiple issues and were or had been in frequent contact with their RAP worker. The staff we spoke to were less intensively involved but still had multiple contacts over their years of program engagement.

Among the students, most became involved in RAP in Grade 9 or Grade 10 (one student reported starting in Grade 11) and continued to access the program throughout their high school career. Three students reported that they were still in contact with their RAP worker post-graduation.

> "I STILL SEEK her out for guidance and support and just to talk. She still helps me deal with a lot of situations that I go through."

This is relatively consistent with the statistics on overall program usage. According to data provided by RAP staff,[12] program recipients are slightly more likely to belong to lower grades (57% of recipients over the past three years have been in Grades 9 or 10) and a substantial proportion of students each year are repeat rather than first-time visitors to the program (38-48% between 2014 and 2016).

No specific figures on the number of students who continue to access RAP after graduation are available. In the reported program contacts, there is a very small proportion of recipients (less than 1%) who are indicated to be "no grade" which may include this group (along with those who are enrolled students but are not in an assigned grade). Some contacts of this nature may also not be recorded in the program data.

[12] Camman & Wormith, 2014, 2015b, 2016

One area in which the RAP students we interviewed were especially different from the majority of program recipients was the frequency with which they were in contact with their RAP worker. All of the interviewees described meeting frequently with a RAP worker, in some cases weekly or daily. Half of them described having a regular drop-in time as opposed to checking in as needed for specific issues.

> "YEAH, I WAS in her room probably every day. Just kind of talking."
>
> "IT DEPENDS ON my class schedule. Last semester, probably about twice a week. And then this semester, probably once a week, once every second week."

In contrast, only a small proportion of all RAP recipients are identified as having regular check-ins with their RAP worker (14% last year) and 70% had fewer than 5 contacts with their RAP worker in a year, including all one-on-one support, follow-up contacts, and mediations.[13]

Given that the participants were identified in part based on their extensive experience with the program, it is reasonable that they represent the higher end of program usage. However, to the extent that their success in the program was based on having a high level of contact with their RAP worker, this could present a challenge to generalizing the successful features of their experiences to other recipients. There are realistic constraints in providing this intensive level of service to all program recipients, including limits on the time and resources available. Program participation is also voluntary.

It was not a definitive conclusion of this evaluation that program success is dependent on intensive program use, but future outcome evaluations should take these observations into consideration.

NATURE OF PROGRAM USE

WHILE THESE PARTICIPANTS may have had more extensive contact with their RAP workers compared to more typical RAP recipients, the issues and conflicts they faced were consistent with the overall profile of issues that RAP workers have reported providing support for.

As mentioned, the majority of students became involved with the program because they were dealing with some form of conflict or issue, from getting into fights to stresses at home to difficult interpersonal issues at school. One student became connected through an interest in volunteering around the school, but later also accessed the RAP worker for support with personal matters.

[13] Camman & Wormith, 2016

The issues and conflicts that **student recipients** reported for were varied, and included:

- Issues at home/fights with parents
- Relationship issues
- Stress about school and feeling overwhelmed with life
- Aggression and anger toward others
- Deaths of friends and family members
- Bullying
- Sexual assault
- Harassment from peers
- Criminal activities by friends
- Accusations of making threats toward other students

Issues reported by **staff recipients** included:

- Students not listening or being respectful in class
- Students not recognizing a teacher's authority
- Physical fights and conflicts among students
- Student involvement in the criminal justice system

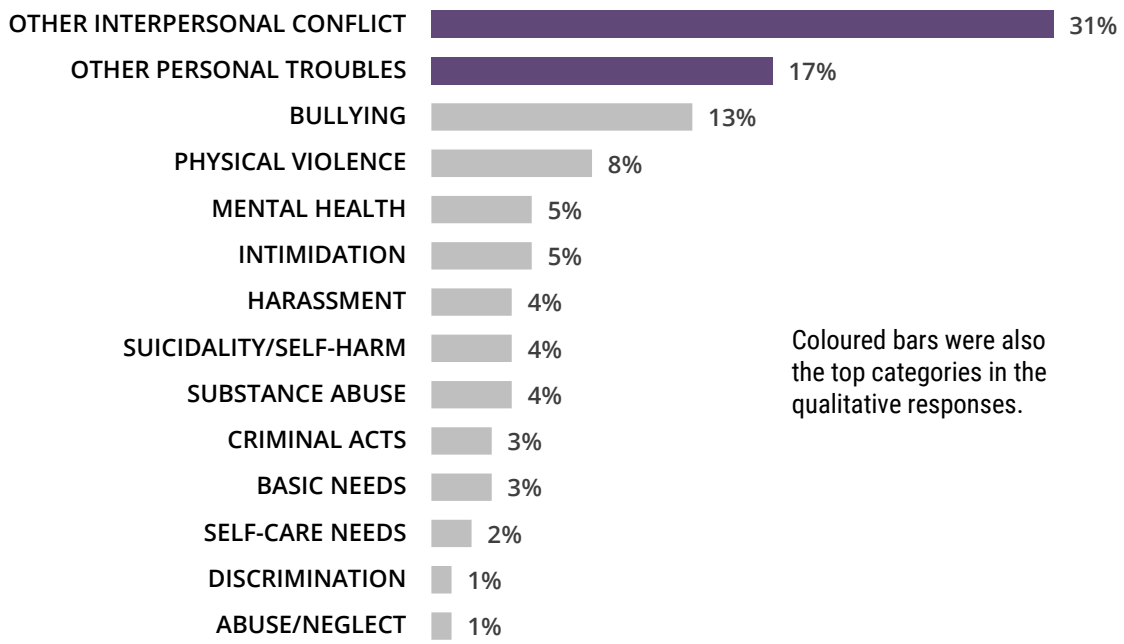
Issues referenced more than once were general conflicts with family and friends, stress, struggling with aggression and anger, and processing grief over the death of close loved ones. This spectrum of issues is consistent with those reported for RAP recipients in general, where two most frequently reported issues were basic **interpersonal difficulties** (i.e., "not getting along") and **personal troubles and stress**, followed by more serious issues such as bullying and physical violence (see Figure 6).

Feedback from the school staff about frequent conflicts between students was also consistent with the majority of conflicts handled by RAP workers being between **peers** (see Figure 7). The students we interviewed reported a wider range of conflict partners, including peers but also conflicts with the self, their general environment, family, teachers, and dating partners. This variety likely reflects the extensiveness of their contact with their RAP worker and the greater number of issues they received support for as more intensive long-term program users, but this is still reflective of the overall use profile.

In sum, the highly successful recipients we spoke to appeared to be addressing similar types of issues as other students, but utilized the program to a greater extent to do so. As one student put it when asked if she was a 'typical' RAP student:

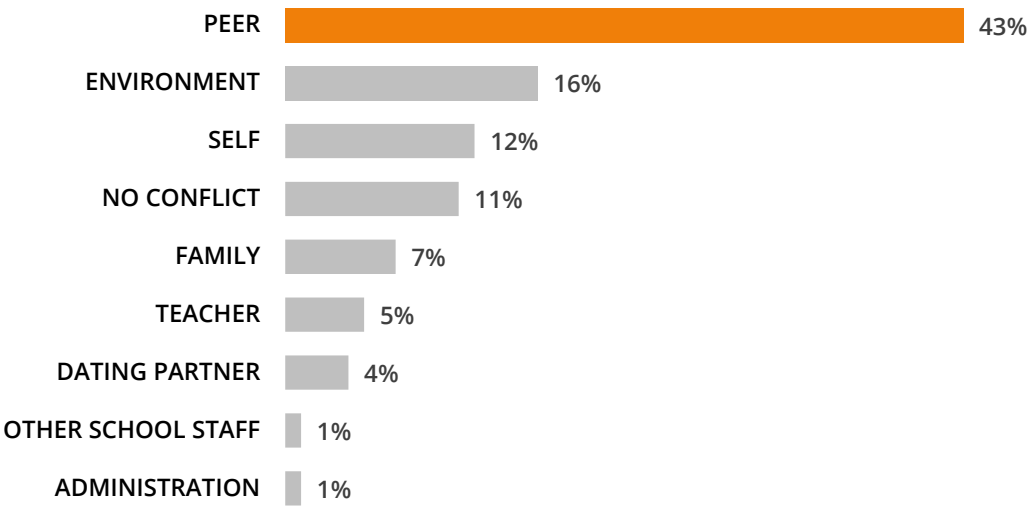
> "MY EXPERIENCES ARE probably the same [as other students'], but my relationship was different."

FIGURE 6. TYPES OF CONFLICT FOR ONE-ON-ONE CASES (2013-14)[14]



Note: As of the 2014-15 school year, RAP workers were no longer required to report the specific nature of every issue addressed to streamline the reporting process and focus on the most significant conflict indicator categories.

FIGURE 7. CONFLICT PARTNERS FOR ONE-ON-ONE CASES (2015-16)[15]



Note: 'Environment' refers to instances of generalized conflict with all those around rather than individual interpersonal conflicts with specific others. 'No conflict' refers to support unrelated to a particular conflict (e.g., preventative skill development).

[14] Camman & Wormith, 2014
[15] Camman & Wormith, 2016

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A RAP 'SUCCESS CASE'?

RAP workers were responsible for identifying successful program recipients to participate in this evaluation. They were asked to suggest individuals who had had some kind of "significant or extensive positive involvement" in RAP to allow us to assess RAP's 'best case scenario'. We also asked each RAP worker how they personally define success in the context of their programming:

> "SUCCESS IS HAVING students resolve issues peacefully. Then the follow-up and continuing to work with them after, it's validated that the process has worked, they've changed the way they're treating each other. They've become friends again or are leaving each other alone, treating each other with respect and dignity."

> "JUST A CHANGE. If I get a referral because someone solves a problem with violence and we work through that and coach alternative ways, and then the student comes back and says they were mad but didn't punch someone and did something else instead, that is huge. The student may not have dealt with it perfectly, but they did less harm than they did before."

> "WHEN YOU HAVE a mediation between two people who haven't spoken in a couple weeks and all of a sudden they're hugging and shaking hands and the relationship has been restored."

> "IF I CAN successfully assist them with what they were referred for and even greater success if they can develop the skills to use in the future."

RAP workers also estimated a high proportion of success according to these definitions:

> "VERY, VERY HIGH success rate of students who manage their conflicts effectively. Maybe one-quarter of students continue to struggle with themselves and with others."

> "75% ARE SUCCESSES at least, from small harm reduction successes to exceptional cases. 50% are the blatant successes."

When asked what distinguished their most exceptional cases, staff strongly emphasized the student's motivation to participate as well as their relationship with the RAP worker:

> "A LOT OF that is dependent on the student and how invested they are with taking accountability with their own actions and how open they are with taking new ways of communicating and changing how they've communicated in the past. Not the issue itself, it's the accountability part."

> "THE RELATIONSHIP THAT you're able to form with them is a key indicator. The more open, the more likely they're going to come to you with various struggles. They give you more to work with. These are the exceptional cases."

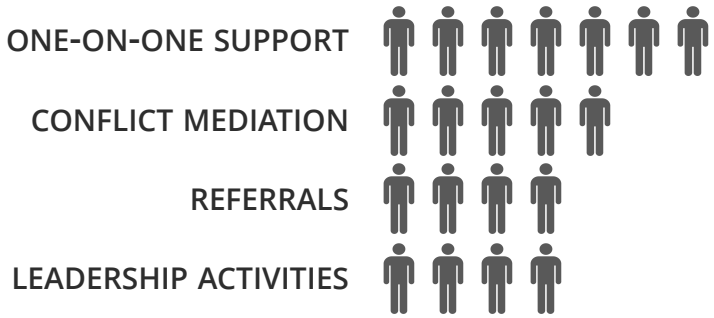
The students who took part in the current evaluation were very engaged with the program and had particularly close relationships with their RAP workers, representing not only successful but highly successful program recipients.

3. THEY RECEIVED SIMILAR SERVICES AND BENEFITS

REGARDLESS OF THE types of issues and conflicts they needed support with, the RAP recipients we spoke to described a similar set of services and outputs from their respective RAP workers.

Services included one-on-one support between themselves and the RAP worker, conflict mediation, referrals to other services and supports, and leadership/community involvement activities. See Figure 8 for the number of participants reporting involvement in each service.

FIGURE 8. SERVICE INVOLVEMENT REPORTED BY SUCCESSFUL RAP RECIPIENTS



The distribution of these results is consistent with the overall program statistics, which show that the primary service offered by RAP workers is direct one-on-one support (98% of recipients), followed by conflict mediations (29%), with less than 10% of one-on-one cases or mediations requiring referrals.[16]

The reported outputs of these services were:

- Immediate conflict management support
- Emotional support
- Relationship with trusted adult
- Practical support
- Access to leadership opportunities

[16] Camman & Wormith, 2016; Exact data on individual student involvement in RAP leadership activities are not available at this time

IMMEDIATE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

One of RAP's primary functions is to operate as an alternative resource for managing conflict in the school, especially before it escalates to the point of requiring intervention from school administrators in the form of suspensions and other punitive measures. Consequently, it is expected that immediate intervention in and resolution of conflicts would be a primary output of the program.

Five of the interviewees specifically mentioned receiving support in navigating an interpersonal conflict, either through a mediation process or through receiving advice on dealing with conflict more productively.

> "WHEN I HAVE issues with my teacher or other classmates, there's the option that he does with us mediation and he makes it a safe place to talk about things."
>
> "I'D HAD SOME issues with a student not listening so I was on my way to take them to the office and I decided to stop and head down the hallway to the RAP worker instead and it just made all the difference."

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

The most frequently reported program output among student recipients was general emotional support, whether related to interpersonal conflict or to other personal struggles. All of the students interviewed mentioned the importance of the emotional support they received from their RAP worker. RAP workers provided a safe, accessible space where they could talk with someone they trusted, share their feelings, and receive validation and encouragement. Some reported having RAP workers check in on them regularly while they were dealing with an on-going issue.

> "THE RAP WORKER let me use his room whenever I needed, he was always there to talk and made sure I was all right and able to handle everything. He made sure I had communication with my teachers about how I was feeling and it was a safe place to go."
>
> "HAVING THE RAP worker there, you know, going to her for support for just anything, or just to talk to, she just really pushed me, she's really supportive."
>
> "SHE WOULD OCCASIONALLY pull me out of class just to make sure I was doing okay and that I was going and my marks were up to speed."

RELATIONSHIP WITH TRUSTED ADULT

Closely related to emotional support was the relationship that all student recipients reported developing with their RAP worker:

> "I FEEL LIKE me and the RAP worker are getting along really well and I would trust him with anything."
>
> "OUR RELATIONSHIP GOT stronger, because it's now at the point that if he sees me in the hallway there's just one look and then he knows that something's up."

THE RAP RELATIONSHIP

RAP workers were asked to comment on the types of relationships they develop with the students they support:

> "A GENUINE ONE. It's a real relationship, a safe place where we can learn, a trusting relationship, a place they can come to talk and get answers. Kids can tell who's real and who's not."
>
> "A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP. Someone who can be a resource to them. Someone to listen to them and help problem solve."

The workers noted that different students will develop different relationships with them depending on their needs and preferences:

> "IT VARIES ON the student. There's a number of students that I would consider are one-time visitors to the program and you deal with something that's going on then and there and you may not see them again for their high school career. There are also students that struggle and have consistent struggles and those are the students you begin to connect with."
>
> "EVERYONE IS UNIQUE. Some students are easier to connect with, some students are open to that and others are not open to that."

RAP workers estimated having closer relationships with 25-50% of the students they see. They also shared what they believe helps them build strong relationships with students:

> "I FEEL THAT being a genuine, caring person helps to create relationships. I think my interpersonal skillset and honesty also helps me to build relationships with students."
>
> "YOU HAVE TO share a bit of yourself, your own personal story, be genuine and want to help them."
>
> "OPENNESS, GENUINE CARING nature. You want to know, you care to know, you're there to listen and not judge."
>
> "HAVING A SPACE where kids have an opportunity to speak their mind, where their concerns are validated and not dismissed … giving students that place to do that develops trust."

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

In addition to emotional support and encouragement, RAP workers also provided program recipients with practical support. This support often took the form of **advice and guidance** on how to cope with personal struggles or manage conflicts more effectively as well as exposure to and training in different **skillsets**. Specific skillsets referenced by participants included conflict management, relationships, leadership, and general coping.

Coping skills, though not explicitly identified in RAP's outcome model, were referenced by multiple interviewees. These skills were usually distinguished from conflict management skills by the focus on effective handling of emotions and stress outside of the context of interpersonal conflict.

In some cases, practical support also involved the RAP worker helping students **access important resources and navigate difficult processes**. For example, connecting them with the school resource officer to report a crime, explaining legal procedures, assisting them in filling out forms, assisting them in filling out forms, and acting as a liaison between the student and another party.

Practical support was always provided in conjunction with emotional support, but went beyond in terms of providing concrete guidance and logistical support.

> "THEY HANDLED THE communication between me and the student, because then I wouldn't have to go and talk to them because I was terrified. And it was just really good for me because I was new to the school, I felt safe and I had someone to talk to, and I wasn't going at it alone."
>
> "SHE BROUGHT IN the [police] officer, I explained my story and she was there every time I needed her and if I ever wanted her to step out of the room she was understanding. She gave me a lot of good advice and coping mechanisms on how to deal. And all the legal stuff and talking to them and sharing information. She explained what was going to happen very well, and kept me up to date on the information I gave her."
>
> "HAVING THOSE RESOURCES there and having the support of the RAP worker being there to help me do those things. Like, to write those statements. Because without her I never would have written those statements about the rape."

The latter type of practical support is a relatively infrequent aspect of RAP's services. In 2016, RAP workers reported collaborating with or making referrals to school or community resource officers in less than 3% of both one-on-one cases and mediations. Somewhat more commonly, they reported acting as a liaison in 20% of one-on-one cases.[17] However, while less in demand than other services, it is clear that when such support is required, it can be invaluable to students.

ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Part of RAP's positive youth development approach is an emphasis on encouraging students to make positive contributions to their communities as well as to manage conflicts more effectively.

Four of the six students we spoke to mentioned this as part of their experience with the program, and all four of these students emphasized how valuable they found these opportunities. The specific activities they described included assisting in transition programming by sharing their high school experiences with elementary school students, participating in and leading anti-bullying activities and events, and working with elders in the community.

> "THE MOST IMPORTANT experience I had would probably be going out with the RAP worker and going to schools and helping prepare some Grade 8s for transition into high school. I found that pretty important. Because I didn't have somebody from high school come down to talk to me when I was in Grade 8."
>
> "THEY SIGNED ME up to become educated in RespectED with the Red Cross and they've been advisors for when I have to go and speak to schools. They put my name out there to be representative for anti-bullying and it's been a lot of help. They've been very helpful to get me involved."
>
> "THERE WAS A project that they pushed me into where we would interview elders in the community and write memoirs for them. And through that, they helped me recognize my gifts and my talents, which is poetry and speaking."

Two students did not indicate any involvement in opportunities such as these and the school staff we interviewed also did not mention any activities of this nature.

[17] Camman & Wormith, 2016

CHALLENGE: PROVIDING LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Because of the importance placed on leadership and community involvement opportunities by some of the students we spoke to, we followed up with RAP workers to ask them what kind of opportunities there are and how many students they connect with such opportunities every year.

In general, while all of the RAP workers indicated that they include services of this nature in their programming, the opportunities were typically limited to a handful of students, between 2 to 40 youth per year across various activities, with most RAP workers estimating 5 to 10 students they've connected with a leadership opportunity in the school or community throughout the past school year.

The opportunities themselves varied greatly across the schools, including:

- RespectED: Beyond the Hurt
- Transition programming
- High School 101
- Peer mentorship
- Speak Out Saskatoon Youth Forum
- Youth Advisory Committee (YAC)
- Student Representative Council (SRC)
- Leadership conferences
- Anti-bullying day
- Healthy Relationship Plus Program
- Boys Leadership Group
- Self-esteem building activities

Several of the opportunities involved leadership development activities and events run by external organizers while others were developed and run internally to RAP. It was also emphasized by one staff person that RAP's leadership development activities take place within a larger context of leadership development on the part of the school:

> "AS A SCHOOL we're focused on leadership. Leadership is a school-community endeavour and it's not just a RAP endeavour. I'm just one person in the building who's trying to develop these skills."

Some of the workers indicated that barriers to providing access to leadership opportunities included time constraints, coming up with new ideas as programming opportunities and students change, and helping students maintain their own confidentiality and privacy when they're sharing their stories with others. Others did not indicate having any challenges with respect to this aspect of their service.

All of the RAP workers agreed that leadership opportunities are an important part of their services because it can help students learn skills and helps foster a stronger relationship between the students and the RAP staff:

> "IF YOUTH CAN learn from youth it's very powerful and empowering to both sides, empowering to the younger ones and to the older ones."

> "YOU GET TO know students on a different level. It's not always just conflict you're dealing with. You get to hear about what else is going on in the school and their perspective of things."

4. THEY REPORTED OUTCOMES CONSISTENT WITH RAP'S PROGRAM MODEL

WHEN ASKED WHAT changes and differences they felt they had experienced as a result of the program, highly successful RAP recipients reported a number of results and outcomes, which fell primarily under four major categories:

- Learning and applying new skills for handling personal and interpersonal difficulties
- Developing positive attributes
- Prevention and reduction in severity of conflicts
- Retention and perseverance in school

Also mentioned were outcomes which related to developing healthier relationships, pursuing leaderships opportunities, making positive contributions to their communities, reducing the burden on school staff to manage conflicts, and mixed results in terms of use of the justice system.

> "ON PAPER THOUGH you can look at the Restorative Action Program and analyze the quantitative data and look at the qualitative data as we do in traditional research, but it actually changed my life. Like me, as a human, it changed my life and I really believe that it works. … If it wasn't for those people who gave me so many chances to look at myself for everything that I am then I'm not sure I would be here."

Overall, the responses the interviewees gave were consistent with RAP's outcome model with some additions. Along with mentions of conflict management, healthy relationships, and pursuing leadership, there was also an emphasis on individual coping in non-conflict related situations which was not explicitly identified in the model but is also an important aspect of the program.

In general, the interviewees felt that their involvement in RAP had a strong, positive impact on their lives and this impression was bolstered by specific examples of what they had learned and accomplished through the program.

LEARNING AND APPLYING NEW SKILLS

One of the primary short-term outcomes outlined in RAP's program theory is the development and application of new skills in a variety of areas. This reflects RAP's strengths-focused approach to reducing conflict through the development of positive assets in youth.

Outcomes of this nature were well supported by recipient accounts, with every student reporting the development of new skills in at least one area and affirming that they were able to use these skills independently and continued to do so outside of the program. The specific skillsets reported were varied. An earlier evaluation of RAP identified five primary skill areas that RAP workers reported targeting (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. SKILLSET TARGET AREAS REPORTED BY RAP WORKERS[18]

COMMUNICATION	Communicating effectively with others (e.g., listening, expressing self clearly)
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	Managing and resolving conflicts effectively (e.g., using a win-win approach, negotiating)
HEALTHY PERSONAL CHOICES	Making positive decisions about health and well-being (e.g., personal hygiene, self-care)
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS	Developing and maintaining healthy relationships (e.g., boundaries, recognizing abusive behaviour)
POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	Promoting a more positive and supportive school environment (e.g., cultural competence, anti-bullying skills)

The more recent strategic planning process[19] also focused on skills in conflict management, healthy relationships, and leadership with respect to making contributions to one's community, which has been reflected in RAP's outcome model. The skill development outcomes reported by RAP recipients aligned relatively well with these areas.

[18] Camman & Wormith, 2011
[19] Jones, 2016

Learning new skills

Communication and conflict management skills were frequently reported together and were the most strongly emphasized.

> "I LEARNED HOW to accept responsibility. I learned how to communicate effectively. Like looking people in the eye and just being honest even if that means not the most desirable answer, response, or outcome."
>
> "HOW TO PROPERLY go about confrontation, and how to use the proper statements to get across the way I'm feeling without sounding like I'm attacking the other person. And how to forgive people and understand that I can't control anybody but myself."
>
> "I THINK MY conflict resolving skills. I think working with RAP has really helped me with that. Just the skills they taught me in how to resolve it and how to resolve other people's conflict, between groups and stuff."
>
> "WE ALSO TALK about what the outcome has to be and the role that each person plays has to change if the behaviours are going to change, and then how we need to change our role, even the way that we speak to each other, and how we approach each other."

While skills in 'healthy personal choices' with respect to hygiene and personal care of that nature were not mentioned, recipients did mention learning self-care skills for **coping with emotions and stress**.

> "IF I EVER get upset over what happened, she explained to me find something that makes me happy and that relaxes me and so that's what I do and I fall back on it every time."
>
> "I LEARNED TO always keep positive thinking just because I would attempt to, like, when I get too stressed, too much on my plate and when I'm trying to juggle everything at once I tend to want to give up, so she taught me to keep thinking positive and everything will work out in the end. That's one thing I definitely learned from her."
>
> "SOMETIMES I'D GET really frustrated and she'd tell me that the best way to deal with it is to take a step back from the situation, walk away from the situation, cool down, come back, and then deal with whatever I was dealing with. To kind of just take that time to calm down and not make things worse than they are."

One student described significant improvements in her ability to identify and maintain **healthy relationships** with others, including setting boundaries and choosing the people she wanted to associate with.

> "I WAS KIND of putting myself in dumb situations, and I don't think I really would have realized what was a safe situation and what wasn't. … It made me realize how to choose my friends and figuring out who I want to be associated with and what effects those are going to bring to me. … Knowing that it's okay to say no and not get myself in those situations and not be so passive."

While some students mentioned learning **leadership skills**, the exact skills they developed were less well defined. However, they reported engaging in and getting experience with specific activities like public speaking and organizing school events, as well as learning anti-violence and anti-bullying skills through referrals to outside programs such as RespectED.

> "[THE ANTI-BULLYING PRESENTATION] was to bring awareness and we talked about how you can help someone, if you've been bullied we can talk about where you can go and just stuff like that."

> "I DO PRESENTATIONS at elementary schools through RAP to teach about anti-bullying, internet safety, and prevention of bullying, and how to solve it and everything."

Independent use of skills

All of the student recipients we spoke to also reported feeling relatively confident that they continued to use the skills they learned in RAP in their day-to-day lives, independent of the RAP workers' direct support.

> "I DON'T REMEMBER everything she told me, but a lot of them, yeah, I'd say I still use them quite a fair bit."

> "LIKE IF HE'S not there or if I'm not in the mood to go into the office to talk to him for whatever reason then I will go about it on my own if I don't feel it's that big an issue."

DEVELOPING POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES

In addition to specific skills, the other major focus of RAP's strengths-based approach is on developing positive attributes and leadership qualities in youth.

In previous evaluation phases, ten positive attributes targets were identified and defined in consultation with the RAP workers (see Figure 10). However, there was a lack of clarity on how to integrate these targets into their service delivery and, as a result, considerable variability in which targets they reported addressing. [20]

> "I WAS ONE of the best kids during my high school career just because when I started working with the RAP worker she introduced me to a whole lot of new things that I probably wouldn't have even guessed. She introduced me to a lot of characteristics of myself that I wouldn't really have found."

A similar result is apparent in this study. While across our sample of highly successful RAP recipients most of the ten attributes were represented in some form, there was a great deal of variation in how these were reported. Nevertheless, there was some evidence to support development of positive attributes as a potential RAP outcome. Further evaluation is required for definitive conclusions on these outcomes.

FIGURE 10. POSITIVE ATTRIBUTE TARGET AREAS REPORTED BY RAP WORKERS

SELF-ESTEEM	Feeling good about themselves and having a positive self-concept
SENSE OF BELONGING	Feeling welcomed and valued within their communities
ENGAGEMENT	Being actively and enthusiastically involved in their communities
EMPOWERMENT	Feeling capable, able to use their skills, and make decisions for themselves
SENSE OF SAFETY	Feeling physically and emotionally safe in their environments
TRUST	Able to express confidence in or rely on other people
SELF-AWARENESS	Having insight into their own emotions, experiences and behaviour
EMPATHY	Recognizing the differing needs and experiences of other people
RESPECT FOR OTHERS	Actively behaving in a way that respects the needs of others
SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY	Willingness to take action and to be accountable

[20] Camman & Wormith, 2011, 2013, 2014

One student strongly identified a positive influence on her **self-esteem** and **sense of belonging**, and several indicated an overall positive sense of self as a result of the program.

> "I LEARNED THAT people actually love me and they can actually love me. I didn't feel really loveable at the time. I learned that I deserve more than one chance and that I'm worth it. … It taught me that my story is important and that my voice is important and it taught me that I belong."

Some students reported more **engagement** with their communities, often in relation to their participation in leadership activities through RAP.

> "I DON'T THINK I would have been as involved [without RAP]. I don't think I would have joined SRC. I think I would have been more to myself. Because right now I know pretty much everyone in my year. I probably wouldn't have done that if I was not involved."

All of the students reported some degree of being able to use the skills they learned through RAP, both with the support of the RAP worker and independently, and some reported a general sense of **empowerment** and capability.

> "I THINK I'M more mature and that I'm ready to go out into the world now. I feel like I present myself very well and I think it's helped me focus my morals and build myself up."

Students described being able to **trust** and confide in their RAP workers in particular, as well as other staff in the school in some cases, and an overall sense of **safety** at least with respect to the RAP program.

> "I WAS ABLE just to go to her to talk to about anything."

> "I FINALLY DECIDED to let him in to my life and actually talk about things not just the problem at hand."

Finally, although not explicitly mentioned, in their descriptions of using RAP to help with managing their conflicts, RAP recipients demonstrated self-awareness and empathy as well as a commitment to treating others with respect and taking responsibility for their actions.

Open-ended reporting on complex and abstract personal attributes in the absence of an explicit and detailed framework of operational definitions for these targets is not an ideal method for assessing outcomes of this nature, as they can be difficult to both articulate and interpret. Nonetheless, there were indications of the program's potential in developing positive attributes and leadership qualities in youth along with the learning of specific skills. Stronger conclusions may be drawn from more rigorous and structured assessments designed specifically to evaluate the target attributes.

PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OF CONFLICT

Both staff and students reported feeling that the presence of the RAP worker in the school contributed to a reduction in the prevalence and severity of conflicts occurring in the school, both as a function of having the RAP worker as an immediate conflict management resource and as a result of learned skills in conflict management.

> "WHENEVER THERE'S A fight, the RAP worker's the one running down the hallway."

"WHEN I WOULD get into a place where I'd be upset or mad about something that happened in class and then I would go there and that's where I would just have my moment and then calm down afterward. And then the big conflict was avoided like that."

"I FEEL LIKE I've avoided a lot of drama in my high school career because of it and that I'm really thankful for. … I feel like there would be way more cliques. I feel like it has helped resolve conflict between a lot of groups. I feel like it wouldn't be as diverse or diverse-accepting. It would just be a lot of a harsher environment."

"THE STUDENTS EVEN talk amongst each other. I will hear them the odd time in the commons say, 'Well, you should see the RAP worker', or 'Go see the RAP worker', because they're working out issues."

"I THINK THAT the conflict always happens, but I'd have to say yes, because obviously that kid is still going to get into conflict, but it's not as much as usual. … 'I did what you guys told me', I hear that a lot. I've not seen it, per se, but I think I'm seeing it by not seeing conflict. Kids are choosing to do something different. They've been given a tool on how."

RETENTION AND PERSEVERANCE IN SCHOOL

Several students saw RAP as the reason why they were able to stay in and finish school successfully, either because they **avoided suspension** as a result of inappropriate responses to conflict:

> "I DON'T KNOW if I would have finished. I don't know if I would have finished actually. I probably would have gotten kicked out."
>
> "I WOULD HAVE been kicked out of high school. Like, for sure I would have been suspended or kicked out. I know there has been times when if I hadn't have went and said something to him right now, then I would have been in trouble later."

Or because they **persevered** through stress and difficult emotional situations with the support of their RAP worker and development of conflict management and coping skills:

> "I'VE BEEN THROUGH a lot of hard times through high school, and there was a lot of times when I just wanted to give up and she kept telling me, 'Do you really want to give up or do you want this in the end?' And she said, 'You just gotta find a way around it.' So she really showed me that I was persevering through high school and the rough times I've had."
>
> "IT WOULD HAVE been a way messier situation with me just dealing with it on my own. … the RAP worker actually got me going to school and feeling a lot better."
>
> "SHE REALLY GUIDED me in the right direction, especially when I felt so hopeless and really wanted to give up in high school. Like there's been moments like that, and she just always reassured me and was right by my side."

School staff also saw RAP as an important **non-punitive alternative** for students in conflict.

> "I THINK IT'S another way to keep kids in school. It's another step before the last step."
>
> "IT'S GOOD BECAUSE you're building up a personal rapport with kids and a relationship with them first instead of taking someone to the office and having a consequence given. It's a better first step for sure, and sometimes it's the last step because it's an opportunity to get to know each other and to see how people perceive the problem."

OTHER OUTCOMES

In addition to the four categories of outcomes most frequently referenced, several other outcomes from RAP's model were mentioned in the participant feedback, albeit less frequently or with more ambiguity.

Developing healthier relationships

To effectively evaluate this outcome, it is necessary to more clearly define what constitutes a 'healthy relationship' in the context of RAP and what appropriate indicators of this outcome would be. However, some participants did describe the restoration or development of positive relationships as a result of their involvement in RAP.

> "I WAS ABLE to see [the other student] in a different light and we actually became friends after that."

> "[THE STUDENT] ENDED up being someone that I really enjoyed seeing during the days. So it ends up being such a good thing in the end."

Identifying and pursuing leadership opportunities and increased positive contributions to the community

These outcomes were challenging to assess because many of the leadership activities described were undertaken as part of RAP's services and therefore more closely reflect program outputs versus sustained changes in the students or school community that persist beyond the program's immediate influence. However, three students reported significant investment in these activities in their schools.

Two students also referenced RAP's influence on their long-term career aspirations. Although career choices are not explicitly a goal within RAP's outcome framework, this may still reflect the role of RAP in guiding youth toward community-oriented contributions.

> "RAP GAVE ME my first speaking gig and I'm a motivational speaker as a living now. Like, that's what I do for a living now, other than teach. I'm an educator as well, and the RAP program exposed me to the drama program which taught me about alternative education which made me fall in love with alternative education."

> "I DON'T THINK I would have went towards the kind of career that I chose. Social work."

Reduced burden on staff to manage conflicts

One teacher reported making use of the RAP worker as an alternative to going to the administration with students behaving inappropriately in classrooms. This still required the teacher to participate in mediation and sometimes involved administration as well for a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue, so it is unclear how much it reduced time spent addressing conflict. However, there was a perception among school staff that RAP provided a valuable resource in the school.

> "I ALWAYS TRY to take up any issues that I have with students with RAP first before I would go to the office."

> "SCHOOL STAFF TALK about using them. It helps administration with those pieces, I don't want to say smaller conflicts, smaller issues, or whatever, but they have some knowledge and it's nice and helpful to do as well. It's another connection."

Reduced justice system use

Evidence for the influence of RAP on contact with the criminal justice system is mixed, though not in a manner that reflects negatively on the program. It should be noted first that while RAP is intended to provide an alternative to the use of more punitive measures within the school, this typically refers to suspensions and not criminal sanctions. Relatively few RAP interventions involve criminal activity (5% of both one-on-one cases and mediations)[21] and referrals between and collaborations with school and community resource officers are also relatively infrequent, as noted previously in this report.

Of the six student participants we spoke with, only one reported having had contact with the criminal justice system prior to involvement with RAP. This student saw RAP as an important, non-stigmatizing intervention for at-risk youth. Another student, however, had increased contact with the justice system as a result of being supported by her RAP worker to report two separate crimes of which she had been a bystander and victim respectively. This also resulted in the criminal prosecution of two other students. Both students experienced exceptional circumstances not typical of the majority of RAP recipients.

While the goal of RAP is to decrease use of the justice system, it is currently unclear the extent to which RAP is preventing criminal justice involvement. Moreover, contact with RAP may sometimes increase rather than decrease use of the justice system, such as when it leads to reporting of criminal activity. A comprehensive assessment is necessary to determine RAP's net effect on this particular outcome.

[21] Camman & Wormith, 2016

5. THEY ATTRIBUTED THEIR SUCCESSES TO SIMILAR PROGRAM FACTORS

WHEN ASKED WHAT made the program work for them, all the respondents provided similar feedback and identified two primary factors:

- Safe, accessible program environment
- Supportive, approachable program staff

SAFE, ACCESSIBLE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Participants emphasized how open and accessible the RAP program was for them, with a non-judgemental, caring environmental that encouraged and supported sharing and learning in a safe way. The confidentiality provided by the program as well as the perception that the RAP workers were not explicitly authority figures facilitated this as well.

> "THE FACT THAT it's so open. It's a really open environment. You just feel completely comfortable. You don't feel like you're looked down on when you're dealing with whatever someone's dealing with. You just feel completely comfortable and relaxed."
>
> "IT WAS SO open and confidential. Open in the sense that I could talk to her about anything but everything was kept confidential."
>
> "IT'S SO OPEN. And there's so many different options. When I have issues with my teacher or other classmates, there's the option that he does with us mediation and he makes it a safe place to talk about things. That's what I like most about it, that it's open."

Accessibility also meant having an office in an appropriate location and being able to access the RAP worker easily when needed, which most participants felt was an option at their school.

SUPPORTIVE, APPROACHABLE STAFF

In addition to the program environment, the RAP workers themselves were the most frequently cited as critical components of the program's success. In particular, interviewees noted the RAP workers' personalities and their skillsets as making them effective in their roles.

The most frequent comments which participants made were that the RAP workers were understanding and supportive, relatable and approachable, and that they were very effective at forming relationships with students and staff. These comments are consistent with the RAP workers' self-assessments of what helps them build strong relationships with students described in the insert on page 24.

"ONE THING THAT makes RAP work is who is running it and how they go about it in working with the students. I'd say you really have to connect to the students in order for them to stick with it."

"I THINK THE people that are selected for RAP are first and foremost what makes RAP work."

Understanding, easy to talk to, and non-judgemental

"SHE'S SUCH AN open person that you just feel so comfortable around her that you can just go talk to her about anything."

"HE DOESN'T GET mad. Like at all. He sits there and he listens. And that's why it works, I think, because he listens. When you feel as if no one is understanding why you feel the way you do. Like, he may not get it, but he sits there and he listens."

"SHE WAS SO easy to talk to and so genuine. She was very understanding and never pressured me to do anything that I didn't want to. I never ever felt judged by her."

"THAT'S WHY YOU don't go to teachers, because they're supposed to be the authority compared to the student. When you can connect to the RAP worker and explain what's happening in detail, it's a lot easier than trying to be vague about it to not get in trouble."

Relatable, sharing similar characteristics and experiences

"SHE WAS A really strong woman, who had an understanding of why I had such a chip on my shoulder. And later I learned that she had similar experiences where she was young

and thought she knew all the answers. And I thought that was really valuable to have a woman like her in her position."

"I THINK IT works because the RAP worker, he's not old. He's still relatively young so he can still relate to us."

"I THINK IT really helped that she was young. And a woman."

Good at connecting and forming relationships

"I'D SAY THAT she's really able to connect with whoever she's working with. She really just connects with the person. She doesn't make you feel uncomfortable. She makes you feel relaxed and at ease."

"A GOOD RELATIONSHIP-BUILDER. Not just with students, but with staff. … It's that relationship-building, and I guess the word we use around here is a 'feeler'. You have to be able to understand the moment and be open to have those partnerships with people."

RAP worker with anti-bullying pillow made by students
© SASKATOON RESTORATIVE ACTION PROGRAM INC
IMAGE CREDIT: NINA HENRY

RAP WORKER PERSPECTIVE

When RAP workers were asked the same question, "What makes the program work?", factors that they emphasized also included **relationship building** with both students and staff:

> "THE KEY TO RAP is developing relationships! Relationships with students, staff and parents. Relationships form trust. When others trust you they rely on you, and they are willing to work with you."

As well as being **personal and supportive**:

> "THAT PERSONAL TOUCH. The relationship between the RAP worker and the student. Being able to be there for them, day in and day out, a safe place to come talk. We're not there to judge or figure out who's right or who's wrong. We're just here to walk beside them and work through things with them."

MANAGING EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Although not explicitly identified by the program recipients, another important characteristic that became apparent through the interviews was RAP workers' ability to manage and maintain good boundaries with the people they support. RAP workers work closely with students on personal issues, have access to confidential and sensitive information, and are in a position of significant trust. One RAP worker described the importance of good boundaries:

> "HAVING A CLOSE relationship definitely allows me to help students better. Having clear boundaries is key. I have very strong boundaries. If someone didn't, it would exhaust them, but that's not how I work. That's very key to maintaining your integrity and not exhausting yourself with a small percentage. The closer you are, the better you can connect, the more honest the student will be. ... [Some students] come to you as a confidant, someone to vent to, a friend, but they know because the boundaries are there that I'm not their friends, they know their information is safe, they can vent, they won't be judged."

This is especially relevant as RAP workers were seen as being relatable, younger, and not authority figures in the same way as teachers and vice principals. While one student commented positively on having what felt like a close friendship with their RAP worker, another reiterated the value of RAP workers' professionalism and discretion. This underscores the importance of RAP workers' strong relationships skills in being approachable without compromising the effectiveness of their role.

6. THEY BELIEVED RAP MADE A UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR SUCCESS

WE ASKED THE participants what other resources in the school they were aware of or had accessed for support in addressing the issues RAP workers had helped them with. Half indicated not receiving support from any other resources for these issues. The rest mentioned sources of support including teachers, guidance counsellors, and other school programs. For students in contact with multiple resources, they reported that the **relationship** with their RAP worker was still essential:

> "OBVIOUSLY OUR SCHOOL counsellors, and then Teen Survival, it's a support group they do in schools, I guess they kind of give me the same thing. But as intense and close as it's been with [RAP]? No."

> "THIS YEAR I'VE gotten very close to our guidance counsellors, but for sure I'd go to my RAP worker before anyone else in the school."

These results were not unexpected given our focus on a subset of program recipients with particularly successful program experiences and strong relationships with their RAP workers.

When asked what made the contribution of RAP unique, participants emphasized the RAP workers' particular skills in **conflict management**:

> "WITH THE RAP workers, you just know they will be there to resolve conflict and help you through everything that's going on. They'll just make sure that you get help and everything."

> "AS A TEACHER, there's a lot of differences. I mean, their speciality in conflict and coming in and doing the conflict resolution or mediation or different things like that."

It was also noted by one school staff person that RAP workers are in a position to do **more direct follow-up** with students compared to vice principals, who have traditionally handled high conflict issues in the school but also have many other responsibilities in the school:

> "AS A VICE principal you take care of all that conflict and work with students to figure out what the intervention is going to be, but having a RAP worker they can really focus in and follow up. It gets really hard to follow up [as a vice principal]."

Another school staff member described how the RAP worker's expertise and experience with handling conflict in the school and knowledge of the students made them an **important resource**:

> "EVEN IN THE hallway this year, I didn't know if there was a conflict between students. One student had blocked another one in the hallway and it almost looked like intimidation, and so instead of trying to determine that on my own, which I could, I mean, that's my job too, but sometimes the RAP worker has a history with kids and he knows what's been going on, the dynamic that's been going on in the school, so that was a time when I'd gone to him and said, 'Is there an issue here? Does this need to be looked at?' and he looked at it, just to be sure. And you know you find out that sometimes they're just friends and they're joking around, but you need to make sure."

When asked what made their role unique, RAP workers themselves also commented on their conflict management training and their position **outside the authority structure** of the school:

> "I AM ABLE to help them with things that teachers may not have the skillset to help with."

> "I'VE HAD STUDENTS tell me they are able to open up easier, where older people might not understand or judge them, because we're perceived as younger. We also do not have the same power differential, we're not grading them or giving them a mark."

> "THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR may have been their teacher in past years so there's that different kind of relationship already formed there. It may be hard for students to transition."

RAP workers also emphasized that much also depends on who the student develops a relationship first and their individual preferences and **comfort level** with different people, which is consistent with comments by school staff members about RAP providing an additional point of contact in the school:

> "DIFFERENT PROFESSIONALS IN the building create different relationship with different students. … The person they develop that trust with becomes their go-to person."

The program itself is also highly **collaborative** in nature. RAP workers noted the importance of strong relationships with other staff and service providers in the school in order to meet the needs of students and staff:

> "BEING PART OF team and working together is integral to RAP."

> "WORKING CLOSELY WITH and having a strong working relationship with Student Services and administration is huge. There's lots of trust from both that I can deliver services needed in a timely fashion."

In sum, RAP was seen as making a unique contribution and being an important addition to the resources available in the schools for addressing conflict and other non-academic challenges.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

THE FOCUS OF the present evaluation was a preliminary assessment of RAP's capacity to achieve its objectives in terms of youth development and improved conflict management in Saskatoon high schools, specifically by comparing RAP's stated goals with the experiences of some of its most successful program recipients. Overall, there were promising indications that RAP's model has merit and warrants further evaluation to assess the scope of its effects. The two specific evaluation questions are addressed below.

IS RAP'S PROGRAM THEORY SUPPORTED BY RECIPIENT EXPERIENCES?

The first goal was to compare RAP's theory of change to the statements of successful program recipients to determine whether these experiences validated the assumptions of RAP's program model. While the statements of a small non-representative sample cannot confirm whether RAP is having the intended effects on *all* recipients, inconsistency between RAP's model and the experiences of some of its most successful participants would have raised serious questions about the validity of the program theory.

There was a considerable degree of correspondence between how RAP is intended to work and how participants described their involvement in the program and the outcomes they experienced:

- All participants described receiving core RAP services and direct outputs consistent with RAP's model, with conflict management support, emotional support, relationship with the RAP worker, and practical support (including exposure to new skills) as the most frequently mentioned
- Access to leadership opportunities was somewhat less frequently identified, mentioned by only half of the interviewees and four of the six students, although it was emphasized in its importance when mentioned
- Multiple participants described outcomes consistent with RAP's model, particularly in terms of learning and applying new skills, developing positive attributes, preventing and reducing the severity of conflicts, and increased school retention

- These outcomes were attributed these outcomes directly to RAP's services
- Outcomes such as developing healthier relationships and pursuing leadership opportunities received less explicit support and would benefit from further evaluation. It was also unclear if the program is significantly reducing the burden on school staff to manage conflicts or reducing use of the justice system, with both of these requiring further assessment as well
- One potential addition to the outcome model is to more explicitly represent the theme of coping with stress and difficult emotions, which multiple students noted as an important aspect of their experience (see Appendix C for a revised outcome model)

With respect to making generalizations between the participants in this evaluation and the overall population of RAP recipients (especially students, who are the primary program recipients), while some direct comparisons are possible, it should be kept in mind that:

- The student participants in this evaluation had more frequent and involved contact with their RAP workers over multiple issues compared to the overall population of RAP recipients
- This more intensive use may reflect any combination of their stronger relationship with their RAP worker, higher motivation to engage with the program, or greater needs compared to other students

As a result, it may be expected that other students with similar program experiences in terms of their relationships, motivation, and needs may have similar outcomes as the students interviewed for this evaluation. What is less certain are the outcomes are experienced by students whose contact is more limited, such as those who access the program only once or twice over their school career, for which further evaluation is required.

WHAT FACTORS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO RAP'S SUCCESSES?

The second goal of the evaluation was to identify what specific elements of the program are potentially responsible for RAP's success, at least from the perspective of those receiving its services. There was strong uniformity among the interviewees that the major factors included the accessible, safe program environment and supportive, approachable RAP workers and their ability to form strong relationships with students and staff. RAP workers, when asked what contributes to students' successes, emphasized students' motivation to participate and their relationship with the RAP worker, as well as the role of relationship-building in the overall function of the program. The importance of the RAP workers, and especially their relationship skills, was emphasized repeatedly throughout the evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this evaluation, four recommendations have been generated to support RAP's development. Two program recommendation address areas of priority for improving or sustaining appropriate program implementation, and two evaluation recommendations address next steps for assessing how well the program is functioning.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Clarify leadership development as a program component**. In previous evaluation studies[22] it has been found that this aspect of the program is less well defined both in terms of what it is intended to involve and what specific outcomes it is meant to achieve and how. This finding was reiterated in the present study as half of the respondents did not reference leadership development as a program component, although those that did emphasized these as significant experiences. RAP workers also indicated that leadership engagement opportunities were relatively limited compared to other aspects of program delivery. Outcomes for this aspect of the program were more ambiguous compared to outcomes related to conflict management.

   Improving the implementation of the leadership development component will require clarification of what this component is meant to entail and how it should be implemented as well as the specific outcomes it should generate. Based on feedback from RAP workers, it is important that this component be integrated within the schools' existing services and that there is clear guidance and adequate access to supportive resources for RAP workers to implement any program changes. There should also be a realistic alignment between the scope of RAP's services and the expected outcomes. Leadership components should be independently evaluated to assess their implementation quality and effectiveness.

2. **Promote the selection, support, and retention of an effective RAP frontline staff.** Numerous findings from this study emphasized the centrality of the RAP workers to the operation and success of the program. To continue to support the program's current functioning as well as to effectively disseminate the program elsewhere, hiring and maintaining of effective RAP workers should be of high priority. Included in this would be ensuring that there are clear, well-documented guidelines for recruitment and training of RAP workers, included desired qualifications, necessary skillsets and knowledge areas, and role expectations, as well as identifying what training and resources are necessary for RAP workers to continue to be effective in their roles and ensuring this is available.

[22] Camman & Wormith, 2011, 2013, 2014

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Continue with the next phase of outcome evaluation**. This preliminary assessment has demonstrated sufficient promising evidence of the program's potential for success to justify further evaluation. As no single-component evaluation design is typically sufficient to establish program efficacy, converging evidence from a multiplicity of sources will provide the most definitive conclusions.[23] In keeping with the recommendations in the literature,[24] the next evaluation phase should employ complementary methods to counterbalance the strengths and weaknesses of the method used in the current study, which was qualitative and targeted in scope. Suggested methods that are quantitative and broad in scope are the analysis of existing school data or a survey of a representative sample of students.

2. **Consider assessing program awareness within the schools**. Some participants reported not having a strong degree of awareness of what RAP was in their school prior to getting involved in the program and others indicated that awareness of the program was low among their peers. While these findings are not definitive and the question of program awareness was not within the original scope of the present evaluation, they raise a potentially significant issue that may bear further scrutiny. An assessment of program awareness and program usage in schools could provide important information about the scope of RAP's implementation, whether there are unmet needs in its target population, and other potential areas for improvement.

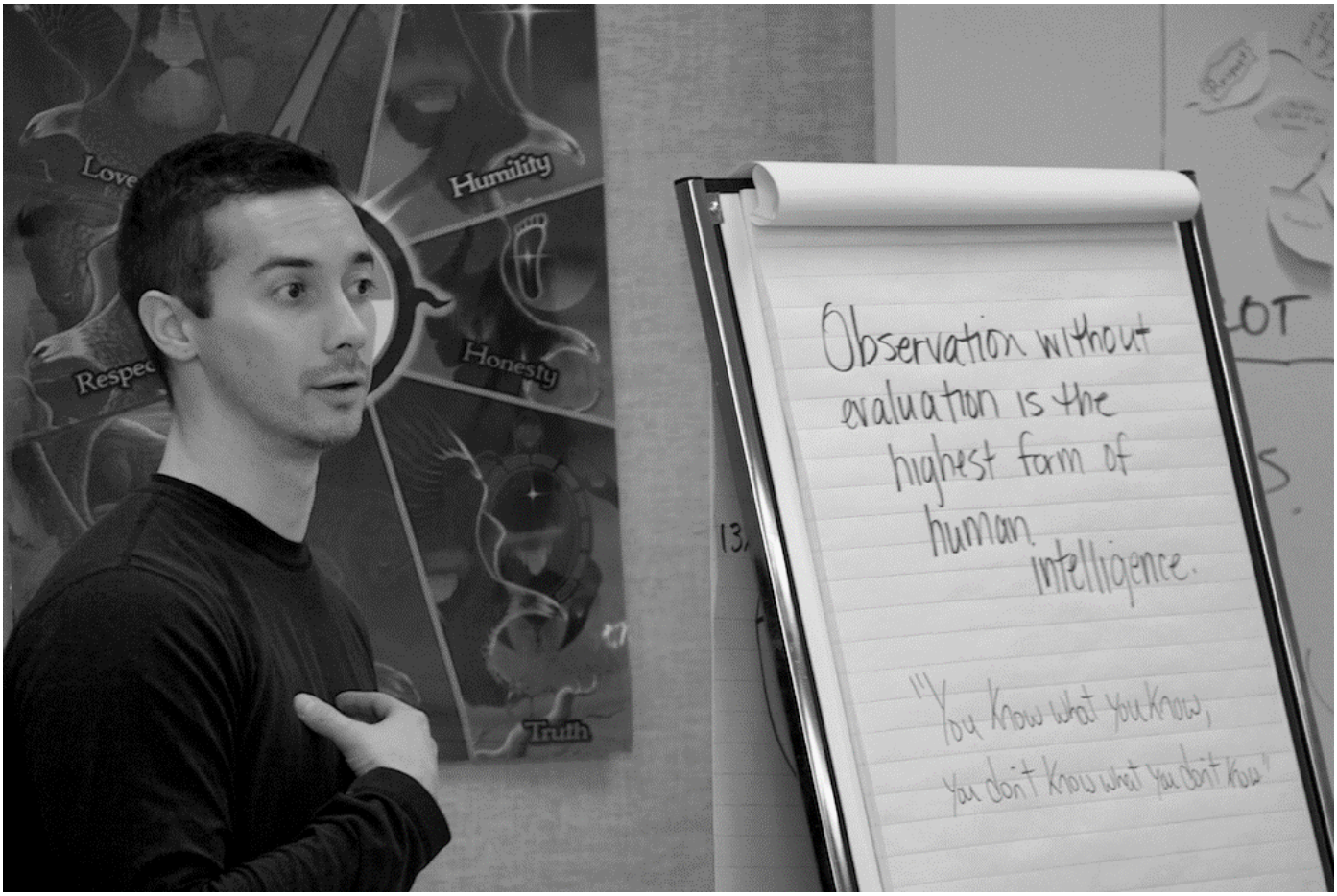
[23] Shadish, 1993
[24] Camman & Wormith, 2015a

LIMITATIONS

All evaluation designs have strengths and weaknesses. The present study provided an analysis of specific experiences with respect to RAP's outcomes, generating qualitative data that were complex and detailed and represented the views of those directly impacted by RAP. However, limitations of the present method include:

- Small, non-representative sample which cannot directly generalize to all recipients
- Limited ability to verify participants' accounts due to privacy considerations
- Reliance on self-reported outcomes which may reflect bias or lack insight into all critical aspects of the program
- No inclusion of those with extremely unsuccessful experiences which would have provided an important counter-perspective

Nonetheless, this evaluation provided useful insights into RAP's effectiveness as a program that can guide further evaluation studies employing complementary methodologies.



RAP worker giving presentation to students
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IMAGE CREDIT: WINSTON BLAKE

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION/CONSENT FORMS

1. INFORMATION/CONTACT FORM
2. CONSENT FORM (STANDARD VERSION)
3. CONSENT FORM (PARENT VERSION)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTION PROTOCOL

APPENDIX C: REVISED OUTCOME MODEL

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Restorative Action Program (RAP) Evaluation Study Contact Form

The Restorative Action Program (RAP) is a conflict resolution program that operates in several high schools and collegiate institutions in Saskatoon. We have been asked by RAP to evaluate their services to confirm that the program is working as intended and to learn more about what makes the program successful.

To do this, we're asking people who have participated in RAP and received services from RAP workers (also known as Restorative Justice Workers) to share with us what your experiences with RAP have been. All information shared will be kept private and confidential. The results of the study will be written into a report for the RAP Board of Directors at the end of the year and may be posted on the program website (http://www.rapsaskatoon.org/). No identifying information will be included in the report.

If are interested in participating in this study, please provide contact information below and an interviewer will contact you with more information. Participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you give permission to be contacted by an evaluator to talk about your experiences with the RAP program, please provide contact information below:

Email: Phone:

If you are under the age of 18 and you would like to participate, please also provide contact information for your parent/guardian.

Parent/Guardian name: Phone (home):

Email: Phone (work):

For further information, please contact:
Carolyn Camman, Evaluation Consultant
Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies
carolyn.camman@usask.ca

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Restorative Action Program (RAP) Evaluation Study Consent Form

Why is the study being done?

The purpose of this study is to provide information to RAP about the effectiveness of its services from the perspective of people who have directly benefited from it. Results will be used to further improve the program, communicate with others about the potential benefits of the program, and guide future evaluation.

Who is doing the study?

The evaluation is being conducted through the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. The lead evaluator is Carolyn Camman (carolyn.camman@usask.ca) and the faculty advisor is Dr. Steve Wormith (s.wormith@usask.ca). The Centre has been conducting evaluation studies on RAP's behalf since 2011.

What is being asked of me?

We are asking you to describe your experiences with RAP, including how you got involved in the program, what you did in the program, what was helpful or not helpful about the program for you, and what impact the program had on you following their involvement. The interview will last about 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded for accuracy.

What are my rights as a participant?

- **Your participation is voluntary.** You do not have to take part if you prefer not to. You can also choose how much and how little information you want to share and you don't have to share anything you don't want to.
- **You can withdraw at any time.** If you change your mind, you can stop the interview and ask for your information not to be used in the study.
- **Your identity is confidential.** We do not publish the names of participants or any details that might directly or indirectly identify someone.
- **Your information is private.** Any information you share and interviewer's notes and recordings will be kept in a secure and private location and will be destroyed after the study is finished.

For further information, please contact:

Carolyn Camman, Evaluation Consultant
Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies
carolyn.camman@usask.ca

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

In addition to consenting to participate, you will be asked to grant permission to various requests both before and after the interview. You can agree to some requests and not others.

Before the interview:

☐ I, [full name] , understand the study and my rights as they have been explained to me, and I consent to participate in an interview about my experiences with the Restorative Action Program.

☐ I grant permission to be audio-recorded during the interview (for the purposes of accuracy in note-taking only; recordings will be destroyed after the study is complete and will not be distributed).

Signature: **Date:**

After the interview:

☐ I grant permission for the information I provided to be included in the evaluation report.

☐ I grant permission for quoted excerpts (with identifying information removed) to be included in the evaluation report.

☐ I grant permission for quoted excerpts (with identifying information removed) to be included in RAP materials not directly related to the evaluation report (e.g., newsletters, promotional materials).

Signature: **Date:**

For further information, please contact:
Carolyn Camman, Evaluation Consultant
Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies
carolyn.camman@usask.ca

University of Saskatchewan

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What are the participants' rights?

- **Participation is voluntary.** Participants do not have to take part if they prefer not to. They can also choose how much and how little information they want to share and do not have to share anything they don't want to.
- **Participants can withdraw at any time.** If they change your mind, they can stop the interview and ask for their information not to be used in the study.
- **Participants' identities are confidential.** We do not publish the names of participants or any details that might directly or indirectly identify someone.
- **Participants' information is private.** Any information shared and interviewer's notes and recordings will be kept in a secure and private location and will be destroyed after the study is finished.

For further information, please contact:

Carolyn Camman, Evaluation Consultant
Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies
carolyn.camman@usask.ca

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

In addition to consenting to participate, participants are asked to grant permission to various requests before and after the interview. Participants can agree to some requests and not others.

Before the interview (for the parent/guardian):

☐ I, [parent/guardian's full name] , understand the study and my child's rights as they have been explained to me, and I consent for them to participate in an interview about their experiences with the Restorative Action Program.

Signature: **Date:**

Before the interview (for the participant):

☐ I, [student's full name] , understand the study and my rights as they have been explained to me, and I agree to participate in an interview about my experiences with the Restorative Action Program.

☐ I grant permission to be audio-recorded during the interview (for the purposes of accuracy in note-taking only; recordings will be destroyed after the study and will not be distributed).

Signature: **Date:**

After the interview (for the participant):

☐ I grant permission for the information I provided to be included in the evaluation report.

☐ I grant permission for quoted excerpts (with identifying information removed) to be included in the evaluation report.

☐ I grant permission for quoted excerpts (with identifying information removed) to be included in RAP materials not directly related to the evaluation report (e.g., newsletters, promotional materials).

Signature: **Date:**

For further information, please contact:
Carolyn Camman, Evaluation Consultant
Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science and Justice Studies
carolyn.camman@usask.ca

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTION PROTOCOL

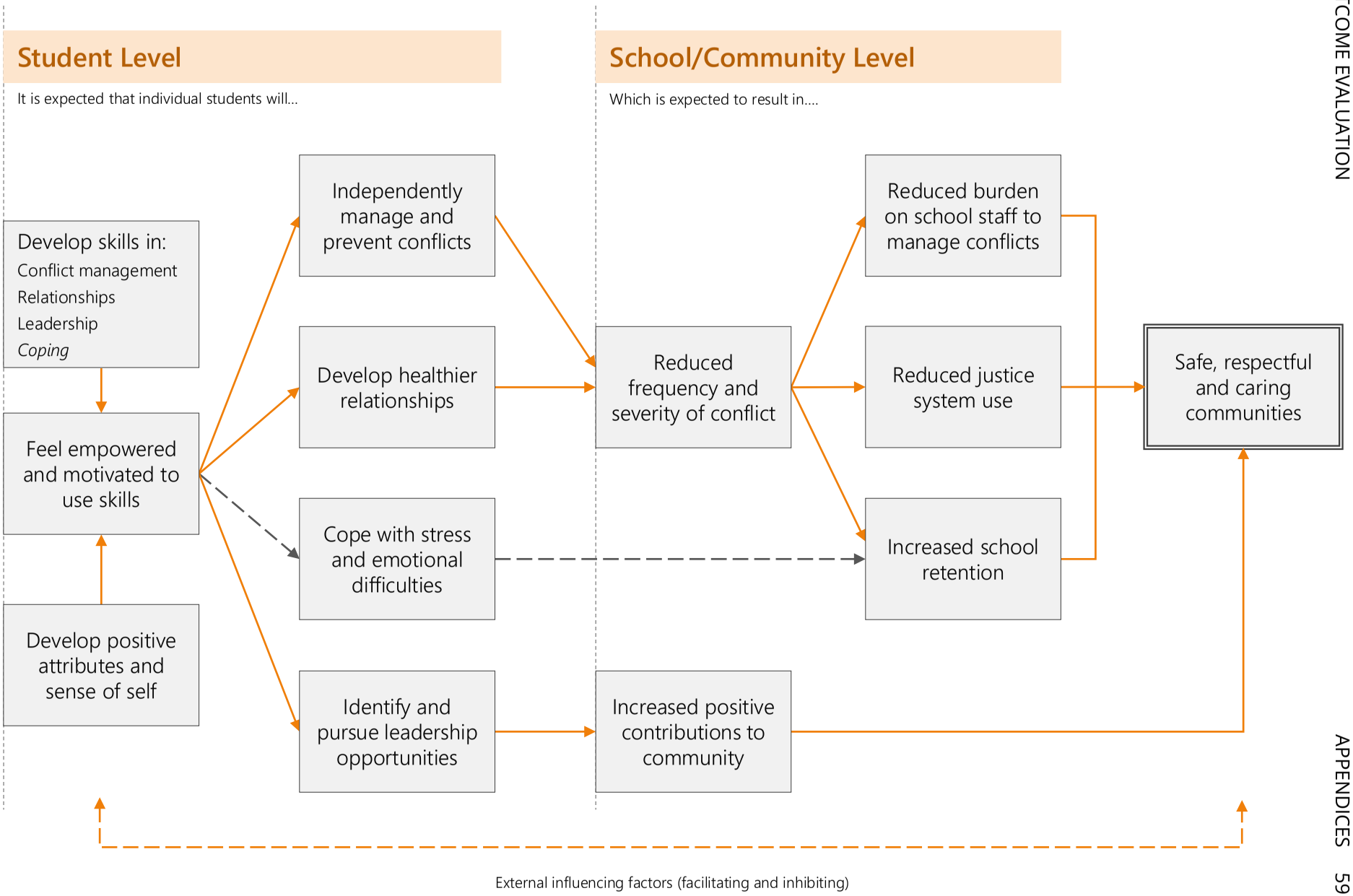
INTERVIEWS WERE SEMI-STRUCTURED and open in format to allow for unanticipated responses and findings to arise while ensuring key topics were addressed. The following questions and prompts were used to guide the conversations (with language adapted and some questions omitted depending on whether the participant was a current student, former student, or school staff):

Participant interviews:

- What brought you to the program? / How did you hear about RAP?
- What did you think about the program when you first got involved in it?
- What kinds of things did you do with your RAP worker?
- What did you like most about the program?
- What kinds of things did you learn? Can you give me an example of a time when you used what you learned?
- What do you think would have happened if you hadn't gotten involved in RAP? / What would have been different about your high school experience without RAP?
- What is different for you now that you've been in RAP? Does your experience with RAP still influence you?
- Has RAP helped you deal with conflict or issues in your personal life? How so?
- What is the most important experience you had with RAP? What made it important to you?
- Is RAP important to your school? How so?
- Was there anyone else you reached out to for support? / Is there anyone else in the school who offers this kind of support?
- What do you think makes RAP work? What makes someone a good RAP worker?
- Do you think you've had a typical experience?

RAP worker interviews:

- Is providing access to leadership development opportunities something that you do as part of your RAP delivery? What kinds of things do you do? How often?
- Have you ever run into any challenges with the leadership development aspect of your service?
- What do you see as the benefit of including leadership development in your services?

- What kinds of relationships do you develop with the students you support?
- What proportion of students do you develop close relationships with?
- How are those relationships different from the ones they may develop with other school staff?
- In terms of your experience and skills, what helps you in building strong relationships with students?
- How do you define "success" in relation to your work?
- What to you are the signs that the program has been successful for someone?
- Have you ever felt that the program has not been successful for someone? What indicated that to you?
- What for you is the difference between those who have had "exceptional" experiences and those who have had more typical experiences? What is your estimate of the proportion of "exceptional" to "typical" cases?
- What makes RAP work?

APPENDIX C. RAP OUTCOME MODEL (REVISED)