



WORD – The Front Line

Cogo Impact Evaluation

In 2022, Action Education engaged Cogo to carry out an impact evaluation of WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) to support potential funders to understand the value delivered by the programme. The two main evaluation goals were to measure the reach of the programme in terms of numbers and demographics of participants, and the impact on participants in line with WTFL's programme goals. Cogo collated and analysed information from: WTFL project documentation including annual reports; an online survey of participants, high school teachers and parents/whānau of participants (n=90 participants, n=19 teachers, n=5 parents/whānau), and; interviews with two Action Education team members.

Summary of evaluation findings & recommendations

Between 125 and 220 young people have participated in WTFL annually, with teams being formed by students from up to 44 high schools each year. Demographic survey data indicates strong diversity among WTFL participants to date in terms of ethnicity and gender, with over-representation of NZ Māori (23%) and Pacific Peoples (56%), and high representation of non-binary (8%), transgender (3%) and genderqueer (2%) young people, and those selecting “Don't know/Questioning/Unsure” or “I use another term [to describe my gender]” (6% combined). High school teachers play a critical role in recruitment for WTFL, with 61% of all participants saying that they first heard about WTFL when a teacher or other staff member at school told them about it, and 33% at a presentation or workshop at school.

The evaluation findings are extremely positive in terms of the impact that WTFL has on participants in line with its goals. 91% of participants (2022 and alumni from previous years) report that the programme had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing, and 90% said it increased their overall-self-confidence. Most participants also reported that the programme increased their leadership skills (72%) and their confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs (88%).

Almost all participants reported that WTFL had a positive impact in terms of their feelings of social connection (90% agreeing that the programme made them more aware that they belong to one or more communities), and their awareness of other peoples/cultures outside their world (96%). 81% reported that WTFL increased their confidence around meeting and connecting with other young people, and 68% reported an increased in their confidence around being able to give back to their communities. These self-reported positive impacts are further supported by parents/whānau of participants: all five of the parents/whānau responding to the survey reported that they saw positive impacts of the programme on their child/whānau member's self-confidence and overall wellbeing, and four out of five in their ability to meet and connect with other young people and meet and connect with adults. As such, these findings indicate that the positive impacts of the



programme on participants can be seen in, and possibly transferred into, participants' communities including their whānau.

As a result of WTFL, participants reported an increase in confidence around writing to express themselves and public speaking (over 90% reporting an increase in confidence around both areas). This finding was supported by high school teachers who almost unanimously agreed that they saw an improvement in programme participants' writing and presenting skills (18 and 19 out of 19 respectively).

18 out of 19 high school teachers also agreed that their involvement in WTFL had a positive impact on their own professional development, and many made comments speaking to the usefulness of both the skills learnt and resources provided through the programme. Teachers also gave extremely positive feedback about the organisation of WTFL, and the communication and support delivered by the Action Education team, indicating a positive experience overall. It is therefore clear that WTFL is not only benefitting the young people participating in the programme, but also the wider school community including teachers and therefore other students.

Overall, the programme feedback provided by all involved was extremely positive, with comments from participants most commonly referring to the welcoming, supportive and non-judgmental space that WTFL provides (54% of comments) and the expertise and care of the Action Education team (49%). This is particularly powerful feedback given recent insights delivered by Cogo to the Hā Collective around the importance of providing young people not necessarily engaged in typical aspects of school life, including for example sports, with safe coping strategies and adults to talk to about the stress they experience. WTFL could therefore play an invaluable role in supporting the wellbeing of this particular group of young people in providing them with a sense of belonging and community not otherwise found in school, whilst also allowing them to access and witness adults who are happy to verbalise and have non-judgmental conversations about challenging topics.

Very few participants made suggestions for improvements to the programme, but those that did mainly supported information from Cogo's interviews with Action Education staff members discussing the need to make the programme and its events accessible for more participants.

Given the extremely positive evaluation findings, Cogo recommends that additional funding is sourced to make the programme and its events available to, and accessible for, more young people in Auckland and to expand the programme into more regions across Aotearoa.