



Blue EDGE (Education, Develop, Grow and Empower) Evaluation Executive Summary 2023

Overview

Blue Light Victoria commissioned the Assessment and Evaluation Research Centre (AERC) at **Melbourne University** to evaluate the **Blue EDGE** program. Blue EDGE is an early intervention and prevention program that aims to build positive relationships between young people, their peers, community, and police, providing young people with the tools to make **healthy safe decisions**.

Blue EDGE is run twice weekly by specialist BLV facilitators over a school term, each session involves an exercise session, shared meal, and a module (activity or discussion) focused on issues relevant to young people.

Evaluation findings are based on pre-program and post-program surveys of youth participants; feedback surveys from families and stakeholders; session-by-session observation reports from program facilitators; focus groups with facilitators; and interviews with police participants.

Key Findings

Participants and their families overwhelmingly reported **positive and engaging experiences** in Blue EDGE. Almost all (97%) of youth respondents said they enjoyed Blue EDGE and looked forward to going. 89% of youth and 98% family survey respondents said that they would recommend the program and many youth participants said they wished they could do it again.

“[My child] always came home raving about the program” (family member).

Overwhelmingly, everyone consistently identified the exercise component as a particularly successful and positive aspect of the program.

Blue EDGE helps to build a **growth mindset** for youth participants.

In terms of building a growth mindset, there were positive changes for youth participants in relation to self-reflection, self-efficacy, and connections to **support** and **self-care**. One of the largest gains after the program for youth participants was on the item “I can come up with healthy ways to express my feelings and emotions” (+11%). There were also smaller but consistently positive gains on all the self-efficacy and self-care items (between +4% to +7%).

“I've learnt more from Blue Edge than I have the rest of my life in terms of myself” (youth participant)

There were many examples of youth participants stepping out of their comfort zones and achieving beyond their own expectations in the program, and 70% of youth respondents selected “challenged myself” as one of their key outcomes.

“...they didn't want to push themselves, but towards the end of the program... they were a lot more willing to challenge themselves” (police participant).

Blue EDGE creates a **safe space** for young people.

Youth respondents reported high levels of safety pre-program, but despite this high baseline there were still small positive gains for youth respondents after the program on items like “people at school and in the community care about me” (+5%) and “I feel safe asking for what I need” (+2%). Nearly all youth respondents (93%) reported **feeling safe** around police after the program.

“[A youth participant] shared that this program has become a safe space” (facilitator).

The Blue EDGE program operates by **building trust** between youth participants, BLV staff and police participants. During the program, some youth participants felt safe enough to disclose serious issues, which were then handled appropriately by BLV facilitators, including being referred on to school staff.

Blue EDGE **empowers youth participants** to believe in themselves, speak up, and contribute. More than half of youth respondents (58%) reported that the program increased their confidence. Many family respondents and stakeholders gave examples of youth participants who increased their belief in their own strengths and abilities through the program.

“The Blue EDGE program gave my [child] the confidence to give new things a go and believe in [themselves].” (family member)

Nearly all youth respondents (95%) said that they felt **included** and that their contributions were **heard** and **valued** in the program and 97% said they were always treated with respect in the program. These strong results go to the heart of the empowering atmosphere the program aims to create for youth participants.

Youth respondents reported a strong positive gain after the program in their belief in the statement “I can **speak up** in group discussions and **make good suggestions**” (+11%). There were also smaller but consistently positive gains on items like “There are things that I am good at that I can use in lots of situations” (+6%) and “Young people my age can make a difference in the community” (+6%).

Blue EDGE enhances youth participants’ **peer collaboration and teamwork skills**. After the program, 91% of youth respondents agreed that they “know how to talk to and cooperate with people different from me”, with a small positive gain (+6%) compared to before the program. Over half of youth participants (61%) selected improved team skills as one of the key things they gained from the program, and 57% reported making new friends.

“The opportunity to get to know others in [my child’s] year level was brilliant and [my child] forged new friendships.” (family member)

In qualitative data, adults in the program consistently noted gradual improvement in each cohort’s team cohesion and collaborative skills.

Blue EDGE helps young people **build trust with police**. Most youth respondents (90%) said they had a positive view of police after the program, a result supported by nearly all (99%) of family respondents.

“...having that relationship and that trust... it creates someone for them to approach and speak about things that they might have never spoken to a police officer about in the past, which is great.” (police participant)

Qualitative data indicated that police participants were able to **build trusting relationships** with youth participants most effectively when the same Victoria Police members were regularly attending.

Blue EDGE to focus on more consistently inclusive and collaborative environment. The program mostly delivers an inclusive environment for youth participants and **supports collaborative and reciprocal interactions** between youth participants and the different adults in the program (police participants, facilitators, fitness instructors, and school staff).

“I loved how all the adults joined in” (youth participant)

Blue EDGE benefits Victoria Police and individual police participants. There was evidence of the program’s success in enhancing the general reputation of Victoria Police and providing benefits for individual police.

“You get to know the kids...really well, and that was fun for us... there's something in it for us as well, for sure” (police participant).

In response to this report, Victoria Police noted that Blue EDGE highlighted the need for Victoria Police members to build their youth engagement skills, as well as providing a key opportunity for this to happen.

Conclusions

Overall, Blue EDGE **performs strongly** in **engaging young people** and **providing a safe space** that builds a **growth mindset**. The program is also working well to **enhance collaboration** between youth participants and build their confidence, as well as tools to increase their mental and physical wellbeing and make healthy safe decisions.

To learn more about Blue Light Victoria programs, impact and evaluation contact us on email: programs@bluelight.org.au.