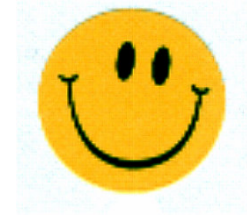


# SMILES PROGRAM

## Simplifying Mental Illness *plus* Life Enhancement Skills

by Erica Pitman



### Target Group

- Children aged 8-12 years old, or young people aged 13-16 years old who have a parent or sibling experiencing a mental health problem (specifically schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or depression).

### Description

- Three-day program (9am-3pm), usually delivered during school holiday period.
- Minimum 8, maximum 10 participants.
- Requires minimum of two facilitators.
- Full program down-loadable **free** from the *Children of Parents with a Mental Illness National Resource Centre – Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association* (a.i.c.a.f.m.h.a.) website [www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au), go to COPMI Services and Programs Listing, NSW, SMILES Program.
- Information and costs for Facilitator Training, please contact the program creator, Erica Pitman (details provided below on footer).
- Erica Pitman is able to provide clinical and program supervision (via phone or email). Please contact Erica (details provided below on footer) for details and cost.

### Aims:

- To provide age-appropriate education about mental illness and life skills to improve capacity to cope more effectively
- To increase resiliency
- To improve self-expression and creativity
- To increase self-esteem
- To reduce feelings of isolation

### Contents:

- Education about mental illness
- Communication exercises
- Problem solving
- Art work and music
- Interactive exercises
- Relaxation exercises
- Peer support

### Facilitation:

Program is best facilitated by professionals with a background in counselling, psychology, social work, teaching or other similar experience. Facilitators require a thorough knowledge of, and experience working in the area of mental illness. Training and experience working with children and group facilitation are preferable.

### Background:

Developed in 1997 by Erica Pitman as a result of the increasing recognition that children in families affected by mental illness are a population 'at risk' for developing their own mental health problems. Erica has an Advanced Diploma of Applied Social Science, Cert IV Workplace Training, is a clinically registered Counsellor with the NSW Counsellors & Psychotherapists Association Inc (CMCAPA) and a registered member of the Psychotherapy & Counselling Federation of Australia Inc (RMPACFA). Erica's professional work is enhanced by her own experience as the sibling of her deceased brother who struggled with epilepsy and childhood schizophrenia.

**Program Evaluation**

Between 1998 and 2005, a total of 87 children have participated in the SMILES Program in NSW Australia - Bankstown, Bathurst (two programs), Canley Vale (two programs), Central Coast, Fairfield, Orange, Parkes, Parramatta and Pointe-Claire (Montreal) Canada.

Comprehensive qualitative and quantitative evaluation data has been collected from the children and their parents.

The following journal article fully describes the program and it's outcomes:

Pitman, E. & Matthey, S. (2004). *The SMILES Program: A Group Program for Children With Mentally Ill Parents or Siblings*. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. 74, No. 3, 383-388, July 2004. Accepted for publication April 2003.

Available on request are the following program reports:

Pitman, E. & Matthey, S. (2002). *Evaluation of the SMILES Program for children with mentally ill parents: Bankstown, Sydney (17-19 January 2001)*. South West Sydney Area Health Service: Sydney, Australia.

Pitman, E. (1999). *SMILES (Explorations) Program Report*. Mental Illness Education – Australia (NSW) Inc: Sydney, Australia.

Pagnini, D. (2004). Carers' Mental Health Project (Stage 1): Final Evaluation Report. Carers NSW, Sydney, Australia. Also available on [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au). (This report incorporates the Bathurst, Parkes & Canley Vale programs, completed in October 2003 and January 2004).

Pagnini, D. (2006). Carers' Mental Health Project Longitudinal Follow-Up: Adult Carers, Children & Service Providers. Carers NSW, Sydney, Australia. Also available on [www.carersnsw.asn.au](http://www.carersnsw.asn.au). (This report incorporates the longitudinal follow-up of children who participated in five programs - Bathurst, Parkes & Canley Vale, completed between October 2003 and January 2005).

As part of the Carers NSW Mental Health Project, a two-day facilitator's training workshop was conducted for nine participants in Sydney during June 2003 and 19 participants in Orange during June 2006. For further information about this, please contact Erica Pitman.

Charts 1 & 2 display the combined results for the 25 participants who participated in the programs delivered in Fairfield, Orange and Canada during 1998/9. Ten of the participants came from a culturally diverse background. Charts 3 & 4 display the combined results for 23 participants who participated in three programs delivered in Bathurst, Parkes and Canley Vale during 2003/4. Statistically and clinically significant improvements were recorded by the knowledge and life skills measures.

**Legend for Knowledge Questions:**

Q1 = What is mental illness?

Q2 = What causes mental illness?

Q3 = What is schizophrenia?

Q4 = Signs of schizophrenia?

Q5 = What is depression?

Q6 = Signs of depression?

Q7 = What is bipolar disorder?

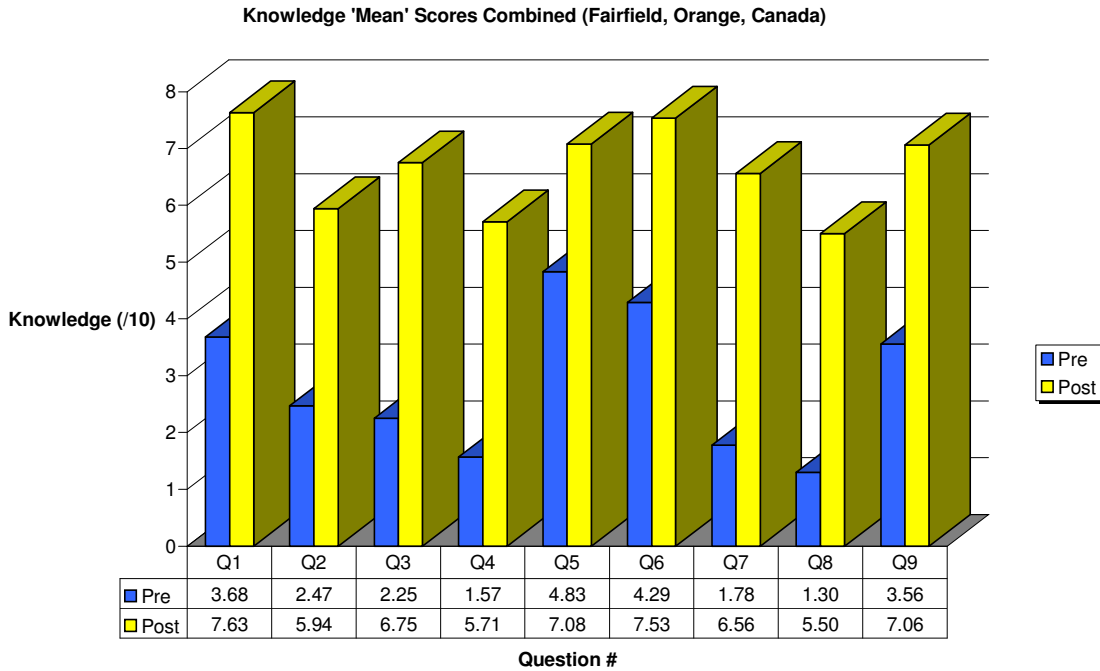
Q8 = Signs of bipolar disorder?

Q9 = What treatments help?

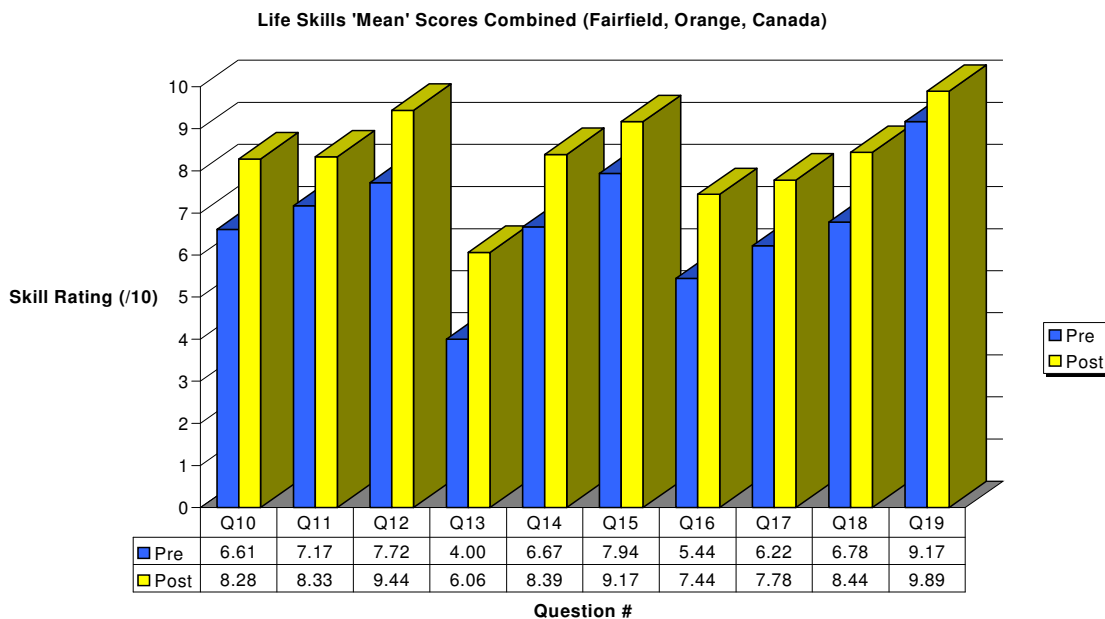
**Legend for Life Skills Questions:**

- Q10 = My ability to talk with people
- Q11 = My ability to listen to other people
- Q12 = My ability to express my good feelings
- Q13 = My ability to express my bad feelings
- Q14 = My ability to recognise my strengths
- Q15 = My ability to be creative
- Q16 = My ability to solve problems
- Q17 = My ability to relax
- Q18 = My ability to feel good about myself
- Q19 = My ability to have fun

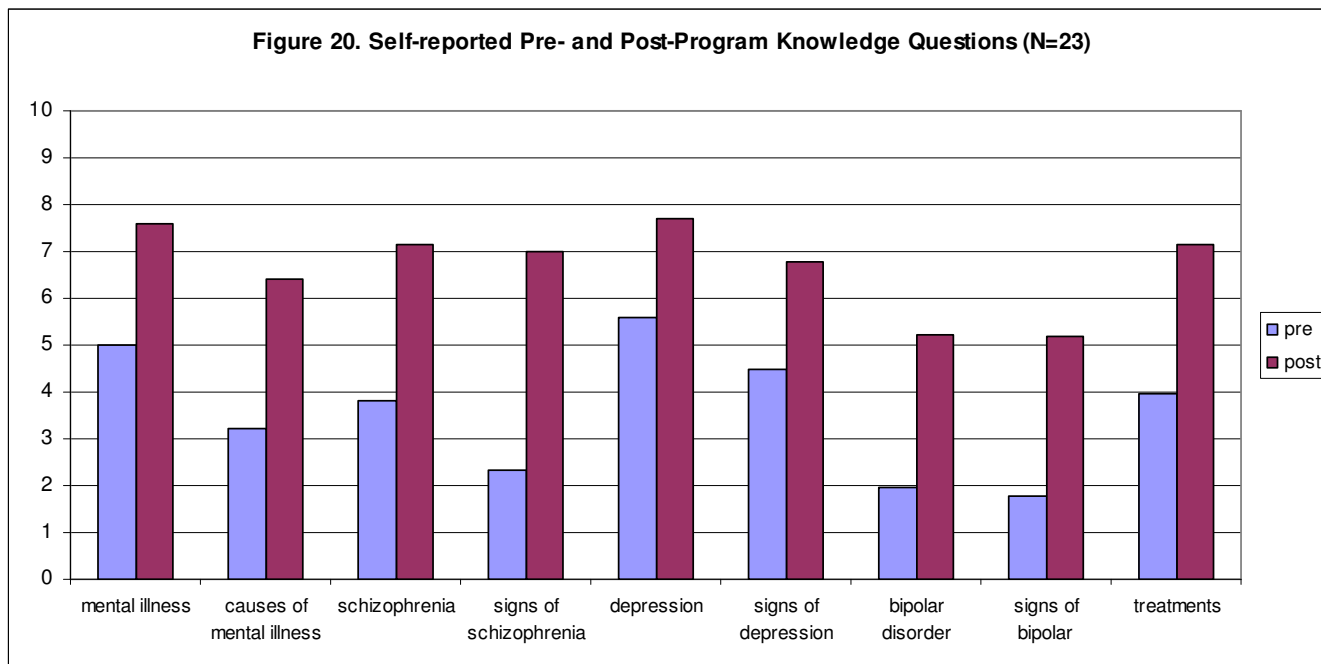
**CHART 1: Combined pre and post knowledge mean scores for 25 participants from Australia and Canada. Average age of children = 10.8 years.**



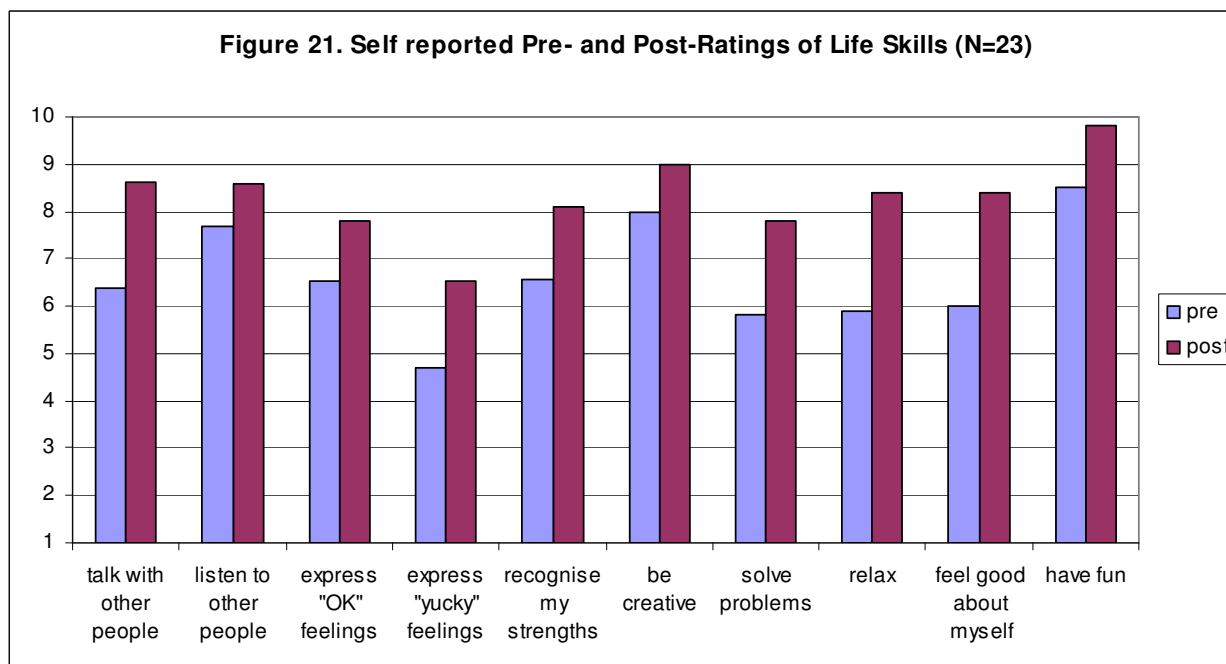
**CHART 2: Combined pre and post life skills mean scores for 25 participants from Australia and Canada. Average age of children = 10.8 years.**



**CHART 3: Combined pre and post knowledge mean scores for 23 participants from Bathurst, Parkes & Canley Vale (part of Carers NSW Mental Health Project). Average age of children = 10.2 years.**



**CHART 4: Combined pre and post life skills mean scores for 23 participants from Bathurst, Parkes & Canley Vale (part of Carers NSW Mental Health Project). Average age of children = 10.2 years.**



**Comments from participants:**

- *"I know a lot more because Erica has explained lots of things I was worried about."*
- *"It was really fun and everyone was involved."*
- *"I am not the only one who has a family member who is sick. It's not Dad's fault."*
- *"It was fun doing the card and drawing."*
- *"I liked the games and meeting new people."*
- *"I learnt that mental illness can't be caught like a cold. And people with schizophrenia can hear things and see things that aren't real."*
- *"I learnt that friends are very important to us."*
- *"I have told other children who don't know what they are talking about what depression really means."*
- *"I learnt a lot about problem solving at home."*
- *"I learnt that it's (mental illness) not our fault."*
- *"It was good because now I can express my feelings more - thanks!"*
- *"I learnt that illegal drugs don't help."*
- *"I learnt that you can call Kids Helpline instead of talking to your parents, if you are shy."*

**Comments from parents of the participants:**

- *"The program gave the children a real insight into the hows and whys of depression at a level they could understand."*
- *"(My son) has adopted a caring attitude that notices when I am feeling worse. He knows when to advise me what to do sometimes."*
- *"The program was excellent and met (my son) where his understanding was."*
- *"(My son) has a less frustrated attitude at what I can't do."*
- *"The student, through this education program, is able to become more tolerant and open-minded and less judgemental. Through guidelines learnt, (my daughter) has the ability to listen, observe and recognise symptoms associated with mental illness. By recognising symptoms she has helped others."*
- *"The program has also given to this family, a sense of belonging without pre-judgement."*
- *"This is the first time we've been able to discuss mental illness as a family."*
- *"(My daughter learnt) how to deal with her emotions/feelings more effectively."*
- *"Great benefits. He is aware now of what mental illness is, what side effects the medications have and knowing that mental illness is like any other illness and not terminal - I think he feels quite relieved."*
- *"We have started understanding each other in many different ways."*
- *"More understanding of her sister's difficulties and how normal it is to become frustrated at her and our life."*
- *"(My daughter) seems to be calmer."*
- *"He understood that he should express his feelings and thoughts more openly."*