

**This is a transcript of Woodbridge School's Be You journey video available at <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/woodbridge-schools-journey-with-be-you>**

**Educators at Woodbridge School in Tasmania have been using Be You to establish a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. Read about how they are growing a mentally healthy generation of children and young people in the town.**

Drive 40 minutes south of Hobart and you'll find Woodbridge School and Marine Discovery Centre, the second-fastest growing education institution in Tasmania.

Not surprisingly, the school's recent growth mirrors that of the town itself. Over the past decade, the rural charm coupled with advancing technology have seen large numbers of young families relocate to the area.

While this growth in population has been embraced by the community, it has brought various issues, many of which are felt most profoundly at the school. The greater demand on existing resources and facilities is one such challenge.

As are feelings of isolation for new families adjusting to life away from a bigger town or city. To address some of these challenges, Woodbridge School Advanced Skills Teacher, Amy Robinson, has looked to instil best mental health practices for children and young people at the school.

In late 2018, the school won a grant from Tasmania's Department of Education (DoE) to focus on school resilience and wellbeing programs. This application was based on an assertion that there were some mental health concerns with girls in the secondary school, a hunch later confirmed in the DoE 2019 Child and Student Wellbeing survey.

Amy explains why this direction was necessary.

"I think it's really important for the children to learn about mental health at school, so they have a greater understanding about it later in life," she said.

"Your mental health is something you should be focusing on day-to-day not just at home but also when the children are at school."

Taking the lead, Amy worked with the school's leadership team as well as Sue Sagewood, Director of West Winds Community Centre in Woodbridge, to find an accredited framework that would provide educators with the resources and strategies to encourage positive mental health practices.

This search brought them to Be You.

## **Woodbridge and the wellbeing committee**

After making contact via the Be You website, Amy and Sue were connected with Consultant Maryann Vaughan to discuss how Professional Learning modules and Fact Sheets could be used to help educators build their capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of students.

Amy became the school's Action Team Leader and formed an Action Team, comprising of school and community leaders, primary and secondary school pupils, the school nurse, parents and school counsellors. This was named the Woodbridge wellbeing committee.

Woodbridge resident, and parent, Tegan Morgan is a part of the committee. She has witnessed the positive effect Be You has already had on her children who attend the school.

“Be You is creating that sense of belonging for children, creating that sense that you can be who you are, and as long as it’s a safe environment, you should grow that uniqueness,” she said.

“That’s the biggest message, how can we get our children to shine and be amazing human beings when they grow to become adults?”

Tegan believes the power of being connected within the local community, particularly when looking at the aspect of isolation in rural locations, is critical to building a mentally healthy community.

“We live on three acres with lots of animals,” she continued.

“My youngest loves playing with the chickens and riding his bike. We call him the chicken whisperer because he just loves being outside. He’ll grab them by the tail and give them a cuddle.

“But there is isolation here, and I do feel quite isolated when parenting my children. I think it’s so important that as a community we’re all working around the same framework to support our children.”

### **The Reaching Out Festival**

The first priority on the wellbeing committee’s agenda was to address the results of the DoE wellbeing survey. Using Be You modules as a guide, they came up with the idea of the Reaching Out Festival, a community gathering that would bring people from all walks together to consider the topic of mental health.

From sporting activities, to creating a mindfulness room, the festival proved to be a positive talking point in the town, and a great success.

“I didn’t know what to expect, but it was absolutely fantastic,” said Woodbridge School Acting Principal Shannon Bavage.

“It was a real credit to Amy and the team who put it together, including some passionate students who got involved.

“We are getting a lot of student input around wellbeing. Learning from our students about their thoughts and opinions and digging a little deeper is something that we’re trying to do to make sure that their voice is heard.

“That’s a really positive part of the culture that’s here, that the students are really capable of articulating a point and speaking up when they need to.”

### **Be You in the classroom**

In early 2019, Woodbridge primary school educator Matt Woolley began using the Resilience and Early Support modules to develop a set routine, or “ritual”, every Monday morning and Friday afternoon for a regular check in and check out with his class.

The safe environment has created a space in which children are encouraged to be comfortable discussing and sharing what’s happening in their lives.

“I’m really proud of the fact, and humbled, that these children are comfortable talking about their mental health as if it’s just another part of their learning,” he said.

At the secondary school, in her role as Be You Action Team Leader, Amy Robinson has been working closely with fellow educator Kaspar Deane.

They have noticed that the young people in their classes are more confident talking to educators about their problems since Be You was implemented.

“The children are opening up so much more, they now know that they’re not alone and it’s OK to talk about their wellbeing,” she explained.

“They feel they can talk to their friends about it too and that they know where to go for help. Just the awareness of it has really changed this year.

“As an educator, you don’t have to have an answer, you don’t have to have a response, but you need to know which direction to send children or what information to provide them. That’s been a real positive about Be You, to have a resource for educators to go back to for advice and support.”

Amy and the rest of the wellbeing committee at Woodbridge will continue to provide support to educators who are new to using Be You.

They are also already planning for an even bigger Reaching Out Festival in 2020.

“This has been our first year with Be You,” said Amy.

“We’re only just building on it. This is just the beginning.”

**END**