

*This is a transcript for the recording of the Be You webinar 'Diversity matters for mental health' (7 December 2018). The recording is available at <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/events/diversity-matters-for-mental-health>.*

## **Be You In Focus Webinar: Diversity matters for mental health**

**Maree Kirkwood:** Hello, everyone. Welcome to our first In Focus Be You webinar, Diversity Matters for Mental Health. My name is Maree Kirkwood. I am a State Manager for the Be You initiative with Early Childhood Australia. Joining me today is Viki Rozsas, who is a Be You Consultant with Early Childhood Australia. Be You is a single, integrated initiative to promote mental health and wellbeing in the early years, from the early year to 18 years. It's for every Australian educator, from early learning services through to secondary schools, including future educators. It is led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, and headspace, and it's funded by the Australian Government.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Be You also has a collaborative learning community for educators who are supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Being part of this community means that your early learning service at school has access to be a Be You consultant to assist you in undertaking your learning in action. So, is your school or service registered in participating with Be You currently? If you aren't registered, if your service at school isn't registered, you can do that today. And then make sure that you ... If you are already registered, be sure to mention the webinar next time, that you participated in this webinar next time you check in with your consultant. If you aren't sure, please just send us a message via Facebook or on our website and we can get back to you.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Now, let me begin. Now let's begin exploring ways we can support everyone in their early learning service communities, their mental health and wellbeing by considering how we embrace, embed, and include diversity in our practice.

**Viki Rozsas:** Before we start, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians from old land, from which we are able to gather on today, and not to only acknowledge, but also pay my respect to elder's past, present, and future, and all those who continue to hold the memories, traditions, a ways of being for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognize the importance of continued connection to culture, country, and community, to the health, social, and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Today, as we meet in this place, I also encourage you to think about reconciliation as a personal, and as a professional practice, and by looking at organizational reconciliation action plans.

**Viki Rozsas:** I encourage you to consider how we can all communicate, maintain relationship, and connectedness, and how an awareness of this can influence children's and family's wellbeing, how we respectfully communicate with everyone in our learning community on a daily basis, and support practical reconciliation, and build positive future for all children and adults. Throughout today's webinar, I invite you to consider ways of

relationship at your place are informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.

**Maree Kirkwood:** We are all here today to consider, learn, and reflect about early childhood wellbeing and education. A sense of safety is the most foundational requirement for positive mental health, sense of security and performing relationship. On our screen are the Be You ways for today. Remember, looking after yourself is very important. That sense of safety, what we mean by that, is that people are safe to be who they are, are able to work towards their strength, express their opinions and beliefs, and feel heard and respected even when there are opposing do. Children learn from what adults around them do. Being aware of how to look after ourselves and support each other can make a huge difference to each of us, the wellbeing of our team and to the children we work with.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Children build a picture of who they are by observing the adults and modelling what they do. We'll be asking you to interact and contribute during the webinar today. There will be opportunity for you to reflect on your own practices through polls and reflective questions. Contribute only what you feel comfortable with and when you feel okay about it. You can join in by the chatbox. Someone would post in links to resources here for you to copy if you're interested. Please remember to take care of yourselves today as we talk about mental health, and have a plan for what you will do if an unexpected or difficult feelings might occur. Sometimes unexpected feelings can emerge and even difficult one. Please be aware of these that come up for you and make sure that you talk to somebody if this does happen. Another idea might be to talk to someone who could listen some help, a friend, a family member, colleague, health professional or a crisis line like health Lifeline. Their phone number is 13 11 14.

**Viki Rozsas:** Today, we will be celebrating diversity. We will be mindful of the many ways. Diversity is reflected within our early learning community. We will be reflecting about what we can achieve by being aware of both the individual and collective identities within our community. We will be exploring the diversity represented in our early learning services and schools that we can support, and increase our understanding on to promote inclusion and, consequently, positive mental health and wellbeing. We will be discussing how educators can create inclusive learning environments that provide every child with the opportunity to be who they are and to achieve their best mental health.

**Viki Rozsas:** We will be considering our responses to diversity in learning environments and how it influences our capacity to protect children's rights, to encourage their agency, and to provide space to build resilience. Our vision, Be You's vision, is that every learning community is positive, is inclusive, and resilient, a place where every child, young person, educator, and family can achieve their best possible mental health through promotion, prevention, and early intervention. Prioritising our practices for inclusion and diversity influences our capacity to achieve decision.

**Viki Rozsas:** Understanding and responding to diversity can be complicated at times, but we all know the diversity and how we embrace, embed, and includes its methods, matters for determining how children, families, and educators feel they belong, and ultimately, maintain positive mental health and wellbeing. This is because feelings of belonging, connectedness are central to our social, emotional wellbeing, to our behaviour, our learning, and our

relationship. Let's move on now to explore diversity and inclusion in more depth.

**Maree Kirkwood:** First, let's have a look at what we actually mean by diversity. Diversity is about difference. From the Collins Dictionary, it's defined that diversity of something is the fact that it contains many, very different elements. Australia's population is considered to be diverse, with the Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people, and migrants from almost every corner of the globe. A learning community will likely be culturally diverse with representatives from all or some of these groups. However, today, we're not only talking about cultural diversity, which refers to people who identify this particular group based on their birthplace, ethnicity, language, values, beliefs, or wellbeing.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Differences can also include age, religion, gender, and gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, education and literacy, family arrangements, and circumstances, personality, interest and ability, ways of thinking, values, mental health status, impairments and disabilities, and physical attributes. It is also important to always remember that as well as the diversity existing between groups, there is always diversity within that group. Even when we identify as being from a group, we have characteristics that set us apart from each other. Sometimes we can even identify or be identified as belonging to multiple groups.

**Maree Kirkwood:** We're going to have a little yarn now about how well we know our identity, who we are, who we identify with, where we belong. Join us in the chat, how well do you know your own identity or identities? Who are you? What do you identify with? Where do you belong? When we were preparing this webinar, we were discussing about whether we consist one identity that's shared out into multiple identities within the various contexts that we have, or if we have multiple identities that encompass up into one core identity. We didn't really have an answer for that. It was something that we were exploring. But what do you think? How well do you know your identity? Who are you? What do you identify with? Where do you belong?

**Maree Kirkwood:** You can consider this in terms of place, your role, your connection, and what might be important to you socially and culturally. Sometimes our identity can feel less visible of coming from a dominant culture perspective. This leads us to think about stigma and privilege. The stigma can get in the way of inclusion and cause negative loss on diversity. Stigma is defined by the World Health Organization is a market shame, disgrace, or disapproval, which results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society. The stigma that exists between groups of people is a result of either actual or perceived difference between them. It can be any form of difference, including personal circumstances, gender, race, religious belief, sexuality, or mental health status, or could be something else.

**Maree Kirkwood:** We learn to notice differences from a very young age. Stigma is connected to and grows from stereotypes that are created by people for a variety of purposes. Sometimes simply from a lack of understanding. When there is stigma, a negative social identity of a particular group is formed and assumptions are made that all people within that group share the same specific characteristics. Social exclusion can occur because of the negative attitudes held against one group. This is called negative stereotyping. Those that might have a physical impairment, those that might be experiencing a

mental health difficulty, or perhaps someone who has a family member in prison.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Self-stigma is often linked to a poor self-esteem and sometimes shame about that situation. That can occur when people or family members who have been discriminated against. They can withdraw or identify and define themselves by the characteristics of the stigma. Essentially, the stigma can become their identity and this increases the potential for mental health issue. The discrimination people experience because of stigma can also intensify the experience of feeling excluded or being different from others. The Human Rights Commission defines discrimination as the behaviour that happens when a person or a group of people is treated less favourably than others because of their background or certain personal characteristic. This is known as direct discrimination.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Discrimination may be obvious, and deliberate, or may be more subtle, and unintended. Either way, it's unfair and potentially damaging. The conventions on the child state, that children should not be discriminated against or their individual differences. We should also not be discriminated in these ways with colleagues and with families that we engage in, in our learning communities. What can we do? We can play a key role in calling out the stigma and discrimination experienced by children, young people, and their family. The Be You Initiative encourages you to challenge discriminatory behaviour so that it is no longer ignored, expected, or accepted.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Privilege can make it more difficult to see how diversity, if not embraced, embedded, and included can negatively influence feelings and experiences of belonging, how it can create barriers, and lead to discrimination. The privilege is an unearned benefit. It's an opportunity or an advantage given to someone because of their identity. When we talk about privilege, we're talking about people. We're asking people to think critically about power, and about the way, and sometimes be held by certain people because of one or more facets of their identity. Things like race, religion, gender, sexuality, class, wealth, or ability. The values with privilege, it can also be embedded into our reality and that it can easily go on unacknowledged or even identified.

**Maree Kirkwood:** In essence, privilege is characteristically invisible to those people that have it. It is important to recognise that privilege itself is not a bad thing. It is useful instead to see it as an opportunity to foster empathy through using the power that comes from privilege and correcting some of those inequities that already exist in our society. When people experience the effects of stigma and discrimination, it is always important to acknowledge and draw on the protective factors in their lives for support. This could be internal strength, and ability, interest, support networks, and positive relationship.

**Viki Rozsas:** How we see the world is influenced by many things by our identity, and the potential stigma, and discrimination, or privilege attached to it. We each have very different experiences in the same environment or situation, and many factors including diversity, identity, and inclusion influences. This is a very complex subject. This might bring up difficult feelings and thoughts. So, let's check in with ourselves for a moment. When faced with challenges related to stigma and discrimination, people will answer the following questions differently to someone who isn't. Before we consider these questions, we need to remember the earlier discussions about safety, confidentiality, and participating in ways best for our wellbeing and self-care.

**Viki Rozsas:** Now, let's consider the potential or different responses if someone, a child, or an adult either encounter stigma, or discrimination, or experiences privilege. From your point of view, if you think about someone from a low socioeconomic background who serve the prison sentence and was released into community. How do you think this person would respond, be alone think about these questions? There is a barbecue, for example, this weekend with people I don't know very well. Am I happy to attend? Will I be greeted warmly when I arrive? Will anyone notice if I don't? Well, let's think about from a child's perspective, a child with physical impairment, a child who is a wheelchair user. How would a child respond to these questions?

**Viki Rozsas:** Will I have someone to play with, or be with me? Will someone talk to me during breaks? Some of these questions, keep in mind and consider what potential protective factors could exist in these people's lives. It is now important to step out of the site of considering these questions from multiple perspective. Let's look at further at what we can do by considering diversity and identities from individual and collective perspective. So far we have discussed our individual identities are informed by characteristics to distinguish our uniqueness, or our sameness, and there are certainly benefits to having our individuality and sameness visible, and both contribute to our understanding of the world and where we fit in within it. We have discussed the total community land. Diversity and identity inform each other and are central the feelings of belonging.

**Viki Rozsas:** Feeling of belonging is a protective factor for mental health that influences our capacity to form relationships, to feel safe, to explore, to learn, and develop. We have discussed that taking time to consider our own identity is fundamental before we can appreciate the diverse identities within our community. We discussed how diversity and identity that exists occurs at both individual, and community levels, and influences mental health. Early learning services and schools. who are open to learning about diversity within their learning community provides many opportunities for all children and adults to be included.

**Viki Rozsas:** Have you look closely at your learning community lately? Let's do a poll. Thinking about the many types of diversity, what we have considered so far, how informed do you think you are about the diversity that exists within your learning community? I can see that many of you think they're very confident. Some people thinking about maybe. I think this is a really considerate response to think about invisible diversity and this take as well. When we are well-informed of the diversity within our community, we still won't always know the answers, the backgrounds, or experiences that make up a child, or a family's identity, I know should we. It's really their choice and right within the boundaries of legal entity of care requirements.

**Viki Rozsas:** We choose how and when to share their circumstances or situations. Families sometimes keep information private for a variety of reasons because they are worried about being judged, the stigma attached to their situation, facing prejudice, or being discriminated against. Also some families may not identify with any group and may not wish to. This is okay. They can still be part of an inclusive learning environment. How we understand, respond, and acknowledge their diversity so they are part of our inclusive learning community will be through our practices, which we promote awareness that everyone is different, everyone is valued, and has unique family circumstances, and situation.

**Viki Rozsas:** Acknowledging and understanding the diversity that exists in learning community, and understanding the differences in individual and collective identities will assist in that inclusion in our everyday practice. We need to be thinking about both explicit and implicit messages, the different backgrounds of the children, and staff, and rights that serves this character and identity. Early childhood services that are responsive to individual differences, and respect diversity, promote kindness, respect, compassion will benefit everyone and help to build an inclusive environment. Let's go to the next slide.

**Viki Rozsas:** We come back to the question, how do we understand, respond, and acknowledge all diversity so everyone is part of our inclusive learning community? Let's explore this further and then look at how we can support individual differences in our learning services, and school, and how we can support the rights of every child whether their individual situation and circumstances fully known to us or not. Inclusion, an early learning service or school that celebrates diversity of children, families, and educators welcomes diversity and understand the value of inclusion. Diversity needs to be actioned by inclusive practice. A diversity without inclusion doesn't make sense. Diversity for the sake of diversity.

**Viki Rozsas:** Inclusion is important and a protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing. Children who experience exclusion are at risk of poor mental health and low self-esteem. Creating an inclusive environment is also important for nurturing children's developing identities. Inclusion helps children develop a sense of pride in who they are, which helps build positive self-esteem. It also helps children to appreciate and value differences in those around them. Children who experience inclusive environments are more likely to be accepting of others and sensitive to other's needs.

**Viki Rozsas:** Inclusive services provide risks and positive experiences for young children. These experiences will stay with them for life. What is inclusion? Inclusion is defined as the act of making a person, or seeing part of a group, or collection. It's not exclusion. It's not segregation or integration. According to the Diversity Council of Australia, there are three elements to inclusion. It occurs when a group of diverse people feel valued and respected, have access to opportunities and resources, and contribute their experiences, skills, and perspective to their environment. An inclusive service is a reflective service, that embraces, embeds, and includes diversity in its everyday practice.

**Viki Rozsas:** The experience of every child lies at the centre of inclusive practice. Their experiences will be influenced by their identity, the culture and practices of their family, community they live in, their socioeconomic cultural setting of their society. Their experience will also be informed by early learning professionals they come into contact with and the service providers for settings they use. These, in turn, are affected by the educational and research institutions that develop the workforce, and inform, and disseminate professional practice. Government policies, regulations, and guidelines influence the nature and accessibility of services, too.

**Viki Rozsas:** Sometimes experiences and environments can be labelled or viewed as being inclusive, particularly when a child, or family, or educator has access to the environment. This access can be limited to being an observer. Inclusion only truly exists and individuals are involved in meaningful ways where they are valued, where they are seen and heard, respected with access to opportunities and resources so they can be active contributors to their

experiences, welcoming all children, families, and educators, and appreciating, and embracing diversity in our services-enabled families and staff to work well together, which all have positive impact on both adults and children's mental health and wellbeing.

**Viki Rozsas:** Tokenism, tokenism, what is tokenism? It is a symbolic action. It is an experience or practice that may appear to promote diversity and be inclusive, when in reality, the effect intention or lack of. Behind it is quite different. The prevalence of tokenism regarding diversity inclusion, and inclusive practices, and steps we take to avoid it needs to be considered regularly. Tokenism is a practice or policy of making no more than a symbolic effort or gesture, as an offering opportunities to minorities equal to those the majority already have. A comment was made by Kate from SNAICC, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, about her feelings around inclusion in an early learning environment.

**Viki Rozsas:** She said, "And once I'm inside in the early learning service, it's very real, embedded practice, so it's not tokenistic, not just a table with Aboriginal stuff on it. I want to see how I can relate to things I do at home within your centre." This comment was in reference to taste cultural heritage, but could also be applied in many of the diverse situation as we mentioned earlier in this webinar. Tokenism can be a starting point if you don't know what to do. It needs to engage critical thinking and reflective practice, and multiple perspective, curiosity. Your view of tokenism can change as your understanding grow.

**Viki Rozsas:** Moving beyond tokenism is done through intentionality, authenticity, and a genuine commitment to continuous learning, action, reflection, and improvement. It is also important to recognise that both the experience of and goals for embracing, embedding, and including diversity are forever. Remember, this first symbol, considering our own personal views, and judgments, our beliefs, and value before we even think to react. Decisions about inclusive practices can be made, keeping in mind that the goal is, that everyone feels included, welcomed, and that our behaviour reflected.

**Viki Rozsas:** We have individual and professional responsibilities for domestic-promoting diversity and inclusive practice, that everyone needs the chance to know each other and feel connected to members of the learning community and learning space. What we do to be inclusive and promote diversity needs to evolve as our understandings grow, and the context of our community changes? Doing what we always do, how we always do it without reflection leaves us treading a fine line between inclusive and tokenistic practices. Let's have a look at the next slide.

**Viki Rozsas:** This is about looking at what we currently do as individuals and early learning communities to embed, embrace and include diversity in many ways. We've all considered a degree to which we do these things. They look forward at what's next in terms of our continuous improvement, and learning as individual, and organisation. When we embrace diversity, we acknowledge, understand, and respond in ways that value, respect, prioritise, and promote other ways of being, doing, and knowing.

**Viki Rozsas:** It requires us not to feel threatened or ashamed. When we embed diversity, our practices that acknowledge, understand, and respect, we prioritise and promote diversity as the norm, not the exception in our daily lives, almost to the point that our intentional actions if we're not engaged in cycle of

continuous reflection and improvement would lose their visibility. Picture a place where diversity is in great, embedded, and included in daily practice, as well as strategic planning for quality improvement. What would you observe?

**Maree Kirkwood:** Just thinking about the previous Venn diagram, the triangle is the area that represents an overlap or balance between embedding, embracing, and including ways to promote diversity. In reality, do we want to achieve a perfect balance? Is it even possible to decide on that perfect balance? If it was the case, where to from there? There really is no final or all-encompassing answer. Your practices will be influenced by time, play, people, philosophy, your own mental health and wellbeing, emotional state. It's all about staying curious and open to taking risks. Let's put up a poll. What does everyone in the audience think? Is embrace, embed, and include considered a quality equally in your place?

**Maree Kirkwood:** Tell us which are achievable to apply in your practice and which ones might be more challenging. I'm saying here that a lot of people are saying that embracing is achievable and that all of them are achievable. Embedding looks a little more challenging than man, and including is also achievable. Considering and reflecting about our thoughts, and ways of embracing, embedding, and including diversity can be done within the context of what we do to acknowledge, understand, and respond in ways to promote and value diversity. Today, we are going to consider how our ways to acknowledge, understand, and respond as discrete concept. However, in practice, they are not isolated or undertaken in a linear fashion. They are in constant interplay and work in unison.

**Viki Rozsas:** What does it mean when they acknowledge diversity? When I hear this question, Maree, I think about power and power imbalance. Very often, I feel we really need to be mindful about our power imbalance that potentially is there. Power, ultimately, is relational, and is socially constructed, and also powers the capacity to bring back change, so it can really be used productively. We can influence people by our actions, ways of being, and ways of doing. We can focus on needs, individual and community needs, and they can certainly affect our environment.

**Maree Kirkwood:** How have you witnessed diversity in an early learning service? How do we witness that diversity in the other links that have been acknowledged? That's something that can happen in a little bit, or can be overlapping and all encompassing. It's about considering where those change points, where they decided that diversity has been acknowledged. We explore the growth mindset, how people are feeling, how the people are feeling in the service. All right, what do you do now that acknowledges diversity at your place? What are the big things you do that acknowledge diversity? Focusing on the ordinary, daily small practices that make a big difference.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Inclusion empowers people to contribute their experiences and their perspective. Partnerships with educators and families will empower them through embracing ideas and plans, reflecting on diversity that exists within their unique learning community and embedding these in practice. It's important to regularly review our services' philosophy, our processes, our practices, and also pedagogical approaches to ensure they truly align with the diversity represented within your service. Doing this shows that the service and educators respect and value their learning community and the responses to them.

**Maree Kirkwood:** In the chat... we've got Sharon who mentioned acknowledgement. Christine has said the use of first languages, and greetings throughout the day; amazing. Lynnette; reflect through the environment. That's great, Lynnette, acknowledgment through song. Diversity and inclusion-embedded from policies, policies, educational program, interactions and relationships from Trudy, ensuring we get to know the family. Amelia: take an interest, and inquire about the lives of children and families in the outside world. Conversations with families about home, life background, and culture; Thank you Rhiannon.

**Maree Kirkwood:** There are a variety of ways for everybody to engage and now explore diversity. Everyone should have a voice in learning community. So this isn't vital for the individual, and collective wellbeing, and then providing an inclusive community. Consider your communication with families, being inclusive, be inclusive and use respect for appropriate, so does to exclude anyone. Be aware of educational, and literacy levels, and what means of communication best suits your learning community. A link will be provided for one of our Be You modules include. It elaborates in more detail about using those policies and procedures in an intentional way to acknowledge diversity.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Your learning community can develop policies and procedures that outline clear expectations of inclusive practices and legislative requirements, take advantage of Cultural Competency Training and other forms of professional development. These can support you to understand the experience of others who you might not know well and to better understand the challenges some members of your local community might be facing. What is cultural competence? Cultural competence begins from the understanding that we are all influenced by the different social, emotional, and organisational cultures around us.

**Maree Kirkwood:** When we recognise that our beliefs and values aren't the only ways of seeing, and doing, and being, we are open up to learning about other perspectives. We understand and relate to others better, and build a sense of belonging among children and family when we explore similarities and differences in our cultural expectations. I've mentioned that some people through the post about reviewing curriculum and program. You and your learning community can review curriculum materials including books and resources to ensure they include positive attributes about inclusion and diversity. This includes being alert to how learning materials can impact the engagement of children and young people from diverse background. What will I think about next to grow the way to acknowledge diversity and our practices? Do we need to start with me, or are we ready to look at the collective? Tell us in the chat.

**Viki Rozsas:** I can see Lynnette's comment. Thank you, Lynnette, that everyone should be able to see and hear themselves in a genuine curiosity to understand the other person on a different way of viewing the world and experiencing it. Let's think about understanding. What does it mean when we understand diversity? When I think about understanding diversity, I think about sharing values and skills, I think about effective, meaningful communication, and I think about creativity, and I'm unleashing creativity and diverge in thinking. Also I think about cultivating diversity within me, not just around me. I think this is a really important point to appreciate and connect with one's self that we touched on earlier today.

**Viki Rozsas:** I also like to mention just quickly that when you think about diversity and how we understand it, we might include and consult a number of different

frameworks on a local state or federal level. We might think about the intuit, and how our actions, and our goals can be reflected in a Quality Improvement Plan. So, have you witnessed in early learning service, understanding diversity? I guess, when you see diversity, and practice, and see how it's translated into practice, theory from theory to practice, it's always contextual. It's always depending on the circumstance, depending on the community, depending on the priorities and needs of that particular community.

**Viki Rozsas:** Always Be You Action Charts are very helpful resources to further develop this understanding. There are many ways of knowing being and doing. For example, within the mentally healthy community domain, the strong connectedness, or within the early learning resilience domain, thinking about supporting identity growth. Also, have a look at the always Be You eBook, the Learning on Country, What Do You Know, which is a wonderful guide and provocation to deepen our understanding of what diversity is. Let's have a look at the next slide, growing our ways to understand. Have you ever asked someone to do something, and have someone to do it in a way you hadn't anticipated? Asking, communicating, and observing are important in growing our understanding of the world around us, of others.

**Viki Rozsas:** Remember, there are many ways we can gather and share information to grow our understanding and many ways to learn. When this is done with warm, with kindness, with respect, empathy, and genuineness, relationships of trust, mutual respect also develop. A word about seeking to understand in the moment, being a mindful educator is to be present and be aware of what is happening in each of the moments throughout the time we work with children, becoming aware of the way we as educators focus and tune in to what is happening within the program, enabling and connecting with the present moment. This wonderful quote by Shayne Hinton; "Being aware of every child and tuning into them will promote children's sense of self and grow understanding of the diversity in our places."

**Viki Rozsas:** Ultimately, the best learning happens when children and adults see the community around them, value diversity, modelling this in everyday practice, and communicating both intention and understanding, helping all children to understand difference, encourages them to feel good about who they are. It also helps children to understand where they fit in, in the world and to appreciate diversity in others. You know that when the environment is safe, supportive and inclusive for everyone, then diversity and everyone's identity is acknowledged and respected. Today's webinar is just an introduction to acknowledging, understanding, and responding to diversity. I encourage you to reflect on where you will go next to increase your understanding of diversity.

**Maree Kirkwood:** As educators striving to embrace, embed, and include diversity of practices that promote, prioritise, and value, and respect diversity, we need to begin by asking ourselves, "Can everyone participate and contribute in this experience to our environment?" If the answer is yes, then go ahead. If the answer is no, then maybe there may be some strategies that you can consider implementing after reflecting on what the barriers need to be addressed. What are the tips and strategies you do for supporting and maximising children's meaningful participation? What does it mean when we respond in ways that promote, prioritise, value, and respect diversity? Let's do a poll.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Think about what you do now that demonstrates how you respond for diversity, how effective do you consider your practices. Somewhat effective,

but because our priority is significantly being responded to compared to the other option, and that's I think a really positive reflection on the educators and their reflection of self and practice to be thinking about that. Behind that we've got very effective and with continuous improvement, which is also an important process in approaching our practice. Before considering what we need to think about next to grow the way we respond diversity, we're going to self-explore how our understanding of agency, why an environment can influence how we respond.

**Maree Kirkwood:** There is better opportunity to explore agency right and empowering environment in the Be You module Empower. That link will be available to you via the chat. We need to ensure that children develop their own sense of identity and the opportunity to have a voice. It is important to recognise that social and emotional education is everybody's responsibility and that everyday interactions adults have with children foster these skills. Educators who reflect, plan, embed, and model social and emotional skills and behaviour into everyday practices are strengthening children's agency and developing an understanding of an acknowledgement of diversity. How will you respond can support children's developing sense of agency, how they feel good about themselves, and consequently, be more confident in trying and learning new things.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Agency develops when children are supported to actively participate, and experiences, and decisions that shape their lives, and those of their families and other children. It is a child-led, independent on developmental side, and will look different in every setting. Agency is strengthened when you listen respectfully, value, and consider children's opinions, respond to their needs, and support them when needed. How are you supporting children's agency? Tell us in the chat. Experiences and environments like this support of development of resilience, independence and positive social-emotional learning, and via protective factors for mental health and wellbeing.

**Maree Kirkwood:** This is because they support children to feel that they belong, that they have a sense of connectedness, and enjoy respectful relationships with educators. It makes them that they are visible, that they have a voice, and have plentiful opportunities to be competent and capable contributors to their world. This also involves having opportunities to learn about and use their right.

**Viki Rozsas:** We mention the Convention on the Rights of the Child earlier today. The rights treaty consisting of fundamental principles that support and guide early learning professionals to plan and develop empowering learning environment and programs. When these principles are considered, embedded into daily practice, we can surely grow a sense of resilience, independence, and social-emotional skills. When we focus on supporting children's agency, we acknowledge that they have rights and they can actively contribute to decisions in the service and in their learning.

**Viki Rozsas:** Protecting children's rights is empowering and fundamental to their wellbeing and resilience. We need to reflect on with children and learn with children that whatever we say matters, and that all people, all children, and adults can have a voice and need to be seen. We can also show children they are valued, and we need to show them they're worthy of respect, and they have rights. You can see children as individuals, value their experiences, their special perspective, and focus on their potential. You can focus on resilience, and strength, and definitely support all children regardless of

ability, locations, status, background, culture, gender identity in becoming active participants in their learning and in their lives.

**Viki Rozsas:** We need to respect children and see them as competent and capable, with their own interests, independent thoughts, ideas, feelings, curiosity, and require opportunities to express these and be listened to. Mental health and wellbeing is most likely to flourish in a supportive and inclusive environment, a safe place, where diversity and I would like to be ourselves if acknowledged, respected, and seen as adding to the vibrancy and strength of the entire community.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Just having a look at the chat here based on the question about how we support children's agency. There's been some quite detailed information coming through, demonstrating everybody's work to support children's agency. Sally says, "We see each child and value what they bring to the group. We hear their voice. We respect each child for who they are." Trudy has said, "Children are given lots of choices to be involved in decisions concerning all that affects them throughout the day." That's a very empowering position that children can be in. Continuing with thinking about the environment. Acknowledging and embedding the diversity of the service and everyday practice create an environment where children can express their voice, be visible, and an active right, and self-determination. That's become evident through some of those responses in the chat as well.

**Maree Kirkwood:** We need to consider our roles as educators in the space carefully because our attitude influence children's developing sense of self as they tend to think of themselves in the way that significant adults in their lives will relate to and talk to them, talk about them. The children are building a picture of who they are by the way that the adults interact with them, by what is being mirrored back to them, and by the relationship that has built through the daily interactions with their environment, the adults and appeals. Philosophical and pedagogical approaches can impact directly on the experiences children have within these learning environments.

**Maree Kirkwood:** Again, it's important to reflect on our own personal approaches and those that a service state or from research and evidence. Consider how your early learning service of school's philosophy might reflect both policies, beliefs, and understandings related to children's right, and how children learn and develop capacity for self-determination and agency. Environments that promote resilience through diversities is because there are opportunities for the children to direct their own learning, develop confidence in their ability, generate and explore new ideas, interact with others and experiments with risky play, have a goal without fear of failure. Ask for support when they need it and to participate in decision-making, which I see through the chat is a common thing.

**Maree Kirkwood:** How educators work with children can also influence children's beliefs about their own ability. That's where we need to think about our intentional teaching and supporting that learning through play where children are encouraged to explore and take risks that will assist them in developing their independence and competence. Remembering also the hidden learning or hidden curriculum in any environment is essential, too. That hidden learning occurs through planned and incidental experiences as children observe and experience. That incidental learning can come from observing the body language of others, how adults respond to what they say and what they do, what has said, what has not said, what is left out, what is highlighted or prioritised, how people are portrayed in books; for example, messages about

gender and inclusion, and also the way on spaces and experiences; for example, the individuals or group experiences are set up and the amount of time spent needs to be.

**Maree Kirkwood:** For every interaction and experience, even when a child isn't directly involved can impact on how they see themselves, their identity, and their ability. Relationships are integral for this. That is modelling, practicing, and growing those authentic relationships. We can move on to the next slide.

**Viki Rozsas:** Thanks to Sharon for your lovely message in the chat, believing them. I think when I think about a really optimal and best-learning environment for young children, it is definitely that sense of responsiveness, being respectful, sensitive, understanding, a different way of experiencing the program. When you think about the children's sense of agency and how it's developed, they really grow as individuals when they know that they are valued, when they are seen, and heard. Someone mentioned that in the chatbox as well. Thank you for that.

**Viki Rozsas:** So, I invite you to take time, to really look, and listen, and feel, and critically experience the environment and the moment from a child's perspective. Are your relationships positive and responsive? Is the social and emotional learning embedded in everyday practice? Is resilience supported within the curriculum? When we think about routine experiences, for example, nappy-change time. I was using them to connect with children, to really use ... use to build a relationship, and are routine practices reflective of children's voice and their identity or something else?

**Viki Rozsas:** I would like to show you Always Be You wise words. They say, "It's about shared respect. It's about shared meanings, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening." It's about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living, and working together with dignity and truly listening. So really it comes down to respect, compassion, and the connection, connection to self and connection to others. What will you think about next to acknowledge diversity? What will you think about next to really grow the ways you understand and deepen your understanding about diversity? How will you deepen your practices in responding to promoting, prioritising, valuing, and respecting diversity?

**Maree Kirkwood:** Thank you for joining us today. As many of you know, these webinars are great tools, not only learn, reflect, and put together, put these learning into action. They also assist in demonstrating out individual commitment to continued professional development with Be You. Have you heard they can also support documentation and guide whole service of school professional learning and continuous improvement? You can contact our team today and we can assist you. For anyone already part of a participating service at school, simply contact your Be You Consultant. If your service at school isn't registered as a participating services yet and you'd like to know more about what is involved, check out how to start this experience and join us today. See the link in the chat about how you can get started.

**Maree Kirkwood:** You can join a check-in event and talk about what you've learned and done soon. Just remember the check-ins aren't check-out. Most importantly, they are not check-outs. So there are often consultants spotting that great learning and action that is being done and sometimes this is action and learning that the educators that are having their check-in with the consultant

isn't fitting themselves. It's often easier for a pair of outside eyes and ears to know this. Please remember to complete the exit survey that will be put up soon and please include the main, followed by separate email addresses of anyone, what, who is watching with you.

**Maree Kirkwood:** It is really important to include the names and email addresses so that everybody can get a certificate, so each of them need to be an individual email address. Thank you for your time today. Please, please complete this form so that we can put your feedback. Thank you very much.

**Viki Rozsas:** Thank you everyone, for your active participation, for your insightful comments and questions. It sounds like it's a wonderful conversation in the chat.

END