

**This is a transcript of Thornbury Primary School's Be You journey video available at <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/>**

**Thornbury Primary School turned to Be You to align its wellbeing programs and support its diverse school community. We look at how they transitioned to a new framework and implemented positive mental health strategies for the school's educators and students.**

Thornbury Primary School (TPS) in Melbourne's inner north is proudly diverse.

Nearly 50 Aboriginal students from 18 different families attend the school, as do children from a range of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Children of LGBTI families, those who are brought up in homecare and children from non-nuclear family structures all call TPS home.

It is the only school in the area to offer children a Steiner and mainstream education and is the base for a small group of students from Croxton Specialist School, an education centre for students with specific learning needs associated with an intellectual disability.

This uniqueness gives TPS its vibrant identity, creating opportunities and complexities for both its educators and students.

Previously TPS used KidsMatter as its mental health and wellbeing framework. Several wellbeing programs were created, however, the school struggled to implement these successfully.

In 2018, principal Leon Bell decided a more holistic framework was required to align all the school's wellbeing programs.

They recruited a wellbeing leader, Emma Cornish-Giles, whose first task was to identify a suitable framework to provide structure to the many great initiatives TPS had introduced. This led the school to Be You.

Principal Bell explains why Be You has been the perfect fit for TPS:

"We had a lot of changes at the school and there were challenges to bring in all the KidsMatter elements," he said.

"When these changes were established we were able to bring in new programs. Then Be You came in and we were like 'fantastic,' this fits in with our philosophy so well and just made us stronger.

"Emma took a leading role in implementing Be You. She's been able to highlight any gaps in wellbeing and is the link between myself as principal and with the classroom educators."

## **Educator wellbeing leads to student wellbeing**

After registering with Be You, Emma became the school's Action Team Leader and established a wellbeing support network and a safe space where educators could go to her for guidance.

The next step was to establish an Action Team, which was renamed the Wellbeing Team, consisting of five other educators who had all put their hands up to help.

Following guidance from Consultant Jen Berthold, the TPS Wellbeing Team used Be You Fact Sheets and other Professional Learning materials to organise individual and group support sessions for educators. These provided an opportunity to discuss best mental health practices with their colleagues and guide them to the most appropriate online resources.

## **Emma talks about why establishing these sessions were and remain so important**

“We are extremely lucky to have the most amazing group of educators who put their heart and soul into changing the outcomes of the children at Thornbury,” she said.

“Our educators do long hours. Part of my job is to make sure they are OK, and that they have strategies and resources to take care of themselves.

“We’re constantly looking at ways to improve educator wellbeing and that of our students. Be You has been great because we’ve been able to unpack Professional Learning resources so that our staff can access them and tie them in to what’s happening around the school.”

### **Speaking the same language**

A hugely successful wellbeing program at Thornbury has been a shared emotional language initiative called I’m Deadly. Deadly is the Aboriginal English word meaning ‘fantastic’ or ‘awesome’.

Using Be You’s Family Partnership and Mentally Healthy Communities modules for guidance, I’m Deadly language has been embedded into everyday school life along with other Koorie language of the Wurundjeri people.

I’m Deadly behaviours are outlined at the start of each school year by the wellbeing and leadership teams. I’m Deadly language is then taught to educators, who in turn use it in their everyday interactions with students.

Educator and wellbeing team member, Jess Duncan, believes the I’m Deadly program, and embedding shared emotional language, has been so vital in creating a culturally safe space for the school’s Aboriginal population.

“There’s a really long history of using Koorie language at TPS because the parents and grandparents of these students were coming to this school too,” she said.

“If someone is doing something well we’ll say ‘that’s deadly’. We’re using shared language as often as possible.

“Most of the Aboriginal students don’t live in the area, they’re driving half an hour or more to get here because this is a safe place for them to come and learn, where they are truly included and connected to the school and the people.”

### **Indigenous Studies and other wellbeing programs**

I’m Deadly is a wellbeing program born out of the school’s acclaimed Indigenous Studies program, which provides an opportunity for all TPS students to study the Koorie language and attend cultural classes with Aunty Terri Lee-Fitzpatrick.

The Malpa Young Doctors program, which teaches children about health and wellbeing with a Koorie focus, an anti-bullying program that encourages children to talk to educators about their emotions and Wayapa, a mental health and wellbeing program that promotes connection to culture and land of the Wurundjeri people, have all been successfully implemented.

The school’s hard work in this space was rewarded in 2019 when they received the Outstanding Koorie Education Award from the Victorian Government.

## **Moving forward together**

Educator Finley Francois has seen his fair share of changes at TPS in the 16 years he's been at the school.

He leads the music wellbeing program which aims to create a space where students can channel their emotions and express themselves through instruments. This program works in parallel with the school's art therapy, gardening and cooking classes.

Although there will be challenges around the corner, he is confident TPS has the resilience to continue its positive progression.

"The place is always moving forward with different ideas. It's not a stand-still school, which is a lot of work, but keeps the place interesting," he continued.

"Everyone here is family, this is the cohort of our community. That's something we've grown over a long period of time to create a feeling of safety for children and their families.

"The diversity aids in the creativity as well, the diversity in the culture, the diversity in the demographic. It's a melting pot, you never quite know what is going to happen, but it's always a positive thing and one that is well embraced when these new ideas come about."

The recent stability brought about by the leadership team, as well as the introduction of Be You, has been warmly received by educators and students alike.

With established programs now better aligned with the Be You framework, a wellbeing leader and dedicated wellbeing team providing support across a whole learning community setting, the foundations have been laid for an exciting future.

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