



Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Building the foundations for wellbeing through resilience

Presented by Paola Mercado (ECA) and Rita Johnston (ECA)

Paola Mercado

Hello and welcome, thanks for joining us today. My name is Paola Mercado and I have my colleague here, Rita Johnston, who's joining us today. We are both part of the Be You team for Early Childhood Australia and we are both consultants, supporting the Be You learning communities. Also behind the scenes we have Trish, Sammy and Emma who will be taking care of the chat box, so please feel free to send through questions, thought and stories. We'd like this to be an interactive session, so the more you share with us, the more we will be able to cater to your, to your sharing. Before we move on I'd like to say warami, which means hello in Dharug language. And I'd like to acknowledge that today we are meeting on at the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I'd like to extend my respects to Elders past, present and those that are emerging. So the Dharug language was spoken in, within the Sydney basin. We also have people joining us from all over the country, so it would be great if you'd like to acknowledge and share where you're joining us from today and put that name of the country that you are currently living and working in, in the chat box, so we can join in extending our respects to everybody present. If you are unaware of where you're currently sitting in the land, the Aboriginal land that you are living and working on, please feel free to after this session, think about researching the land and the language that you, that you are joining us from. It's a really nice step to encourage reconciliation and joining together in the, in that process. If you were just joining us and you haven't listened to the keynote this morning, we're going to give you a little bit of an overview of what Be You is. So Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators and they are also the organiser of this conference, that you are joining us today. Be You is led by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. Be You is completely free and it's available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia and that's inclusive of pre-service educators who are training. Be You is a framework that empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and their own mental health. It also offers educators online professional learning, fact sheets, online events, similar to this one that you're attending today and a multitude of other resources. Be You also offers learning communities tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. And the discussions throughout the conference will highlight Be You resources, tools and professional learning to show you how Be You can support a whole and, a whole school and a whole service approach to mental wellbeing. So if you haven't heard about this conference, this conference is in relation to back, to recent events that have reinforced the need mental

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wellbeing strategies, both in early learning services and schools.

This conference covers three key themes over the 10 sessions, over the two days. The first being mental health and wellbeing is a whole community approach. We know the most effective approach to mental health prevention and promotion is one that involves the whole learning community. This is inclusive of latest educators, children and young people themselves, families and of course the wider local community. The next thing is prepare and take care, looking at critical incidents in uncertain times. Certainly our most recent exposure to the pandemic as well as bush fires, highlights the needs for preparing and taking care in these circumstances. And lastly the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships. Most of the sessions over the two day conference are aimed at a particular learning stage, either early learning, primary school or secondary school. This particular session that you're attending at the moment with Rita and myself, will, will be in relation and, and relevant to early learning services. So before we move on and get into the deep content of what today's session is, we are going to launch a poll and this might be a little bit counter intuitive to, before we start with the content, but we're going to ask you whether you are able to identify risk and protective factors. So you have a couple of options, whether you are not able to identify risk and protective factors, are you able to identify some protective factors, perhaps a few protective factors or many protective factors. We're also thinking about the risk factors as well, so perhaps either way you might have a look at what you can identify within your learning community, within your context and be able to answer the poll.

Rita Johnston

So do you want to see the, have, have a chat about the poll results?

Paola Mercado

We've had results already? That was quick.

Rita Johnston

Yep. Yep. So the people who knew many or know many of the risk and protective factors or, or a few, they jumped in and straight up and said yes, we know what this is all about and if you listened to the keynote just earlier, you will have improved your knowledge already. So at the moment we've got, 5% said no, they don't know anything, 24% know, they know something, 31% said a few and 43% said many. So basically half our audience feels relatively confident, fairly confident about what risk and protective factors are and probably and the other, you know, 40% has got some knowledge and there's a couple of people out there for whom this is a fairly new concept so, so those people for whom this is fairly new, get your pen and paper out and take a few notes and we will really share what this is all about with you and with everyone else.

Paola Mercado

Absolutely. And we'll be expanding on those thinking about the specific early learning services that are out there. So we, we will definitely have that perspective and that lens on what we do this morning. So moving along, on your slide you'll see what this session will cover. So first of all we'll be looking and having a bit brief overview of understanding mental health trajectories from birth, as well as the mental health continuum. And we'll have a little bit of a chat about that in case you've missed the keynote, because there was some information shared during the keynote. So bear with us if it gets a little bit repetitive, but again we are looking at this from the early learning perspective, so we're trying to make it as specific to the early learning services as possible. Then we'll look at what, what are risk and protective factors, so again we will really enhance our knowledge around risk and protective factors and what that means for early learning services, and then using the risk and protective factors to support the wellbeing and building resilience. And of course how, how can this be done within your learning community. So let's think about mental health within the early years. Mental health and wellbeing is related to healthy physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and mental health and wellbeing is essential for optimal development, learning and growth lifelong. So early childhood development and life experiences, contribute strongly to a person's mental health and wellbeing during their childhood and of course, have an, have an impact for later in life.

So to focus specifically on early childhood mental health and wellbeing, it is seen in the capacity of a young child within the context of their development, their family, their own environment and their culture to be able to participate in, in the physical and social environment as well as form healthy and secure relationships, experience, regulate and understand and express their emotions, as well as understand and regulate their behaviour and interact appropriately with others including their peers, and of course overall develop a secure sense of self. So this development process continues obviously throughout adolescence. And we know from birth, children experience relationships and learn skills that support their mental health for life. So when working in collaboration with parents, carers, families and the community, early childhood settings are really well-placed to support children's development throughout early childhood. So all these elements are also really good early child practise, as well as protective factors for mental health and that's what we'll be looking at a little bit later on as well. So that's pretty much the background of what mental health and early childhood thinks, thinks and looks like and feels like. And that to me always highlights how early childhood settings, this is what they're working with. They call practises during the day, you're already talking about participating in physical and social environments, you're considering how you can influence forming healthy and secure relationships. You're supporting children to experience and regulate and understand and express their emotions. So all of these things are encompassed in your daily practise. But we also know is that mental health exists on a continuum. Now, Be You will be able to provide you these resources and they sit on our website. So if you'd like to know more, you can find the links within the chat and you'll be able to understand a little bit more about mental health and the mental health continuum. So for today's purpose we're looking at the mental health continuum as existing on, on a continuum as, as we said and we have positive mental health on one end, mild and moderate symptoms in the middle and severe symptoms at the other end. It is also important to remember that when you're thinking of the continuum, where we sit can actually fluctuate and be influenced positively and negatively by our context, influencing factors, the environment that we're in, but it's also really important to understand and consider that even when mental health conditions exist, we can experience good mental health. On the other end of the - on the severe end of the continuum, we have mental health issues. And there's a difference between a mental health issue and the condition. So just - we're going to be a little bit more specific around what an issue is and what a condition is because that will influence our conversations later on in the session. So mental health issue encompasses various cognitive, emotional and behavioural issues that may cause concern or distress. And this effect help person thinks, feels and behaves. It can also be inclusive of issues which children and young people experience in relation to normal life stresses. So it covers the area of the continuum from the yellow zone which again is on the lower end of this continuum right through into the red zone. Now this is different from mental health condition. So when an individual has seen a health professional for the mental health issue, they might actually be diagnosed with a mental health condition. So this is a clinical diagnosis, such as depression and anxiety. And it relates to a condition that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional, or social abilities. Mental health conditions can cause distress and they impact on day-to-day functioning and relationships. So mental health conditions can also occur at any age or stage. And many commence during childhood and adolescence. And before we move on from that mental health continuum, I always like to point out that even though our diagram shows that the continuum exist on a line, we know that it doesn't always happen that way. Sometimes we have spirals, sometimes we have fluctuating moments during the day. So it is really important to understand that that continuum may look different for each particular person. And it exists separately in each individual. Do you agree, Rita?

Rita Johnston

Oh, absolutely. And, Paola, I like your idea of a spiral. You know, I think as adults we can often say, oh yes, we're spiralling up or, you know, we probably use that expression of spiralling down. And yes, as you say it's just every, you know, when we're looking at a model, we've got to be careful not to think that life is that simple. Mental health can change in the course of the day, week, month or a year in children and adults.

Paola Mercado

In moments.

Rita Johnston

And even in moments.

Paola Mercado

Yeah.

Rita Johnston

So...yes. So I think the continuum is the good model to start with but then in early childhood, we're graded observation. And so it's like taking that model and then looking at what your observations actually are and not necessary trying to fit an observation into the mental health continuum model. But using that model to inform your interpretations of observations of children and yourselves as well. It's a really useful tool for that.

Paola Mercado

That's a really lovely way of putting it, Rita, because you can understand that, again, as you know, that we're fluctuating through moments, and times, periods throughout our day. We can understand where a particular individual will actually be sitting, and even for us, that's where we're sitting on that particular continuum. So knowing all of that and thinking about all of that which was like a big information sort of drop there, we will move on to have a look at what are risk and protective factors. So what you're looking at on your screen are risk and protective factors, is the diagram of the risk and protective factors. Again, these diagrams and models, you will be able to find on the be you website. So feel free to click on the links, so access the links at a later point in time. The be you framework is grounded in risk and protective factors model and it encompasses the mental health trajectories. So we understand that throughout anybody's life course, there are a range of influences and events. So both positive and negative, and that impact individual's mental health. So again, that continuum, those having around those continuums. So these influences and events are also known as risk and protective factors. So, to differentiate, risk factors for children's mental health and well-being increase the likelihood of mental health issues developing during childhood and beyond. So these include any internal, biological or psychological, some family, or environmental characteristics, as well as experiences and events that perhaps challenged social and emotional well-being. One of those being the most recent events of the pandemic throwing everybody out slightly. So one of those could be scenes of risk factor. Protective factors decreased the likelihood of mental health issues and build and maintain resilience. Even when risk factors are preserved. So we're not trying to, we're not aiming to remove risk factors but we are trying to increase and enhance those individual's protective factors to allow them to become vulnerable to those. So enhancing individual, family and environmental protective factors means that children are less likely to be vulnerable. Because they receive the acceptance, the warmth and the support required for learning social and emotional development and resilience. So these are all important all the time not just after a clinical incident. However, we're thinking of these at the moment because we've recently experienced some changes, and perhaps now is a really good time to look at protective factors and what we can, I guess, intentionally provide the children and the families within our settings to increase those protective factors. Now, on your screen as I said, you'll see the model. So in the centre, we have the child, the family, the service the life events, and some social risk and protective factors on either side. So to expand on these, we have the - will start with the child and we'll have a look at perhaps some protective factors go along with children being having easy temperament. Now we know that not everybody is naturally given an easy temperament. But in early learning services, we are supporting children to create those personality traits and those characteristics to support them. Obviously, it isn't - the next one is good social emotional skills. And I think we will touch on that in a moment where we're looking at perhaps how we can include this in our early learning services. And of course well-developed cognitive skills. We're constantly challenging our children to think and to increase their learning and challenge their development in those senses, as well as good physical health and good language skills. So this again shows to me how well-placed early learning services are to create these protective factors. Now in a family, we have some stable home environment, so these are not necessarily what's going to be available to all the children but it's something to consider that. And I think what you were saying before (INAUDIBLE) was how we're so good at observation in early

learning services. And we have really solid relationships with their families, we understand the bigger context around the child of how this influence. And again, that relates back to the service how we flow on, on to the service and how the high quality education that we're providing for the children and the families who attend can create this increase in protective factors. So I'm going to move on to the life events. And we understand that there's a rest some life events that cannot be removed. So stressful life events - I think the beginning of the year has really shown to us all how it can be quite a stressful time. And also that highlights to me that these aren't necessarily able to be removed. So there are some risk factors that we cannot remove even if you choose to. So things like death of a family or particular experience of trauma. And again, that stressful life event that we will be through this worldwide pandemic. But what are we thinking about with risk, with protective factors on increasing those? So on the other side, we can see warm and supportive relationships with family members. And one example that comes to mind is when services have had to change their pick-up and drop-off routines. They've been able to maintain those warm and supportive relationships for those families in most children. But the impact of that risk factor has probably not been removed but it's certainly been diminished. And I think that's a really current example that we've seen recently. And also being inclusive of all those needs for change and really thinking about what we can do. So this is highlighted out that perception is how we can increase our protective factors as well. Did you have some examples that you wanted to share? I know when we were having conversation.

Rita Johnston

Yeah.

Paola Mercado

We could really extend on this, so.

Rita Johnston

One of the things that I really liked about the risk and protective factor model is that if you look at all those protective factors down to the service level, early learning services can influence every single one of those. Either directly or indirectly. And perhaps a really good takeaway activity would be, would be with you and your team to literally take this model or way which you could find a copy of it on our website, on the be you website, and look at how you are actually supporting all of those protective factors. And the example of the stable home environment, we all have children in our early learning services that don't have that. And perhaps never will have that. But if they come to your early learning service and you provide the stable early learning service environment, what you're providing is the extended family, the additional family. You're not replacing the original family because those relationships that child has with that family, even if they're difficult, are unique. But you can value add by giving those strong, secure relationships in your early learning setting. And, you know, the research is in now that children at risk in particular, when they go to high quality early learning environments, and I stress high quality, their lifelong outcomes radically improve. And you can look at the Be You resources and also get on the internet yourself and find all of that evidence that shows that. So, your early learning environment, which is a stable, supportive, warm environment with secure attachments, and I've read those off the family section, as you provide those, you're going to change the outcomes for children, you're going to add to their protective factors. The other thing I wanted to say, Paola, was about the lifelong events, other life events, that there's also evidence that shows that when there's a traumatic event like a fire, flood, death, that when the child has that stable, steady, strong adult who can say to them, "It's OK. I will take care of you. I will keep you safe." And then that you actually have some emotional wellbeing and also practical strategies in place, when you put those in place, then the child may feel, will feel distressed for a while, but they will recover over time quite quickly. It's when children go through traumatic life events, if they don't have that strong, secure adult, then that's when the trauma can continue and can be unresolved. So yeah, so this is, I love this model, it's fabulous to use, as I said, as a framework again, to take that lens on what it is, what practises you're actually using in your service, and what can you add? What else can you do? What am I, what are we already doing? What else can we do?

Paola Mercado

That's exactly right. And I think it's really important when we're looking at these protective factors, it's a

really good way of acknowledging and really considering the things that are already being allowed for. And it's really important to share this with your team to actually acknowledge that there is some great work that's already happening, but this will provide you with a really good mental health lens and perspective as to the reasons why providing those warm and secure relationships are so important, not just in the follow up to a critical incident, but I guess in general in daily practises why these are important. And as you were talking, one of the social ones that jumped out at me was the economic security. So, there are families who have been impacted by the pandemic who have either lost their jobs and have suffered financially. However, their children who are still accessing the care still have the warm relationships and that secure base that they are continuing to go to on a daily basis and have those the consistent adults within their life to provide them and support them through this. The other thing I want to highlight with this particular list is that we know that it's not an exhaustive list. So, there are other things that we can add on to here. And perhaps that's a really nice way for you to reflect on what protective factors you currently have happening within your service and what else you could perhaps add or include. And maybe there's some that are not highlighted here. I know for personally, for myself, one of them that's not highlighted here is our connection to nature. And that also can relate to some cultural safety as well. So, if we're thinking about how we can incorporate and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, that perhaps we need to consider some cultural safety around that as well. But I think you also have some examples of connecting to nature and how that's a protective factor for many.

Rita Johnston

Well, you know, once again, we're discovering that being in nature is a great regulator of feelings and being in nature helps children to come and settle and adults as well. It's, you know, we're being called a nature-deprived society these days. And I think those services out there who are already have some nature pedagogy and getting out into country, going to parks, or even just getting out and creating a playground and environment in their early learning service that has got a lot more natural elements, find that when children are out in nature, they will calm, they will regulate and they will recover from trauma and stress much more quickly. So, once again, it's something you can research yourselves to find some more evidence around that, but as I said, as people who're already doing that, we'll guarantee you that this is a really great thing for children. In fact, I've also got an example. You were talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. A service I worked with quite a while ago, there was a boy whose grandma died and they were very close and that boy reacted very strongly to that death of a family member. But what regulated him, what helped him to work through his distress was a gardening project. So, in the early learning service, they particularly created a garden and they had, they shifted their focus from indoors to outdoors, to a lot more outdoor activities, a lot more gardening for this with this particular boy as the focus and the stimulus for this change of practise and this developmental practise. And, you know, the parents reported that it really helped this child work through their distress feelings and start to recover. We're not asking that children don't feel distress or grief or shock or pain or anger, but what we're wanting to do is help children and adults to work through that in a very natural way and not to get stuck because that's where you get ongoing trauma and stress where we may need extra professional help is when we get in that stuck place with our emotional reactions to stress and trauma. So, nature for me, personally, myself is an incredible protective factor. And I think for all the children that you're teaching and caring for in your learning environments accessing nature is a really strong protective factor as well.

Paola Mercado

That's a really great point because only recently have I realised my need for connection to nature is so important. And what was highlighted during the pandemic when we had to be socially isolated, not having the, I guess, the access to outdoors as much as I had been, really had an impact. And therefore I needed to think about how I was going to prioritise my time and my personal family's time, to be in the outdoors and what we could do in the meantime to get us through that. But that connection to land, to nature, to open skies really, really is important to think about. So again, this isn't an exhaustive list. So, please feel free. We're hoping that you've been able to share some thoughts during the chat and if you have any risk and protective factors that perhaps you've identified, feel free to share those as well, but only share what you

feel comfortable with at this point in time. So, moving along, we'll have a look at this image of a balance. And you can see that obviously you will have to contextualise the risk and protective factors that happen within your learning community and your context and your service as well. So, we're aware that we have all types of early learning services here today. We have family day-care, we have out of school hours care, vacation care, as well as long day-care, preschool, all sorts. So, feel free to think about how this will benefit and how it will look like within your context and also within your wider team of educators. So, looking at the image, on the left side, we have, of course, the stressful life events and low self-esteem. And on the right side, we have inclusion, good physical health, stable home environments. Now these are just examples of what can sit on either end of the balance. So, what we're thinking about is things like inclusion. So, how are you promoting inclusion within your setting? Whether it's a language barrier that perhaps a child or a family may have, if there's some social isolation that's happening there. Another point is the good physical health. Now we understand that due to people's differing physical abilities, that may not always be possible. However, thinking about being inclusive of those physical abilities, how is that being promoted and being addressed within your early learning service and how can you increase the capacity for that individual? Again, I think Rita mentioned before, we know that not all children come from a stable home environment. Not everybody has that. And that's where the importance of your early learning service providing that stability for those individuals and those families. And obviously thinking about an educator's perspective, how that happens for you. And again, highlighting our own risk and protective factors and understanding how they influence our daily practise and what happens to the children that are in our care during our daily practises. So we're going to move on to our second poll now, thinking of all the information that we've just had a look at, thinking about the risk and protective factors. And our second poll question now moves onto how confident are you now to identify risk and protective factors within your learning community? So, there's four options there, whether you're not at all confident, you're still feeling a little bit uncertain, you're a little bit confident, or perhaps somewhat confident, or maybe you're very confident now at thinking about perhaps, you know, how you can identify risk and protective factors. So, how are we going, Rita?

Rita Johnston

We've done something really well, because there is nobody now who's not at all confident. So, that small percentage for whom this was a brand new topic, now feel a bit more informed. And we've got only 2% who've got a little knowledge, as opposed to 24% earlier who only had some knowledge. And so basically, 65% feel very confident, and 32% somewhat confidence. So, that's virtually 98%.

Paola Mercado

That's great.

Rita Johnston

Of you guys now feel somewhat or very confident in actually identifying risk and protective factors at your setting, which is fabulous.

Paola Mercado

It is fabulous, because we're starting to understand the context and I guess how it can relate back to our learning community, and how it relates back to our practises as educators and how we can influence those. And again, thinking about how we can increase those protective factors in our daily practises with the children and families, ourselves, and how that has a lifelong impact on the mental health trajectory of individuals. So, it's really, really nice to see that. And hopefully, for the small percentage who are still not feeling quite confident, please feel free to go to the website and access those resources that have been provided to you within the chat. All those links and the resources sit on our website, and they are completely free for you to access. So, that's where you will find the model of the risk and protective factors as well. And there's more information in that, cause there's only so much we can fit within this particular session. So, we're going to move on to, perhaps, thinking about what's happening within your early learning service, and these reflective questions that are sitting there. Rita and I are going to have a bit of a discussion around them. But we'd like you to consider these from your perspective. So again, what early learning service are you coming from? Think of your community, think of the diversity within your families,

perhaps the diversity within your team of educators, and different learning styles as well. Again, we ask you to share anything that you may have in the chat box, and share what you're comfortable with, but also we'd like you to think about these reflective questions as perhaps something that you could take back to your wider team of educators, so that way you can have a wider conversation, and have that contextualisation within your service, to suit your particular learning community. And hopefully, it will be different to others, because that's the whole beauty of Be You, is how it can be contextualised to suit your individual needs and your learning community needs. So, thinking about how do risk and protective factors influence the mental health of our learning community, again, how is this going to happen? How can we embed protective factors into our daily practises? So, we know what risk and protective factors are, but how can we embed them into daily practises with children and young people, our families, our community members and our co-workers? Now, one particular example that I have is how a service that I worked with a little while ago, they used the risk and protective factors model to actually have a wider conversation. And this is where they were able to really acknowledge that they were doing great work already. And that the work that we're doing was going to have that lifelong impact on positive mental health for children. So, what they were able to do is identify additional protective factors. And in their daily documentation, they were able to really relate back to those protective factors and include those protective factors into all of the documentation that they were doing for the individual children. So, that's one little example, but I think there are other ways that we can embed this. And I think you mentioned some before, Rita, how some early learning services have Bush Kindy, or they are able to access outdoor areas on a regular basis, and that additional need for a protective factor, how they're able to increase that as well. Do we have anything else coming through the chat?

Rita Johnston

There was a bit of a discussion about how, basically, all the early learning curriculum can be done as an outdoor curriculum. And it's certainly done in different parts of the world and in some services in Australia. There's some examples here of during the lockdown that we've had. Wendy has said that they've continued communication with families through electronic communication, whoops, that's just disappeared, to build understanding amongst the staff. But there was another one who... and I just can't find it now. So, I'm sorry I can't acknowledge the person who popped it in there, but it was that they were doing cooking and all sorts of other things online via Zoom meetings to include those children who were not attending preschool or kindy and who were attending from home. So, it sounds like it was a bit of a play school on the air type sessions.

Paola Mercado

But how incredible for those services to acknowledge the need for those children to have equal accessibility, I guess. And we also have to acknowledge that there are some communities who lack internet, or there are some families who perhaps lack the access to technology. However, early learning services are being quite creative as to how they can maintain. And I think the underlying thing is maintaining those relationships, and why it's so important to have those stable relationships between both, is being able to think about the children that you are caring for, that are coming to your educational setting, and how you're able to cater to those protective factors and increase those. Even though we are being physically distant, we are still able to maintain those things, which is really, really quite important.

Rita Johnston

I wanted to say something else also about the embedding. As I was preparing for this presentation that we're having together. What I realised is that the Be You framework model, which some of you will be familiar with, which includes the areas of mentally healthy community, children's resilience, family partnerships, responding together and the support one. So, you don't have to know the names of them to know what they are, but using the Be You framework, with the risk and protective factors model, can help you to see that, gee, we've got a lot of protective factors in social emotional skills, for example, or in family support, but we might not have a lot of protective factors in understanding what mental health is, for example. So, you can actually use that framework, pull out that framework, pull out the model that we've been talking about right now and see which of the areas that you're already strong in and see which areas

you might need to grow some protective factors. So, for example, for everyone to understand what good mental health is and how to promote good mental health and how to stay mentally healthy and what to do if your mental health is declining, for your educators and family members to feel comfortable with those discussions is an incredible protective factor for your whole community. Another way to embed is also around your policy documents, because well, before that is identifying what you already do, because often I've seen early learning services throw out really good practise because somebody new turns up and they go, "Oh, I don't like that." Or, "That doesn't, you know, tickle my fancy." And so, maybe they throw out a practise, which is actually a really simple, it could be a simple practise. And I always think of, you know, children signing in with a photo. So, that's often what happens in, you know, preschool and say the other Tuesday, they will pull out their photo and they stick it on a Velcro board. So, they've all signed in. And I used to do that at my service because I thought it was just the cute thing to do. Somebody else did it and I copied them and the kids seem to love it. It was only after I started learning about, more specifically about early childhood mental health that I understood that this was a way to show children that they belonged, to help them to connect to the early learning service and to each other that showed that they were valued, that gave them a sense of agency and identity and place. And they're all protective factors. So, that one little activity is building and supporting... A whole lot of protective factors. And I could imagine that another educator might have taken my place when I lived in God, oh, look, I couldn't be bothered doing that this year because I have to do the photos and have to, you know, put the laminate, you know, laminate them and have to put the Velcro on them and have to set up the board and doesn't, you know, and could have easily just thrown that out. So, for me, it's really important to after you've looked at all of this, then go to back to your policy framework, and then your practises. And as you more and more identify practises that support mental health and well-being that will protective factors, and you name them in the same way as you were sharing Paula with, you know, the, you know, you're writing up for the children and putting in which protective factors you're working with in your documentation. As you do all that practise, then it becomes completely embedded in the service and it's much more difficult for a new broom to come and sweep out good practise, which I think we all know has happened in our sector, and hopefully it's happening less and less and less. But yeah, once things are embedded in practise, embedded in policy, when families also understand have that understanding, then it's much more likely to be embedded and then stay embedded into the future.

Paola Mercado

They're really awesome points that you've just highlighted because we're thinking about the embedding and in Early Learning Services, we're always looking for quality improvement. So starting with your policies and procedures is great. But I think it going back that extra step of having that bigger conversation with your wider team and everybody acknowledging that these are really important, I guess, ways of working, that are going to have an impact for everybody, not just the children, but it has that ripple effect on your family. It also has the ripple effect onto educators themselves, which then again, provides the link into your wider local community. So all of those have an impact, and how we embed that is going to be really, really important. So using the risk and protective factors model can be a really good starting point for everybody to have that general understanding and knowing what mental health is and what it looks like for your particular learning community.

Rita Johnston

And to follow on, on from Paola's point about the whole learning community and the whole family community and extended community - I wasn't planning to do this, but this is where the Be You framework is perfect because it is a whole of learning community framework. It's not just for someone to go off and do a bit of training and then come back and try and disseminate it. It's accessible to every educator, it's accessible to family members, it's accessible to the wider community. And so using the Be You framework and the Be You learning tools is a great way to get everyone on the same page so that you're all working together in harmony, rather than sometimes, you know, we do get some push me pull you with one person having one idea and the other person having another idea. And the Be You framework helps to bring those different perspectives together in an evidence based framework so that you can still...

Paola Mercado

Absolutely.

Rita Johnston

..you can have a wide enough framework where everyone can be working together in harmony to the, the best outcomes for educators, children and families.

Paola Mercado

Yeah and I think that's why that example fits in so well where you're thinking about the protective factors and how you can increase those out because if I'm thinking of an example here, where a long day-care service, and you have the babies and toddlers room, and then you have the other rooms, the preschool room, and all those different rooms, but all of those educators within that particular service, were able to identify the protective factors for each individual child. So and of course that goes along with their documentation. So all of leadership was on board. Everybody had that uniform approach to understanding why protective factors were so important to embed into their daily practises, not necessarily just because it was a response to a critical incident, or at the moment, you know, where we're trying to come back from this pandemic. So not just because of that, how important it is to increase those protective factors. And again, the flow on effect for the educators within that space. And I remember when we had our original conversation as we were getting our presentation together, I specifically remember you making a comment of, "I didn't know they were called protective factors." And I thought that little comment really encompasses of what's happening out in our early learning services that when you look at these risk and protective factors, you can really acknowledge the fabulous work that's already happening there. And you can be a little bit more intentional about how you can increase those protective factors. So perhaps thinking about increasing the protective factor and if you want to look at the outdoor environment to increase that as a predictive factor as well, then all these things will come into play and having a conversation with your wider team of educators is going to be worthwhile. So, we are coming up towards the end of our session. But before we wrap up, I would really like you to share in the chat box if you have, since our conversation, highlighted any particular protective factors that you may think are new to your knowledge now, or that you've been made aware of at this point in time. And again, we can take all these back and hopefully you're able to see the chat box as well and share any examples.

Rita Johnston

I've just seen a really interesting comment. It says, "Wendy says it has been powerful to reflect on routine movements in our kindy program plan. Looking at this through the protective factor lens would be empowering." So looking at basically transitions through that protective factor lens. So yeah, that's such an interesting perspective, absolutely.

Paola Mercado

Yeah and reflecting again on the especially with the current context, we're in services who have had to change their daily pickup and drop off routines. That's a transition point in your daily practises. However, being intentional about having those protective factors in place, those warm and secure relationships that does that hasn't changed. You're still providing those warmer secure relationships, and that stable environment for the children to be, to come into your care. So that really highlights to me having that mental health lens put on to those daily routines, as Wendy has pointed out. So let's have a look at your role within all of this. So I think we've sort of had a bigger conversation about what your role is, but it's also important to remember that you do have a central role of influence, so strengthening those protective factors Oh, I can see you've got....

Rita Johnston

I've got something from Jotone, who says educational leaders must understand their role is to guide and help others to bring out their best and improve on their weaknesses, not to push them down or focus on their weaknesses only.

Paola Mercado

And that's a predict-

Rita Johnston

And that's exactly what we're talking about is, yeah.

Paola Mercado

Really identifying what those are, though, and increasing those protective factors. And I guess this brings me to this perfect point is providing support when needed. So educational leaders are providing that support for the educators. Leadership is providing that support for the wider team. As educators we're providing that for the children and the families that come into our care and into our learning community. But it's also really important to point out that your own well-being is just as important. So, again, that goes to show that your well-being really is a reflection of how we also personally need to be aware of our own risk and protective factors because we all bring risk and protective factors to our life and to what we do.

Rita Johnston

And in fact someone service started with risk and protective factors and asked their educators to take this time and privately look at their own risk and protective factors in their own lives before they started to look at them in the lives of their children and families and service. And also educated well-being is regularly the first focus for people for services engaging with Be You, so we really understand that currently, educator well-being is really, really critical. There have been so many demands on early learning educators over the last five years and then over the last, you know, two months. So, educator well-being is also an incredibly powerful and positive entry point for looking at the Be You framework. And there's lots of resources on the website as well.

Paola Mercado

And I think that's a really valuable activity, I guess that you know, thing I'm thinking about that image of the balance. So having an idea and a personal reflection as to what are your risk factors and how you can increase your protective measures. So we will leave you with that. And it's, we have to wrap up our session. But please have a look at all of our social media handles. They're all listed for you there. And we do encourage you to continue to engage with Be You and learn more and obviously keep up to date with what's happening. So to wrap up, we'd like to thank you all for joining us today. And it's been a pleasure to have you thank you for sharing in the chat. We hope that you continue to enjoy the webinar, and sorry, the virtual conference, and we hope to see you at another time soon. And we'll be back tomorrow.

Rita Johnston

We will be back tomorrow at 2:00.

Paola Mercado

Read through the sessions. So feel free to have another little break as you break out to your next session. And thank you once again.

End of webinar.