

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Practical strategies for promoting wellbeing in primary school communities

Presented by Joyce Tam (headspace) and Melinda Phillips (headspace)

Joyce Tam

Hello everyone and thank you for joining us for today's session, practical strategies for promoting wellbeing in primary school communities. We've enjoyed the keynote session focusing on the role communities play in supporting mental health and wellbeing, led by Judie and Debbie, and we look forward to unpacking some of the themes around learning communities together in this session. We are conscious, as Judie and Debbie mentioned, that we're currently working in schools in complex and uncertain times. More than ever, we know supporting wellbeing is a core priority for all of us at the moment and we look forward to sharing some practical strategies for supporting mentally healthy communities and hearing your ideas too as we navigate through this unique year. My name is Joyce Tam, senior clinical consultant with the New South Wales Headspace school team. My background is a psychologist working in a range of clinical and community settings, and I am delighted to be joined by Melinda Phillips, education consultant on our team. Melinda, would you like to share a little bit about yourself today?

Melinda Phillips

Thanks, Joyce. It's great to be here. I have a teaching background and I've worked in a range of roles supporting school communities for the last 15 years or so too. And I wanted to take the opportunity to say that we're talking about mental health in whole school communities today and this includes us as staff too. So, take the opportunity, we'd like to invite you in the next 50 minutes or so to think about your own wellbeing and self-care too. And I'd like to acknowledge that Joyce and I are joining you today from the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. And as an initiative with national reach, we'd like to extend our respect to all Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. Today, we have people joining us from all over the country, so it would be wonderful if people could share their own acknowledgement by putting the name of the country that they're on into the chat, and the moderators will also share a link in the chat to a map which can help if you'd like to know what land or country you're on, and this map comes from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. And Always Be You is a suite of resources that's also available within Be You to assist learning communities to consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. We recognise the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of this resource and we'll also share a link to this resource with you now.

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And now, we'd like to tell you a little bit about Be You, for those of you who mightn't know too much about Be You or haven't been to one of our virtual conferences before. Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators and the organiser of this conference. It's led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace and it's completely free and available to every educator and also every learning service and school across Australia. Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and also their own mental health. It offers educators a range of online professional learning options, fact sheets, webinars, and other resources, and it also focuses on the needs of whole school communities with tools and processes to implement that whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. The discussions that we'll have throughout the conference will continue to highlight Be You resources, tools, and professional learning to show you how Be You can support that whole school approach to mental health.

Joyce Tam

So, recent events have reinforced the need for mental health wellbeing strategies in early learning services and schools, and this conference covers three key themes in ten sessions over two days. So firstly, it's about mental health and wellbeing, a whole school community approach. We know that most effective approach to mental health prevention and promotion is one that involves a whole school learning community including leaders, educators, children, and young people, and also families and the wider local community. Secondly, it's about prepare and taking care, so looking at critical incidents in uncertain times. And lastly, the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships. So most of the sessions in the two days conference are aimed at learning stages, so early learning, primary school, and secondary school, and this session is relevant to primary school communities. So Mel, what will we be talking about today?

Melinda Phillips

Well, we'll be taking the opportunity to explore how a range of people across our schools can contribute to that mental health and wellbeing of the whole community. We invite your contributions in the chat box too, so please do send your comments in and we'll have some time at the end for questions, so please send them through. Be You has so much to offer in this session, and as we've mentioned, our moderators will be sharing links to help you navigate around Be You with some specific ideas about things that we've been talking about. And more specifically, we'll be looking at five things today. So firstly, why are partnerships important in schools to support mental health and wellbeing? Who should we partner with at our school? What community needs can we identify and why are these an important consideration for us? What risk and protective factors might we consider? And finally, what are some practical strategies and ideas that primary schools have used to build and sustain these mentally healthy communities? And we look forward to sharing these strategies with you from schools both from the last few months and also how they've been managing in the earlier times too. And strategies that work for you at your school may work for others too, so please do use the chat box to share the great things that you're doing at your school.

Joyce Tam

So, thank you very much for that Mel. So, we've just mentioned about the chat box, and another way we encourage you to interact with us is actually via the poll that would be running throughout the session. So, the first poll will give us a sense of who is joining us today, and further polls will enable you to share your thoughts on other issues with us too. So, please let us know where you're joining us from today. And whilst you reply, I just wanted to let everyone know that Be You team are also based across Australia with consultant supporting schools and early learning services in every state and territory. So now, I'm just gonna check the poll. OK. And it looks like we've got a few results in. So, we've got about 36 percent coming from New South Wales. Hello. And also, from Queensland, we've got about 16 percent, and from Victoria, we've got about 30 percent or so, and also from Western Australia and South Australia, and some more from Tasmania and also the Northern Territory. So, welcome.

Melinda Phillips

Thanks Joyce. And welcome to people from across Australia. That's just great to know. And so, why are partnerships important? Well, we know that a sense of belonging and connection are really critical for the mental health and wellbeing of all members of the community. Partnering with others allows us to connect with all of the important groups in our community and foster a sense of belonging with every group. And these partnerships, in turn, are important in what they bring to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Effective partnerships really contribute in two ways. Firstly, by strengthening that broader mental health and wellbeing landscape in the school community and also through enabling specific interactions that can support specific children and young people. So, partnerships are working at both levels. And in looking at the elements on the next slide, this slide, firstly, it's mentioned in the keynote presentation, partnerships are key to strengthening the protective factors available for each child and for our school communities as a whole. And we'll return to these protective factors soon. And secondly, trust is built over time through everyone involved being inclusive, respectful, honest, and reliable, and doing what they say they'll do. Our work in schools is relational and we're constantly working to strengthen relationships with each other and with our families at a range of different levels with our office staff, executive staff, with our teachers and support staff too. This means that in challenging times, we've got those trusting relationships built that can allow us to have, what might be, a difficult conversation to support families through some challenging times they might be experiencing and to continue to develop and evolve those relationships with families as children develop and change over time.

And absolutely in the last few months, those genuine trusting relationships have allowed us within our communities to really know that we're all in this together as we navigate the challenges that we've been facing as a school community. And finally, partnerships support learning and wellbeing outcomes because children and young people really benefit when the important adults in their lives are working together. Children and young people also benefit when they have a say and are included in decision making too. And in the end these wellbeing outcomes are life outcomes for the children and young people we support, and a really core focus for all our work. We know that children's wellbeing is linked to improved relationships, their learning and creativity, their social skills, their emotional skills and their physical health. And for more information on some of what I've just been talking about, you can visit the three modules within the Be You's mentally healthy communities domain, understand, connect and include.

Joyce Tam

Thanks very much, Mel. So who should we be building partnerships with?

Melinda Phillips

Well, Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory, which we've popped up on the slide outlines the importance of healthy and strong family and community connections to support and promote the wellbeing of children and young people. While families is certainly the first and most important influence on children's development, there are many other influential aspects in that social environment. The most closely involved, family, school and peers, are at the centre of the circle and then others are present in those central circles with some other significant social aspects in the outer ring.

Joyce Tam

So how can we actually implement this model in terms of building partnerships?

Melinda Phillips

It can feel like we already know who our key people in our school community are and perhaps we do. But taking the opportunity to pause and reflect is really important though, as it gives us the space to question our assumptions and identify other people and groups that might be less immediately visible. It also gives us the space to work out which partnerships are flourishing at the moment, which might be going just OK and which partnerships we might need to start and support. And using a socio ecological model like this one, is one way your school can map its existing connections for children, young people and their families.

Knowing and working with these key stakeholders to uncover community needs and perceptions, enables the needs analysis that you do to be really rich and multi layered and consider a range of perspectives. Sometimes we might need to do a little bit of planning on how best to engage with different groups. But especially I think, for those who are participating like this might be a newer experience, but generally, our work is really well rewarded in long and trusting relationships that we can build with families.

Joyce Tam

So, Mel, what about children themselves?

Melinda Phillips

Well, that's a great question, Joyce, and the importance of each unique individual is highlighted is really central in this model. And this affirms the importance of partnering with those children and young people themselves too. We really need to recognise and build their agency and their capacity to share their views on what's needed as we identify those next steps and then to get them to help us build and maintain our mentally healthy community.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So we have discussed a range of important groups within our school. And we all find that some groups might be easier to work with, whilst others in building a mentally healthy learning community. So we've shared a poll on the screen here, let us know who you find it easiest to partner with. And this is worthwhile because it will let us know our personal strengths and also those groups that may need some reflection and planning time to ensure successful outcome.

Just checking the poll now.

Melinda Phillips

Maybe scroll up.

Joyce Tam

OK. Yes, so, yes, thank you so much for the results. So now they've come back. That staff would be, we've got about 48, 49%, that people find it most easiest to work with, followed by students and then families and then community organisations Mel.

Melinda Phillips

Great, thank you for sharing that everyone. And it is just to back up what Joyce said earlier, it's that idea about knowing who we naturally feel really comfortable working with and also putting some attention around those partnerships that we might find a little bit more challenging or that take a little bit more work to work out how best to do those as well. And we're now moving on to look at how we work with our partners to identify those community needs that we talked about. So we know our school communities well and we might feel that we have a really good sense of what our community's wellbeing needs are.

And building on this by working together with all those partners we've just identified to confirm some needs and identify others is really inclusive of partner perspectives and their strengths. And at its heart inclusion is about encouraging everyone to participate. In addition, we know that in our current context at the moment with physical distancing and changes to work and family for many families work and learning for many families, our community needs might likely have changed and expanded. Our partnerships are really key in identifying what these needs are, as some may be less visible, while they've got less physical involvement on our school grounds. So we can't do this work alone. There are three important considerations that we've also shared on the slide. And firstly, we need to be really clear on our purpose, why we wanna gather the information especially at the moment in our current times. The more intentional we can be about those wise, the more they can guide us in our next steps that we wanna take.

Secondly, we can be really open and creative in how we wanna capture everybody's voice. In addition to Be You surveys and other surveys we might use at school and other Be You tools too like the reflection and implementation tool, we might consider a key question on a whiteboard, or a question box and some slips

outside classrooms for parents and carers. And we might consider that kind of a suggestion box too in the staff room for staff to anonymously share. Do we consider inviting different partners to focus groups? Do we ask children and young people to survey their peers in different groups to find out what they think? And also how can we best be inclusive of the different cultures that are represented at our school and people's preferred ways of communicating? Would some people like the chance to be anonymous? And would others like to hear what other people think before they have the chance to communicate and contribute? And finally, a broad approach to get gathering useful information means that we're taking a strength based approach in addition to uncovering those needs. What is working? What do people want to contribute? And what are people interested in achieving in supporting that whole school wellbeing.

Joyce Tam

So, thanks, Mel, I'll be sharing a link of the Be You tools mentioned in the chat box. So Mel we looked at risk and protective factors in the keynote presentation, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Melinda Phillips

Well, as mentioned in the keynote session, throughout anybody's life course there are a range of influences and events, both positive and negative, that impact an individual's mental health. And these are known as risk and protective factors. Risk factors for young people's mental health and wellbeing really can increase the likelihood of mental health issues developing during childhood and also beyond and protective factors on the other hand, decrease the likelihood of mental health issues and build and maintain resilience, even when those risk factors are present. Enhancing individual family and environmental protective factors means that young people are less likely to be vulnerable, because they're receiving that acceptance and more than support that is required for learning for social emotional development and for building resilience.

And it's really important to remember too, that these lists aren't prescriptive and they don't determine the outcomes for any particular child or young person. Everyone is different and it's often a combination of factors that can contribute to a mental health issue. So while risk factors might often indicate circumstances that severely challenge a young person's mental health and wellbeing, predicting whether an individual might develop a mental health issue isn't straightforward. For example, sometimes risk factors can result from an isolated event, but more often, however, several risk factors might combine with one another and it's their combined effect that can lead to issues. For example, for a young person, a difficult transition to school, coupled with poor connections at school and a sense of social isolation could mean a child or young person is more vulnerable to developing a mental health issue. But what's really exciting to know is that the evidence shows that school communities and effective partnerships with parents and carers can really maximise those protective factors and at times address risk factors for the children and young people within our community.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. So what risks and protective factors are relevant for each school community?

Melinda Phillips

Well, they're so unique to each school's context, and it's great to identify what these are in partnership with other key people in the school. The views of the action team are really important, but so are those of other staff, families and other key members in the community. Working together to identify these risk and protective factors as a community for the community, really support buying and commitment from others as we make plans and enact those plans across the school. So this process is a really shared work. It provides a really solid foundation for the shared work to come that we'll do as a school. And we'll share some links to some related resources in the chat.

Joyce Tam

So ad hoc work by passionate educators and community members is brilliant, but in the end it is generally not sustainable. There is just so much going on at a school and that having a plan for school, community wellbeing, and using your planning cycle is a very smart way to respect people's time and commitment and leverage their contribution for a bigger impact. How can partners remain involved in different ways beyond

the first step that we've discussed, identifying community's needs.

Melinda Phillips

When you've identified something really important, Joyce, because at times with so many plans going on in schools, it can be a really challenging task due to everyone's competing demands and our own limited time. However, this only makes it more important to consult with others the whole way through, because it helps us identify the best way to do things without needing to double back and try another strategy. Although we've all been there and done that too. We only ever have some of the information and by bringing other people in, we can find out the information that they have too. And importantly, when people change roles at schools as happens in schools, it means that there's a plan that's not tied to one person's knowledge and experience, but it's a plan that's shared. And to answer your question, Joyce, inviting feedback on newly developed plans from family and the community is a really valuable step. And it demonstrates that commitment to partnership. This might include specifically seeking the voices and comments of those that might be less visible to ensure that all people are included. And in addition, some groups can be ongoing partners, and this might be the executive team, the positive behaviour team and others reach out and keep partnering to bring people along with you.

Joyce Tam

OK. So what about taking action steps, Mel?

Melinda Phillips

Well that third part, the taking action step, is the fun part. And using action plans to guide actions provides direction and structured a team members and partners, and allows the work to be understood by others and not hidden behind a plan. Remember plans aren't fixed either and they can be modified while in action. And our current context is a really perfect example. There would have been some beautiful wellbeing plans created in term four last year for 2020. And while the ideas of those would likely still have underpinned the work of schools in the last few months, they will have been modified and responding to changing circumstances with an adapted plan is a really smart move as it helps everybody to feel reassured that wellbeing still a priority and that thoughtful work is being done.

Joyce Tam

OK. And finally, reflection on how things have gone.

Melinda Phillips

Thank you, Joyce. And this final step is really important. Often in the business of school, taking the time to pause and reflect can feel like a luxury, but it's anything but, because taking the time to reflect helps teams to talk about what worked and what didn't and what needs to happen next. And again, although it can feel easier, this isn't work for a few key people to do by themselves. Asking partners to share their views and reflecting on that information on stories and data gathered from a range of sources is a really important part of gaining a full picture of the work, because this then gives us that nice solid platform on which to plan our next steps.

Joyce Tam

That's great. And this provides some ideas for the 2020 action plan. So, now let's look at some school examples.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah, that'd be great. It'd be good to move on and talk about schools. And we'd like to spend the remainder of the session sharing with you some of the strategies that have been undertaken by school teams with key partners in the last few months with parents and carers, community providers, students, and of course staff. So these strategies that we're going to talk about may affirm some of the things that you're already undertaking, and it might give you some ideas and prompts, some connections with things you already doing too. And we'd really love to hear from you too. And we'll be asking you to share any great strategies that you've tried when working with your key partners in the chat as we go along too.

Joyce Tam

OK. So, well, this slide is about building parent engagement and you've mentioned family centred practise. What do we mean by that?

Melinda Phillips

Well, family centred practise is about supporting parents and carers to be actively involved in their children and young people's development and their education. And what it means, I guess, is really drawing on family's knowledge and understanding and their resources and their strengths to assist in shared decision making. It also occurs when we share information about their children and young people with them in a really open, respectful, and collaborative way. Because when we do this with families, this helps families feel confident that they've been seen and that their needs have been identified and their roles have been acknowledged. Our current experience of course, has meant that family centred practise has taken a central role in just about every school around Australia in the last few months, even if we haven't named it, like this. Schools have been working so tremendously hard to foster connections and support families as those families have taken you and unexpected roles in supporting the learning and wellbeing of their students.

Joyce Tam

So in the chat box here, we invite you to share how your school community has supported family team engage with student learning during this time. So, Mel, have you got any examples that you would like to share?

Melinda Phillips

Well, there are so many great stories. One team at a Sydney primary school prepared learning and wellbeing packs for some of their most vulnerable families. And these were big plastic tubs and they were filled with picture books and, you know, cards and pencils and crayons and pencil cases with some traits tucked in there as well. And many other schools have had learning packs with some wellbeing resources, generally two that have been safely delivered, collected at school or posted home as well as of course the delivery online that we've been seeing too, and many schools have also continued to support their children and their families through wellbeing strategies in a multiplicity of ways. Some of the beautiful ones that we've seen have been key principle messages shared in blogs on Facebook posts and in emails home, we've seen some tremendous visuals that schools have created in order to share important information with their families, webinar links to great resources, and also some really terrific plain but easily understood parent friendly resources in English and a range of other languages as well.

People have been sending individual emails home to families sharing, I guess, the support and resources that are available for their children and executive teams at many schools have been in contact with the families of vulnerable students weekly or often more week, more often than weekly to check in with those children and see how they're going. And I think really importantly, it's this combination of support that has built on what was existing before the last few months, but also innovating and finding new ways to support families that have been really crucial in keeping up that engagement and that family connection and the wellbeing information that's been shared of course, complements the great learning information that's been shared in so many ways too. And we're conscious that schools around Australia have been really working so hard as families transitioned back onsite and learning takes place again on our school grounds in many places. So email and phone conversations about how children and young people have found that transition have been really important as has a renewed understanding of the new knowledge that parents and carers often have about how their children learn best and the kinds of supports that they've needed to put in place for their own kids. And also from the school's perspective, there might've been glimpses into family lives that mean there's a greater understanding there too, and it will be really great important work over the next few months and even years as we weave that new knowledge in to how we've already been engaging with our families.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. These are great examples and it's really lovely to see the creativity behind or the lovely ideas and in action. So let's see now what we've got in our chat here. So we've got a few comments coming in, so. Thank you so much for your comments, Josh. So, providing laptops and internet connection where that wasn't present before and ensuring that all were connected remotely.

Melinda Phillips

Oh, that's fantastic. Because we know it's an assumption that everybody has internet access within family homes. So that's a terrific initiative to hear about.

Joyce Tam

Yeah, it sounds great. And also we've got a comment from Kirsty. So as distant education centre, that they're well prepared for the changes that occur during the COVID pandemic.

Melinda Phillips

Absolutely, Kirsty, you are terrifically well-placed. You had a lot of those strategies down pat that the rest of us were learning as quickly as we could.

Joyce Tam

Yes. And also from Ryan, engaging with parents and students with planners and encouraging dialogues between home and teachers.

Melinda Phillips

Fantastic. That's so great. And I think it's that extending the opportunity and the invitation to speak in many different ways so that we can offer the ways that different families need is a really important step that many families in schools have taken.

Joyce Tam

Yeah. And so we've also got a message from Jennifer. So our school has at least two people within the school contacting each family each week.

Melinda Phillips

Oh, that's great.

Joyce Tam

And yeah. And my role as a school cap- the chaplain was to contact a number of families by phone and, and just to be a person to chat to about anything. And it's fabulous for me to continue to build that relationship. So, that's great, Jennifer.

Melinda Phillips

Yeah. Thank you. And thank you, Jennifer. And that's right. It's those continuing relationships too, that this has been a part of our story, a big chapter in our story this year, but our relationships with families have started before this time and continue on. And Jennifer, you've really beautifully shown that in your comments. So thank you.

Joyce Tam

And now we're moving on to our most important stakeholders, our students. So, Mel, student engagement is a construct that is often being discussed. So what exactly is it?

Melinda Phillips

Well, student engagement has been defined in a range of different ways, but often it can be seen to involve three interconnected dimensions, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. So when we're looking at that behavioural dimension, we're really looking at students' involvement and participation in their learning and in social and extracurricular activities. The emotional aspect is often captured by students' sense of belonging and connectedness to school. And finally, the learning dimension can be looking at, I guess, students' investment in their learning and schools have been working so very hard in many diverse ways to

keep their students connected in the last few months, as we've all responded to the changes brought about by COVID-19 and there are so many terrific strategies schools are using, and we've identified, we've invited you to share those in the chat too. But one story is a boarding school, a Year 5 to 12 boarding school here in Sydney had to postpone a whole school singing and music event that generally occurs on the last day of term one. And it's a very special school event because it's entirely student led with every student in the school, participating and border families, combine it with a trip to Sydney to pick up their children and young people and take them home for the holidays.

And this year, rather than cancel, the senior students have decided to hold the event online, which will happen in the next couple of weeks. And they've been working hard with very dedicated staff to work out the logistics of how that can happen online and to have a couch choir of 1,100 people and also to practise and rehearse with the younger students via Zoom. So this example, I guess, demonstrates that behavioural aspect of engagement around helping students to engage through the different extracurricular activities and social activities that are on offer and also that emotional connection, that real sense of belonging and other primary schools have been sharing story time, including one who shared bedtime stories every week night in a Facebook group with the teachers taking it in turns to read the story and stay connected to children and young people. And we've heard about movie nights too where the same movies being played in many different family homes with a photo or a little paragraph about their experience being shared the next day. Some schools have been really engaging with students face to face in online sessions and others have been doing really great work via email and even telephone too, to keep up that individual support for students. And now that many schools are transitioning back online, we know that many primary schools are really continuing to work very hard to monitor where the engagement of all of their students are at each of them, as they arrive back at school.

Joyce Tam

That's great, Mel. It's a great story. So I think we just got to check the chat box and see if we've got any further, shares from our participants here, and keep them coming 'cause we'll be reading through them and we really enjoy our interactions through our chats here.

Melinda Phillips

Great. And I think it's really important to, to know that each of these strategies have worked well for some schools, but you'll know what works best for your school and what works best for your school community because every school community is different and has done some really terrific things to keep that sense of connection.

Joyce Tam

So, we've just got a chat that came through Christina. So, using Google chat classroom was helpful during distance learning.

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

And that they've... So Christina always had WebEx chats in regular, and also we've got recordings from Ryan of a video response to a question...

Melinda Phillips

Great.

Joyce Tam

..which involves students creating dance moves. So that's beautiful. And we've also got other students uploads for video, YouTube, and also, you know, with their peers, responding to those videos as well.

Melinda Phillips

What a fantastic idea and what a great way to connect kids when you might not always be able to do it in

real time. So that's excellent.

Joyce Tam

That's beautiful. And yes, and we've also got Jody that just came through, that staff greet students and families at the gates in the morning and afternoon school pickups.

Melinda Phillips

Great! Thank you for those lovely ideas, and that idea of greeting families and making families, I guess, feel that sense of normality and routine returning is really important for kids, but it's really important for families as well.

Joyce Tam

So another very important partner in schools now are community organisations. So can you comment on community sector collaboration?

Melinda Phillips

Sure. And Joyce, I know that this is part of your background too. So I feel very privileged to be sitting beside you and talking about this. Community organisations play a really important role in delivering many services to children and young people and their families. And also other groups that might be in the community such as survivors of family violence or the aged, and by partnering with community organisations, schools enabled services and resources to be more accessible for their families, but also they provide opportunities for children and their families to contribute to their community. So it's a two way street. And I guess it's a really important piece of work at the moment for us as well, because we know that many children and families through the last few months have experienced changes in their living circumstances that might mean those community connections are more necessary than ever.

Joyce Tam

So, now we will invite you to share your examples of how school collaborates with community service organisations and other participants in the chat. And Mel, do you have any examples for us too?

Melinda Phillips

Yes. I'd love to share an example from a Sydney primary school community, who, like many of our schools, has many families with languages, first languages, other than English. And they work really hard, like so many other schools do to be inclusive and welcoming of all of the families in their community. And one successful strategy that they've used is a mother's day brunch, and they invite many different people. So mothers and grandmothers and aunties and carers and other special friends along to this brunch, which is attended not only by people providing hair and makeup stalls and massage tools alongside some really beautiful food, but also by community service agencies who have their own stores and the wellbeing team at the school too. And one year, this was so successful for the local women's health service that they formed some really nice relationships with women on the day. And they were able to follow this up further down, the later in the term with some workshops onsite at the school for these women and the school provided childcare.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel. Sounds like the school's doing a great job with the local community agencies. And now so we've got some chats going on here. So let's see what we've got from our participants here.

Melinda Phillips

And I think as we're just waiting for those to come through, as I mentioned, it is a really important time for us to have our relationships with our local community agencies. And for some of us that might be that those relationships are already established, and we're drawing on existing connections that we have already made, but it's also a really terrific time to be reaching out and building new connections, and new relationships with the community agencies in our area, as in the next sort of six months, and into next year, we do provide that support that our families might need in linking them to different services.

Joyce Tam

Yes, and look, we've got a comment from Lucy, so remembering to include the outside school hours care service in all communication in collaborative partnerships.

Melinda Phillips

Fantastic.

Joyce Tam

And we've also got a comment made by Emma Louis, so that we have the Noongar Spot, and we'll be in team coming one lunch time a week and to play traditional Aboriginal sport and they come in twice a week after school for Aboriginal student's homework club.

Melinda Phillips

Oh, they're both such tremendous examples. It's really great to have that support for homework in different context and from people that really understand what's going on for kids and to provide that alongside also the after school care options that you mentioned and really bringing that partnership to the centre of the work we do is great, too, because we know how many children and young people are supported by our after school and before school services, as well as by community members from their own communities, so, thank you.

Joyce Tam

Yes, thank you, and Emma also added that bilingual storytelling by parents for the Harmony Weeks.

Melinda Phillips

Oh, beautiful.

Joyce Tam

Lots of wonderful examples.

Melinda Phillips

That's a great idea, too.

Joyce Tam

Thank you for sharing. So now, and finally, it's talking about staff and how can schools, you know, part of their own staff and support their well-being, Mel.

Melinda Phillips

Oh thank you, Joyce, and this is such a crucial topic. First and foremost, staff wellbeing is important in and of itself, but also we know that to focus on staff wellbeing can really aid in then the staff in turn having their focus on student's wellbeing. School's assistance and the wellbeing of people in all parts of the system contribute to the whole. So staff wellbeing is always important, but we also know because of the events of the last few months that it's now a top priority for school executive teams, and indeed whole school systems right around Australia. And we've all had a big few months with a lot of uncertainty, and stress is a normal human reaction to life's changes and challenges and can be a response to a single event, or it might be prolonged and cumulative. And some stress is OK, but in times when we change and challenge, stress can become overwhelming, and might impact on our health, on our relationships, on our learning, and even on our capacity to fill our lifetime roles, our working, our partnering, being a good friend, and caring for others, studying and parenting. Be You has a really strong emphasis on staff wellbeing that's threaded through the framework. And there's fact sheets, there's resources, there's links to other services which are really important, too, and schools can share these with their staff as one strategy, for showing, I guess, some ways to support at the moment with what's going on.

Joyce Tam

So, some great ideas have already been shared in the chat box on this important topic, so keep sharing. Now what have you got for us for here?

Melinda Phillips

Well, it's one of my favourite topics, so I'm really glad you asked. One school, for example decided to support their staff by forming small groups as they went offline, so some staff stayed on the school grounds, and some people were working from home, and this school formed groups across different occupations within the staff, so maintenance and support staff, teaching and executive staff, and administrative staff were all split into these groups that were encouraged to meet online once a week during school time, and to just have time together and talk about anything but school. Other schools have prioritised the time for executive staff to make contact with each staff member, and check in how they're going, and still others have done weekly check ins that might include wellbeing amongst other topics in online surveys to check how people are going week to week. And we also know about some really lovely initiatives from parents and community to show support for staff at these hard times, including coffee carts, lunch deliveries, and fruit boxes. And we know, too, that in some schools, specific strategies have been focused on, including personal strategies like self-care, sleep hygiene, self-compassion, and physical activity. Strategies at the whole school level are really important, too, like realistic email expectations, cancelling unnecessary meetings, and sharing work equitably are also really important in supporting staff wellbeing.

Joyce Tam

Thanks, Mel, and we've got some fabulous stories here from our chat box here. So, we've got from Kate, so staff appreciation board in the staff room with pictures of one staff each week, and everyone puts in a positive comment.

Melinda Phillips

That's a great idea.

Joyce Tam

That's a great idea. Yeah and staff mindfulness before school from Emma Louise. Thank you for that.

Melinda Phillips

Thank you for sharing those. And I think it is those small strategies that build up over time that makes such a difference.

Joyce Tam

Absolutely, Mel, and thank you so much for sharing, everyone, and Melinda for your presentation. Are there any final words that you would like to leave us with?

Melinda Phillips

Working in partnership across the school community, including those that might be a little bit less visible, ensures that everyone has the chance to have a say to belong and to feel connected. Children and young people really benefit when the important adults in their lives work together and these partnerships strengthen protective factors, they build trusting relationships, and they improve wellbeing and learning outcomes.

Joyce Tam

So as we've just discussed, promoting mental health, and wellbeing in everyday practise is integral step creating and maintaining a mentally healthy learning community. Planning and working on simple strategies can be a great way to continue focusing on wellbeing during these uncertain times. So now we've got a few more minutes to take a few more questions from the chat box, so please feel free to come through.

Melinda Phillips

And as those questions are coming through, we'd like to thank you for the interaction that you've shared with us in the chat box. It's been just terrific. And it really is an opportunity, I think, in the work that we do to learn from other schools and learn what other people are doing, because they can prompt us too.

Joyce Tam

OK so thank you, Joy, we just got a question that popped through. So in essay on site schooling has happened from the beginning of the term, but we have not been allowed parents on site, so any ideas to connect with our parent community when we don't really seem them physically? So, Mel, what's your comment on that?

Melinda Phillips

Well thank you, Joy, for sharing that with us, and it might be some of those strategies that we mentioned earlier. And while we were all struggling with it, the challenges of physical distancing, and it can feel really difficult to find ways to connect with our parents, it might be some of those activities that we can do with families as a whole, so the story time that was mentioned earlier or a movie night with then family sharing pictures or little comments on the movie to be shared in a class blog or a school blog the next day. And also the opportunity for families to come together online, if that is possible to have the opportunity to share their views and ask questions of the principle or the executive team and others as well.

And I think we can't overlook the importance of sending messages home in our school bags as well if we need just to share our plans and what we're doing, so that families feel connected, and that they know what's going on. And looks like we're nearly out of time, so thank you for that question and we encourage you to continue to keep on engaging with Be You, to learn more and to keep up to date, and we've got three suggestions on the screen at the moment. So if you're learning community isn't yet implementing as a whole school community, we really encourage you to register online, and get started with some support from a Be You consultant like Joyce and I. If you're looking for resources to support you with a specific need or concern such as adapting to change, visit the website at beyou.edu.au and finally, you can keep up with all of the information about Be You resources, events, tools, and tips on our Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter channels, and also subscribe to the Be You YouTube channel to receive video updates on Be You, too.

Joyce Tam

So thank you everybody for your participation in chat box. It's been terrific to hear about some of the great strategies that you and your school are utilising to support mental health and well-being, especially through these challenging times. And Mel and I have really enjoyed sharing the session with you today, and hope that you enjoy the rest of the conference, too. So thank you, Mel, for your presentation.

Melinda Phillips

Thank you. It's been terrific to share this with you. Thank you everybody for your contributions, and make sure you continue to take care of yourselves, too.

End of webinar.