



Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Q&A Panel: Planning for the future through Be You

Presented by Jeannette James (headspace), Debbie Yates (ECA) and Ami Raman (headspace)

Jeannette James

Welcome to the final section of the Be You virtual conference, responding together, and managing well-being in times of change and uncertainty. We really do thank you for attending. To those who have joined us for all sessions or just a few, or those that are joining us just now, welcome. We really have enjoyed learning with you all, and we've really been impressed and amazed by the amazing chat box and the engagement in the chat box, as well as the great questions that have come in. On behalf of the Be You team today, I really would like to acknowledge the collective efforts of everyone that has played a role in this Be You virtual conference, from the team at Beyond Blue, the team at Headspace, Early Childhood Australia, as well as the Redback webinar team, it really has been a tremendous collaborative effort.

We are honoured to support and work with learning communities all across Australia to build mentally healthy communities. It's our Be You vision, and one that we are all truly dedicated to. We are conscious that we are currently working in complex and uncertain times and now more than ever, supporting wellbeing is so important. My name is Jeannette James, and I am the national service development advisor for the Headspace team, implementing Be You within primary and secondary school settings. And I'm delighted to host the Q&A panel with Be You team members Deborah Yates, who is the Early Childhood Australia state manager, representing early learning and school aged care communities, as well as Be You clinical consultant Ami Raman from the Headspace Be You team, representing primary and secondary school settings and close the Be You virtual conference for 2020.

Before I begin, I'd love to acknowledge that I'm meeting on the land of the Gadigal clan of the Eora Nation today, and pay my respects to Elders both past, present and future, particularly to the Indigenous educational leaders and staff that are joining us today. A link is now shared for you in the chat box if you are unsure what land or country you are on, and you'd like to share this with your learning communities. We know that awareness is the greatest agent of change, and we encourage you to acknowledge country in your learning community events and meetings.

So for those of you that don't know much about Be You or haven't been in one of our Be You conferences before, Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators and the organiser of this conference. It is led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. It is completely free. It's available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia. It's a truly wonderful service and

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it's funded by the federal government Department of Health.

Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing, and their own mental health. It offers individual educators online professional learning, fact sheets, webinars, and other resources, but it also offers learning communities tools and processes to implement whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing, along with our fabulous Be You consultant support and guidance.

So, for those of you that are just joining us now, we have covered three key themes in 10 sessions over two days, and we've captured some fabulous questions from the chat box. And from these sessions, we're going to share them now, amongst the Q&A panel with Deb and Ami. By participating in this conference, we hope that you've increased your commitment to creating and maintaining mentally healthy learning communities, that you've built knowledge and skills to support the children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We understand, or we hope that you understand the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships, seeing the benefits of preparing for critical incidents and taking care of yourself and others in these uncertain times, and also experience being part of this wonderful Be You community and the benefits of embracing a whole community approach to mental health and wellbeing.

A recording is available for those of you that have registered, and you can watch back any of the sessions, keynotes and other concurrent sessions that you weren't able to dip into at any time for the next year, which is wonderful. So, now I'd love to welcome my two lovely colleagues who are here with me today. We have Deb Yates and Ami Raman. Good afternoon, ladies.

Debbie Yates

Afternoon.

Ami Raman

Hi, Jeannette.

Jeannette James

Yesterday, particularly, I enjoyed listening to both of your keynotes. And Deb, something that resonated with me was the whole concept of building mental health and wellbeing through a whole community approach. And I think that's really been apparent in these times of COVID and learning remotely. And we've seen that the importance of family partnerships, engagement, so important to support students and young people's learning.

And Ami, a key takeaway for me from yesterday's keynote was that the more you prepare, the more we're able to respond. And I think that's just such a lovely sentiment and highlight that communities can take on onboard, and certainly the Be You consultants are there to support action teams moving forward. So we have captured some great comments through the chat box and there's some more coming through now. These are really interesting questions we'd like to discuss now, so let's move on to the first one.

This first question here is, well, I guess it embraces quite a few similar lines of this one have come through. In times of uncertainty and change, what are some key considerations for supporting learning communities, not only the students, but the staff and families? Deb, would you like to start off with this one?

Debbie Yates

Yeah. And like you said, I think it's been reflected in a number of the sessions over the past two days. One of the common themes that we hear through this is that there's such a strength in connection and community in our early learning communities and our schools as well. And when we look at the community aspect, it's really important we do consider, as you said, families, children, and the staff as well. We all make up the community and it's important considering all of those people. What connection looks and feels like is really different for every individual, so I think it's really important that we don't assume, and that

we're really connecting, talking with people and considering it from multiple perspectives, that's a really important step, I think.

One of the other key things we know can be supportive and a protective factor in times of uncertainty and change is really considering routines. So, it might be that we're returning to an existing routine, continuing with routines, or perhaps adjusting some to meet what's the new normal, the phrase we're often using quite a bit at the moment. That can be a really good protective factor for our learning communities.

Also, remembering the adults in our spaces as well is really important. Often when we've been in a time of uncertainty and change or responding to critical incidents, which is one of the other topics that have been discussed over the last few days, we know there are elements that we're thinking that might be concerning for some people, and we're looking for those in the children that we're caring for. But I think it's also, we remember that as adults, we might have also been through challenging times and so we might need to consider that for ourselves and for families and carers as well.

So, I think considering things like that from multiple perspectives is really important. And one that's a little bit of a boring one to mention sometimes, but policies and processes, they're there for a reason. And sometimes in uncertainty and change, we can forget to refer to them, but they actually can really support and help us to consider important steps forward. So, that's really important too, I think, and considering how we might need to adjust them in the current circumstances and who we need to talk with and connect with. So, that any adjustments we make are taking in the needs of the whole community.

Jeannette James

Flexibility's really important...

Debbie Yates

Absolutely.

Jeannette James

..in times of uncertainty and change. Ami.

Ami Raman

I couldn't have said it better myself. I think Deborah, completely echo everything you just said. And also about the boring policies and procedures and processes. I think just how containing those things can be is a really important consideration. And if they are boring, because are so familiar, that's even a better indication of how useful they might be when you actually need to access those things. The only things I'd probably reinforce also are that the reactions across the learning community will be most intense in the following weeks or months after a significant change.

So, it's also really helpful, I think for us to normalise the fact that there will be quite a level of disruption. So, part of what you'll be seeing as an educator is, it could seem like a high level of activation or an escalation of concerns, which obviously would impact you and be concerning. But it's also part of the normal response to a critical incident. So, keeping in mind that most things do stabilise over time.

So, part of that also means as an educator, focusing on what you can influence. And I think that's one of the things I'd like to highlight the most. Allowing room for communication for young people to ask questions, also tuning into how you're feeling and knowing where to access further information and support. I think all of those things are really important. So, we're not just looking after children and young people, but we're also looking after ourselves and it's really about having a mentally healthy community. So, I think just normalising those reactions and also knowing where to turn if you needed additional support.

Jeannette James

And as you mentioned, that stability and that sense of normality is quite comforting for so many people, not just our students, but staff and families as well. And Julia in the chat here has mentioned that the impact of providing protective factors and building that and considering the protective factors in your

spaces is equally as important consideration for these times. So, thanks, Julia. Guys, if you have any chats or questions and you'd like to pop them in the chat box, I will build them into this Q&A panel today as well. So, thanks for your participation there.

One of the next questions has been around recovery and change. So, I think it is fair to say that there has been a substantial amount of change in our world over the last six months. And we know that change is an act or a process through which something does become different for whatever reason and something old maybe gone, or maybe the new hasn't been yet established. So, transitioning through change can present challenges, but also opportunities for growth. So, Ami, in your role as a clinical consultant for the Be You Team, how can we assist recovery after change?

Ami Raman

Yeah, I think recovery is a really interesting concept because it's unpredictable, the nature of how, what our path for recovery looks like. And oftentimes it doesn't necessarily mean that life will go back to how it was before an incident, but through that process, that is, as you said, Jeannette, there is space for growth. And I think even though these times, it can be incredibly turbulent and I'm not minimising how distressing and difficult these disruptions to normal life can be. And the fallout from that, it really, and I really liked that comment in the chat box about acknowledging strengths and actually recognising the things that are really holding us together throughout this process. When we come out of it, that can really be space to reflect and think about what are the things that we have in place that have really gotten us through these really difficult times.

In terms of how we assist recovery, I feel like a bit of a broken record saying that reinforcing the importance of connection and community, but also the sense of consistency and stability we can provide to young people. And also for ourselves being able to stay in role where we're able, having that, for young people who are incredibly perceptive, they're little sponges, they know what's going on around them. I think something that Deb's been highlighting too, just the importance of not forgetting that these little people, even though they might not express how they're feeling, they are quite attuned to what's going on. So, just by being able to provide opportunities for questions and communication, and also being able to provide some stability and routine, and also that strengths focus. So, when it's an appropriate time, when you're out of the immediate adrenaline and the... I think looking at the new normal, sort of when you settle into it, just thinking, acknowledging the strengths that you are...

Jeannette James

Retaining the benefits.

Ami Raman

And then being able to retain the benefits by actually reflecting on the positives without obviously glossing over the fact that it has been challenging.

Jeannette James

And it is beautiful to see the human spirit shine through when there is adversity. It is amazing to see what our communities have produced and how they've supported each other.

Ami Raman

And there is that saying, our minds are Teflon for the bad and Velcro, no, no, Teflon for the good and Velcro for the bad. So I think it's really helpful to actually stop and recognise strengths in moments like this 'cause that is conducive to us then feeling stronger or more resilient to then be...

Jeannette James

And you find what you look for, right?

Ami Raman

Yeah, it's true.

Jeannette James

And as you said, you acknowledge the difficulties and the adversity, but you still have those moments to reflect on all the good that is happening within our learning communities. What about from your space, Deb?

Debbie Yates

Well, it was so lovely to hear you mention the littlest people in our communities 'cause I do think that's something that we need to remember. There can be a bit of a myth almost out there that the youngest members, babies and toddlers in our communities perhaps 'cause they're not as aware or don't have language to express or, you know, aren't obviously sitting and watching the news and things like that, oh, they mustn't know what's happening, they're not aware of what's happening.

Jeannette James

But they can pick up and absorb.

Debbie Yates

Absolutely, absolutely. And we do know that there is evidence of children, really young children actually having responses to, you know, stressful situations and it can impact on their mental health and well-being too. So it's really important that we consider them as we're looking at recovery after a particular incident in a community. And I think that part of that process in is really acknowledging the importance of secure and attached relationships for our youngest members in our community.

Obviously, that's important everywhere, but even more so for those youngest ones. And that is a huge part of the role that educators play, families and carers pay, but consider what we can do within our learning communities to really strengthen that on an ongoing basis cause that will be a really strong protective factor when we're moving through a period of change and looking at recovery.

Jeannette James

Thank you, thanks, Deb. I can really hear the voice of educators in this next question. So, something that came through yesterday is how can we support our children and young people, their learning and development, their mental health, manage our own well-being when things are just so challenging like they are right now? It feels that we need to be doing more for them. And as an educator, I just don't know how and if I am doing enough. How would you respond to that?

Ami Raman

I think that is, there's so much in that question. And I think, yeah, as you said, Jeannette, there's so much, you can hear the voice of an educator through that. So there are a couple of things that sort of come to mind here in that question. First thing is that I think a lot of the time when we are in these professions, it's because we care so much about looking after other people.

And part of that means we, you know, when we're noticing distress, not only with the young people that are in our care, but we can see, you know, things happening within a community, we can see the families and the carers and the parents being affected, your own families might be impacted and then you're looking at your own impacts. It can be a really, really challenging situation because you know you need to exercise self-care, you know that you need to be flexible, and you know you need to, you know but in practice, you can't help but switch off that button, especially when you're extra heightened to say it's OK to slow down a bit. So I think when we look at what it is to be an educator,

I just encourage everyone that's, you know, in this session to reflect on what it is that made you or motivated you in the first place to go into this area of work because as an educator, I think the reason you end up wearing so many hats is because you are such a pillar of support for people that you end up being a pseudo counsellor or pseudo parent or, you know, it's just the nature of the relationships that you build, because of your...

Jeannette James

Why you chose to go into that profession, right, 'cause educators we're very caring people.

Ami Raman

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, schools and Early Learning Services, they are like a pillar of our communities and, you know, a hub. So I think, as an educator, even though you're pulled in all these different directions just by virtue of being in your role and being the, you know, most likely the type of person you are, it can be really helpful to just remember if you just do what you do, if you provide that stability and that security and, you know, you are that, you're just providing that in your role. That's also a way for you to look after your well-being but also to provide young people and families with the support that they need in these times.

Debbie Yates

I think there's some really strong messages there and I think just as you're saying, how we often wear lots of hats. I think one of the things that we can do around self-care is actually consider our boundaries as well. It's really important to consider what is the scope of our roles, the scope of our practice, and remember that boundaries are actually a protective factor for ourselves as educators as well. So I think that's a really important thing to consider. And I think as you were saying that too, you were talking about how educators are really at the moment also experiencing a lot of these challenges.

So being really able to know and identify your own reactions to stress and in stressful situations and maybe do some planning on your own or with colleagues to really be proactive about what steps you can put in place. And sometimes that step is actually putting your hand up and asking for help and support. And I think normalising that is a really important step to take within our early learning communities and our schools that you know, seeking support and developing a culture that supports that really reduces stigma around that and just, it helps everybody in the long run because the more we can support ourselves, the better we'll be able to then support the children and young people in our care as well.

Jeannette James

I think that that's such an important point. The more that we can look after ourselves and have self-compassion, then we've got that ability to help others within our in our care. So let's move on to the next question. Before we move on to the next question though, a couple of people through the chat box have mentioned around the recording. And yes, the recording will be available for you and for anyone that's registered, which is great to hear.

So as you can see here, this was the mentally healthy continuum as a tool was introduced yesterday in the Be You conference, it's probably one of our most well utilised resources on the Be You website. And people were asking that we know that mental health can exist on a continuum, but what supports are there available for educators to know where a child or young person might be on that continuum at any given start time or stage?

Debbie Yates

It's a really good question, because once you know that piece of information, the next step is trying to think, how can I use that to support the work I'm doing with children and young people. So one of the other tools we have on our website which is really popular is the one called the BETLS tool, and it was mentioned in a couple of the sessions, but if you weren't in them, we'll just mention it again here now today. So we love our acronyms, we try to avoid them as much as possible.

But the BETLS tool is an observational tool that educators can use. It helps them to gather and document and really look at children's behaviours especially for that child where you might just have that little thing in the back of your head that's going, something's happening here for this child. We need to observe them a bit more closely to work out how we can support them. So the BETLS acronym stands for behaviours, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships. So they're the five things that you'd be observing around a child.

So once you use this tool, and you can unpack that information and you can record that information, it can really help you look quite holistically at the situation for that child and for the environment that they're in and really perhaps understand what's sitting behind some of the behaviours that you might be seeing.

Jeannette James

And I guess with the BETLS tool, something that can be skipped over is that emotions and the feelings part of the observation tool. So how does what you're feeling and your emotions impact the way that as an educator, you might respond or contribute to the situation?

Debbie Yates

I think that's really an important step to consider. So there is a section in the tool which actually looks at yourself as an educator.

Jeannette James

Right.

Debbie Yates

Because obviously children when they're, you know, exhibiting certain behaviours, it's not happening in isolation. So often it is as part of our connection to their environment, to their peers, and to the educators that are actually working with them. And how we feel about that is also an important part of the picture.

So we're actually spending some time to unpack what that means for you, what emotions and feelings you might be experiencing and at least spending some time to sit with that and reflect on it, even perhaps going to a peer or a colleague, and actually having a chat with them too. They also might be working with that child and saying, how do you experience this situation, what happens for you when these things happen? And you can see, are they similar, are they different, and have a conversation about why that might be. So we can see what role we may or may not be playing and really consider that and if we're looking at strategies to put in place for the child, what strategies might we want to put in place for ourselves as well as part of self-care, as part of a professional and personal growth as well?

Jeannette James

And what about, Deb, the situations where you may not have a peer to bounce ideas off? You might be a one teacher school or you might be a family day-care centre. What would you suggest in those times?

Debbie Yates

That's a really important question because obviously for early learning services, which is where, you know, the sector that I'm coming from, family day-care educators often feel really quite isolated in these spaces and it can be challenging for them to connect with others. So in that situation, they'll often have a coordinator or service coordinator that sits above them, so you could use them as a reference point. But one of the strategies that could actually also be used effectively is using it as a reflection tool back for yourself.

So if you've completed the tool, and you've reflected on your own emotions and feelings as well, you might sit with that for a week, leave it be, don't look at it, and then go back to it a week later and actually use it as a reflection tool back to yourself and consider, am I still feeling the same way this week? If not, then why not, what maybe has changed for me, rather than changed for the child. And I think that can be a really useful process to go through and it's part of our continuous improvement and actually can support us in the long run too, because it's growing our strengths and skills...

Jeannette James

And reflective practice.

Debbie Yates

Exactly, yeah.

Jeannette James

Great, awesome. One, a comment that came through the chat box was casual teachers. And I think that's a great point as well because casual teachers may have a different relationship with the student and may in their own relationship building with the new students focus on other areas or points of interest or passions and they might observe something totally different in a BETLS tool. So it's often it's great to get that information from the receptionist or a librarian or casual teacher as well. So thanks for those contributions through the chat.

Let's move on to the next question now. So let's have a look. Our learning community has processes and critical incidents plans in place. Now, let's go to this one. Connection with families and carers is a known protective factor. We've spoken a lot about protective factors the last couple of days for children and young people. Can you share any innovations that you've seen around family engagement in particular in this time of change?

Debbie Yates

Yeah, it's been really interesting. And it's one of, like we said, to try to pick some strengths and some exciting things that have come out of this space and change that we're going through is that a lot of Early Learning Services and schools have been looking at the existing platforms they use. So they might have a social media page, they might have a website or perhaps electronic communications with families and how they've been using them quite innovatively to keep that connection happening with families and children during this, you know, quite odd period we've been in really. We've seen people using online spaces to do story time, to sing songs and those really, like we talked about keeping those rituals and trends, you know, those routines are really important.

So keeping those elements that have been part of our, you know, our daily practice, but moving them into an online space, we've seen things such as, you know,, cooking challenges or exercise challenges across a whole school environment. We've really seen some interesting spaces too where people that we might not consider perhaps really utilising ways to connect as well. We had a great story of a school crossing supervisor on the first day that school went back in that area, they had made some really big welcome back signs for the pole that they stand next to every day as they're, you know, helping children to cross the road to school.

So as they're as much a part of that school community as other people and they were so excited to be welcoming back the children. And I think even looking at it from the other side, there was a story of an early learning service where a number of families had for various reasons, chosen to keep their children at home for a period of time, and those children were really missing the connection with the staff and with their friends and with the families, and so their families chose as a group to go along to the early learning service, take some big bits of chalk and actually wrote, welcome, you know, we missed your messages and we can't wait to see you again and you're doing a great job.

So really important messages of connection and support, which was so important for those children to feel like they were connecting and saying, hi, we're still here and we miss you, and we can't wait to come back. So as much as we're using technology to be innovative, piece of chalk on a driveway is also...

Ami Raman

Back to basics.

Debbie Yates

Yeah, back to basics. But a great way of connection as well.

Jeannette James

It reminds me on the BU news page. There's an example, a news story or a story capture of a local community, a preschool that used kindness rocks and they spray painted some beautiful little message and the kids all got involved, the families got involved, and they place these rocks in certain parts of the

communities to encourage people to go into the forest or a bush walk or along a certain part of the town that hadn't been visited for a while. And it really brought the community together. And, as you said, that back to basics, you don't need the technology often. It is a great conduit but even those back to basics and creative outlets are really important in these times. Do you have any examples or ideas around innovations for family engagement?

Ami Raman

I think we're still really very much navigating this new sort of space. And it'll be interesting to see sort of what comes out of it. But I think it's the times we've been through recently have really showcased some real strengths and opportunities. But also a lot of challenges, I think in terms of family, partnership and engagement. But I think it's really interesting like with the technology, it's really provided opportunities for families to be more involved in certain ways with the young people like, on examples with parent teacher interviews, being done via Zoom. It's a really, so it's more flexible way, even for educators and for parents to engage in that way.

That being said, there are also challenges with that process. But the if we then think about, you know, that example of the chalk, there's so many opportunities when we come back to basics for other ways that educators have been engaging with families, through community, or actually, you know, being more in touch with families by phone or actually dropping in or, you know, being able to, there have been lots of different ways that people have been navigating this space. And I think also, there's been a lot more understanding of what our schools and our services are actually managing just because of the amount of exposure families have now had, you know, with remote teaching and learning. So, yeah, I guess watch this space. And, it'd be really great to also hear from educators.

Jeannette James

Yeah, there's a few that have come through the chat box. So Julie has mentioned that teachers making a funny video about how they miss the students and posting that on the school's intranet has been wonderful to see. Fiona mentions a lovely support story of a lollipop lady accompanying a distressed parent, whose kindy child was upset and reactive about post curve and returning to school was a little bit anxious. And so it's really nice to notice these beautiful moments that are happening in communities and sharing them. So thanks, everyone for sharing.

Ami Raman

Just the appreciation of that connection that comes from our learning communities, I think, yeah.

Jeannette James

I mean, certainly myself as a parent, and with three kids, it's great to have Microsoft Teams and for parent teacher interviews. Sometimes it is a struggle to rush home from the city, engage park, do the parent and teacher interviews. Where you've got that one on one online. It's been fantastic and I hope that's something our school continues moving forward.

Debbie Yates

I think, do we have time to (CROSSTALK) One of the other things I think that's important for us to consider as well, we know that those transition times so dropping in, drop offs and pickups have actually changed considerably. And you know, there's valid reasons why, but it looks very different for a lot of our early learning centres and for schools at the moment. And, you know, obviously, we're taking into account the, you know, the health and safety needs of our community members, for adults and for children. And that's really important.

But we need to acknowledge as well that in some ways, it may be impacting on that family engagement, that family connection that we're working so hard to build and grow over time. So I do think it is a question that we perhaps need to reflect on and ask ourselves, you know, and really consider as we move forward, and you know, keep using the phrase, the new normal, but, and it might not be a new normal. I think you mentioned that before, Ami, about sometimes when we go through change, we're moving through to an

unknown, and we're not actually there yet. So we're not quite sure what this might look like in six months' time or 12 months' time.

But as we are making these decisions to really reflect on what are the perceptions, what are the needs of the different parts of our community here? How can we manage the health and safety needs? As well as ensuring that we're still growing and working towards strong connections with families and children. And that drop off and pickup time is going to be a really challenging space for a while, that there's no easy answers and what that looks like, and feel like will be very different for every community. But it's a really important question to consider within your early learning community and school.

Ami Raman

Really, yeah, great.

Jeannette James

Absolutely agree. And also to, I guess, cherry pick for want of a better word, the benefits are, what do we want to retain and make a conscious decision? This is what life has presented to us. What are some of the wonderful things we want to retain? And what are some of the things that we were holding onto that just no longer necessary anymore that we can perhaps leave behind.

Debbie Yates

Yeah.

Jeannette James

Next question has come through about learning communities collaborating with community service organisations. And a question that came through the chat box was, I don't know where to start, where or how do we start?

Debbie Yates

Well, I think one of the things we often talk about is growing a list of, you know, the services and support networks and other community organisations that are relevant in your local community. And, you know, but there's never a perfect time to start a list. Obviously, it's easier to do it when we're not going through a time of uncertainty and change and big challenges. But 'cause often when we're going through those times, that's when we want to access this amazing list of resources. So I guess there's never a perfect time to start.

But we really encourage you to start if you don't already have a list of those things within your learning community. I guess one of the things to consider is we often think of ourselves as being the only person who can do that job. So whether you're a director of an early learning service or a leader, in the leadership of a school, we often think those tasks fall to ourselves, but really consider can we broaden who might be involved in this process? Is there a parent or a carer who's put their hand up and said, hey, I've got some time at the moment, I'm happy to volunteer for a task. This might be a really good activity for them to undertake, a couple of parents, or perhaps some parents and some staff to work on collaboratively. It's acknowledging the role they play as a member of the community.

Jeannette James

And they may have contacts, they may have been through the process. So they may know who to interact with.

Debbie Yates

Exactly. And also, it helps to really look at it from a different perspective. Because often from a school or an Early Learning Centre, you've kind of already got an idea in mind of what am I going to make a list of, if you ask the parent, they actually might have a really different perspective on what sort of community organisations that they think are relevant and they would like to know more about and perhaps connect with across the learning community. So I think bringing in different perspectives for one thing, it shares the load of the work, but it also broadens the scope of what actually might, you might get in the end, which

could be a much more useful list.

Ami Raman

While also strengthening those relationships with families and giving more agency and voice to the community.

Debbie Yates

And we don't want to reinvent the wheel either, because that's not a good use of our time. So really considering where else might there already be some of these magic lists. I mean, if you think about local councils, local libraries, primary health networks, local health districts, they often already on their websites have some really great valuable content, and lists...

Jeannette James

Like schools, like services.

Debbie Yates

Exactly, yeah, speaking and talking to each other within your local neighbourhood. So using those as key starting points, I guess, can be really valuable. It also really needs to be obviously reflective of your community's needs. And it's really important to consider what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are in your local community and how you might be able to connect and work with them as well. That should be a really important part of the process.

I think once we have a list though, the next step, which can often be the one that also is quite challenging and can fall off the to do list sometimes is actually reaching out to some of those organisations over time and building connections with them. And what that looks like, again, will be different depending on the needs of your service in school and what the organisation is. But it can really help for us within our settings, though, to understand what that organisation can do to support our families, and also help, especially if it's a referral agency where you might be thinking we could refer a family there to have a really good understanding of what's the referral process, are there forms to complete? What's the realistic...

Jeannette James

What's the waiting timeframe?

Debbie Yates

Absolutely, that waiting time. So that we can ensure we're not sending families to a space where they might have an unrealistic, we maybe even have provided an unrealistic expectation around what support they can get and the timeframe they can get it in. So building those connections and that understanding so we ensure we're sharing and connecting families and ourselves to support services in a realistic way.

Ami Raman

And that's such a really important point I think there because we're so in the business of help seeking and promoting help seeking and it's really doing, I guess, that message a disservice when we're encouraging all these wonderful messages of help seeking and help seeking is increasing, then someone goes to access a service, and the wait time's unrealistic, or we've not managed their expectations. Well, and then that actually really doesn't have a positive effect on that family or a young person's trajectory in terms of future services.

Debbie Yates

Yes, absolutely.

Jeannette James

Yeah, one of the schools I used to work with in a previous role, and it was a special school in the Northern Beaches of Sydney. And what they did is they developed a showcase, an expo, so like almost like speed dating of local service. And they opened up the school and the kids were sent home, so about 1:00, and then all the locals, they invited all the local schools and parents to come into the school grounds and the

services were there and programs to connect with and ask questions with and sort of truly clarify what the services entails and what they can provide to the community. And then from that they developed a book, or like a little, I guess, resource book that went back to the school communities and the early learning services. So it was something tangible that they could have in the office, but they also could have online and update those details.

Debbie Yates

That's great.

Jeannette James

Let's move on to the next, or not so much a question, I guess, because we're drawing to a conclusion now of our virtual conference. But I'm really interested in one takeaway that you both have that you'd like both schools and Early Learning Services to leave with today.

Debbie Yates

I guess, from my perspective, you might be perhaps really, over the last couple of months been really considering mental health and well-being in a whole new way because of the challenges we've been through. And hopefully the two days of this conference has also really helped you to consider it from different perspectives. So I guess one key takeaway I would like to see from the perspective of Early Learning Services is really to think about any learnings you've had over the past couple of months from the mental health and well-being perspective and think, what's the takeaway that we can now embed into our daily practice?

So what's something that we might not have done before, what's something you've considered over the last two days and you can really join those dots together, perhaps a bit more now and think of just one thing that you might want to actually then embed in daily practice? So rather than it, so it doesn't fall off the to do list, so that it doesn't fall out of your daily practice that actually really becomes part of just, this is just what we do here. Yeah, I guess that's one takeaway.

Jeannette James

Thanks for sharing, Deb. Ami?

Ami Raman

Yeah, I think mine really follows from that, too. I think we're as a society sort of moving away from this idea of, Oh, yeah, just chuck a wellbeing programming there. You know, I think it's part of embedding that really into our practice. So my takeaways would be, continue to focus on what you can influence and also use your own lived experience, like Deborah was saying, your personal experiences, the reasons and the passion that you bring to being an educator, and also that ongoing professional learning and personal learnings that throughout your life to identify the strengths and also, you know, opportunities to develop things further because at the end of the day, what's going to support us during times of uncertainty are those, really the basics of having these things strengthened.

So in the face of adversity that we can't plan for, we can't predict, we have strong community connections, we have strong mental health literacy, we know how to access support and, you know, with all these things in place, we can navigate things a lot more easily. And I think we've only really scratched the surface on a lot of these topics the past couple of days. So if there's anything else that sort of piqued your interest or any further questions you have, then please explore the Be You website and also reach out to your consultants. If you have an action team, there's just a lot more that we can unpack around some of what we've spoken about.

Jeannette James

Absolutely, I think, and as I said at the beginning, it really is an amazing service that is funded by the Department of Health and Beyond Blue in partnership with Headspace and Early Childhood Australia that Be You consultant support, that guidance for action teams, is gold, really is gold. So we do implore you to

reach out to your local Be You consultants. And we'll move on now to the wrapping up of the Be You virtual conference today.

And there is a poll that we will attend to. So I might pass the iPad to you, Deb, so when that comes up in just a moment. So we do know that learning communities provide a unique platform to build mentally healthy communities. We know that promoting mental health and well-being in everyday practice is such an important step in doing so. We know that planning and working on simple strategies can be such a great way, as Ami just alluded to, to continue focusing on well-being during these uncertain times.

And we know that protective factors are so important in this space as well. So in the breakout sessions, we heard from the Be You team about protective factors, and Rita reminded us that to identify your learning, the protective factors in your unique context is really important. And once you do that, then how to embed them in your everyday practice is so important. We've heard a lot about the three R's, relationships, relationships, relationships. They really are the key to the universe, not only for our students and our young people, but also for our staff. They are really pivotal for mental health and well-being.

The team have explored what mental health may look like to you and what does a mentally healthy community look but also feel like, what does it sound like as you walk through the school, what's the school climate look like? What does an early learning service, family day-care, after school care look like? How do you include multiple perspectives from your learning communities? They are all valuable questions to take back and discuss with your teams. One of the Be You consultants, Nicole, mentioned that positive relationships and partnerships can have a ripple effect across whole communities and she likened partnerships to a ligament and they really bond and strengthen, especially in all the stability that we've mentioned before, and they hold things together, especially during these uncertain and critical times.

We know that positive partnerships with families and carers and community do support well-being and learning outcomes for children and young people and there's so much evidence and research based on this and in these uncertain times our partnerships are key in identifying what learning communities need. So I guess our questions to you are, what will be your next steps for your action teams and engaging with families and the community? How will they know that well-being is a priority for your service or for your school? What is your learning community's commitment to mental health and well-being?

And how do you communicate this with your family and carers? We do know that our own well-being is important and we've discussed that a lot over the last couple of days. And there has been much to contend with in the recent months and many are still feeling overwhelmed. So do be aware of your own needs and seek additional support where you need it. There is a Be You educator wellbeing toolkit that's available online, and that's a really great place to start for communities. Now, as part of a commitment to self-care and self-compassion, as we've mentioned before, educators are very giving people and sometimes we do need to think purposely stop and reflect. We've developed this quick poll for you.

And it's not just a poll, it's a commitment to well-being and to self-care. So we might launch the poll now, and as a commitment to our self-care and self-compassion over the coming months. And it's multiple choice, so you can choose quite a few here, not just one. I will aim to spend time in nature. I will aim to practice gratitude more regularly, get back to basics and keep routines simplified, as Ami mentioned previously. I remember not to let my thoughts overwhelm me or scheduling mini brain breaks into my weekly routine. I will focus on what is in my control and take small steps forward and I will spend more time on activities that I truly enjoy and make me happy. Now as an extension to this, we'd really love if you could share this with a trusted colleague or a friend as part of honouring that commitment to yourself. So, Deb has the poll results...

Debbie Yates

Yeah, they're starting to come through now. It's actually, there's quite a lot of people choosing similar ones actually, so it's quite spread across. At the moment, the final one is actually the one that's getting the highest rating. So spending more time on activities I enjoy and that make me happy. And also the top one,

spending time in nature. And I think there's a lot of evidence to show that connecting with nature is a really good protective factor for us as adults as well as for children and young people. So I think that, you know, that's clearly coming through in the poll as well that other people are recognising that that's a really good one.

Jeannette James

Especially if you could combine a couple, like the kindness rocks that we saw and spreading those, doing a bit of a rock geo.

Debbie Yates

Exactly, exactly.

Jeannette James

What's something you might commit to, Deb?

Debbie Yates

I think probably the spending time in nature is one that I've sort of been very conscious of, I think, because we've been spending so much time indoors. And yeah, it can be quite challenging over a period of time when you haven't had that time to get out. We're not doing the sorts of things we might normally do. So I think getting out in nature. And I think a lot of these are 'I statements', so that's obviously really important. But for me, part of getting out in nature is also spending time with other people.

So it's connecting in nature or going out with a friend is actually just as important for me as going out on my own. So I think that using some of these, you know, self-care commitments and deciding what suits you is best to do it on your own or whether it's actually about connect using those opportunities to connect with others, can be a really valuable thing to do.

Jeannette James

It's about what suits you, it's self-care, it's about what fills your bucket. What about you, Ami, what fills your bucket?

Ami Raman

I think the one that speaks to me is getting back to basics, maybe that's why I've been repeating, getting back to the basics and keeping routines simplified that also, I think, feeds into spending more time in nature. I think it's the... Just being present and not feeling like you need to keep doing. I think I have a tendency to be a doer and sometimes it's, you know, it's more conducive to self-care to actually just do nothing.

Jeannette James

I think when you're a doer, it's forward thinking, which doesn't allow you to be mindful, it doesn't allow you to be in the present moment.

Ami Raman

And that's where that is really, I think, for everyone this is going to differ so greatly because there are people that are very, very comfortable, you know, doing the opposite. And so it's about...

Jeannette James

What works for you.

Ami Raman

What works for you, and also spending time in nature, that's one thing that automatically makes me mindful.

Jeannette James

Yeah.

Ami Raman

So, yeah, I think they're the ones that would speak to me.

Jeannette James

Wonderful, excellent, thanks, guys for sharing. So we'll move on to some of the other concluding parts of the virtual conference for today. We spoke about critical incidents and there are events that are outside the range of normal experience. Children and young people may react differently to critical incidents, and they may react in a range of ways and while most responses will resolve in the short term, there will be longer lasting traumatic and other effects. We do know that those principles of prevention and preparedness and response from recovery can support communities following a critical incidents.

So what does your learning community have in place? Is it something that you need to take back to the action team to discuss further? Also, those words of you, Ami, spring to mind again and again is that the more we can prepare, the more that we can respond, I think that's really important. So in terms of that question, what does your learning community have in place, are you not sure or you need some further help? Contact one of our Be You consultants. We're here to support educators and the vital role that they play in our community during these uncertain times.

On the screen here, you'll see a variety of ways you can connect to the Be You community and be part of our lovely community. So there's Facebook pages for both Early Learning Services and for the primary and secondary stream. LinkedIn for educators, there's multiple Twitter accounts, we have three Twitter accounts, and also a YouTube channel that you can connect with as well. So any final questions or comments that have come through the chat box there?

Debbie Yates

Just lots of thank yous actually, which is really nice. And quite a number of people commenting about how they really understand their protective factors more after attending the conference and are really taking back to their settings, what they can do to actually start looking at those, recognising what they're already doing and then thinking how they can strengthen those. So that's really lovely to see, yeah.

Jeannette James

I like the point you said, recognising what we're already doing.

Debbie Yates

Yeah.

Jeannette James

Schools and services are doing amazing, amazing work and even through the chat box yesterday and today, you can see the lovely engagement that's occurring between different participants, with an inspiring idea or a new resource that they can follow up. So thank you very much for participating with us in this virtual conference. Upon exiting the room, you will be prompted for a quick exit survey, literally takes one minute, does inform our services moving forward so we can improve them for you.

So it is important to remember that we cannot have the same expectations of ourselves and others as we would have in normal times. These are clearly not normal times and not normal weeks. So please be patient and kind with yourself and others. We do thank you for joining the virtual conference today. And I know we're slightly earlier, which is great on a Thursday afternoon.

Debbie Yates

Also self-care.

Jeannette James

So we have nine minutes or so, OK. So thank you very much. We do encourage you to continue to engage with the Be You team. We're always here to help and support and guide you in your learning communities and yeah, take care, goodbye.

Ami Raman

Thank you for everything you do for your communities.

Jeannette James

Yeah, absolutely, massive thank you.

Ami Raman

Excellent.

End of webinar.