

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

The benefits of building strong family and community partnerships

Presented by Geri Sumpter (Beyond Blue) and Kate Johnson (Beyond Blue)

Geri Sumpter

Hello everybody, welcome to our session on the benefits of building strong community partnerships and family partnerships. I'd like to introduce myself, my name's Geri Sumpter, I'm the head of Be You delivery at Beyond Blue, and I'd like to also introduce my colleague, Kate Johnson, who is also a WS lead at Beyond Blue.

Kate Johnson

Hi, everyone, it's great to be here.

Geri Sumpter

So, today we'll be discussing the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships. Be You sees partnerships as a key factor in supporting positive mental health outcomes for children and young people. So, today's session we will be looking at the role that families and the wider community can play in learning communities. We'll provide you with practical tips and strategies to building strong and sustainable connections, and moving from family and community involvement with your learning community to active engagements, and when engagement occurs, the mental health and well-being benefits really begin to shine through.

Before we dive any deeper into this I would like to acknowledge that I am meeting on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, so we're in Melbourne today, which is different to the rest of the presentations, which have been in Sydney. And I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to pay my respects to all Elders on the many different lands that this presentation will be viewed on today and in the future through the recorded sessions.

We would like to invite you to use the chat function to share with us what country you are joining us from today. And over the course of the conference we've been seeing some great representation nationwide. So, really keen to get you to start to engage with us and to enter where you are and what country you're on within that chat function.

Kate Johnson

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We'd also like to introduce Be You. And for those of you who don't know about Be You or haven't been in one of our virtual conferences, Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators.

It's delivered by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. It's completely free online, available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia. Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional well-being and their own mental health.

It offers educators online professional learning, fact sheets, webinars and other resources. It offers learning communities tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and well-being. The discussions throughout this conference have highlighted Be You resources, tools, and professional learning to show you how Be You can support a whole school and whole service approach to mental well-being.

We'd also like to tell you about the conference. So, recent events have reinforced the need for mental well-being strategies in early learning services and schools. This conference has covered three key themes in 10 sessions over two days. Mental health and well-being, a whole community approach, prepare and take care, critical incidents in uncertain times, and the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships, which is what we're going to be discussing today. Most of the sessions in the two day conference are aimed at a learning stage, early learning, primary school or secondary school. However, this session is relevant for all learning stages. If you have missed a session that has been relevant to you, they will be available recorded on our Be You website in the future.

Gerri Sumpter

Fantastic. Thank you, Kate. So, now is time for us to get into the details of our presentation. So, as mentioned, today's session will be looking at the role that families and the wider community can play in supporting positive mental health outcomes for children and young people in the learning communities through partnerships. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many services, schools, families and support systems have needed to find new ways of working together, and for many of us the nature of our relationships with families and the broader community is looking different to what it used to.

Our children, young people and families have been through some intense periods of transition during isolation, and whilst we all know now the restrictions are easing and we're taking those steps towards life as we used to know it, our learning communities are again faced with the transition to the new version of normal. These changing times may have impacted on the mental health and well-being of many.

And, in addition, many of the businesses and organisations in our local communities have also faced hardships and are now faced with what the current and post COVID-19 world is also going to mean for them. So, we need to pull together and now is the perfect time to take the opportunity to redefine what we want our partnerships with families and our local community to look like, and to take active steps to involve and engage these key stakeholders for the benefit of mental health and well-being.

Partnerships, and you may have heard about partnerships across some other areas of this conference as well. We know that they're often seen as hard to establish and difficult to maintain, but what we're going to talk about today will really help you and we're going to start with looking at family partnerships.

So, we're going to look at why family partnerships are important to kick ourselves off. Be You defines family partnerships in education context as a collaborative relationship between people who agree to share responsibility and work toward a common goal, and in this case we've got the common goal of the mental health and well-being of children and young people. We're probably all familiar with family partnerships improving educational outcomes, and so we want to use the same approaches to assist our common goal of positive mental health outcomes. And I know across the conference as well, there's been much talk about risk and protective factors and we know that connections with families are a protective factor for the mental health and well-being of children and young people.

When we talk about protective factors for mental health, we mean those factors associated with a lower likelihood of negative mental health outcomes. And, in fact, there's much research out there now that shows us that when parental involvement is occurring, it's critical to the success of education based mental health programs, and that without involving families, a program is much less likely to achieve their goals. So, effective partnerships are very important and the reasons for this are as follows. First, when the learning communities and families have a better understanding of each of those environments, it creates a better understanding of each other and how to work together.

And I think we can probably all see that from our own work settings too. (LAUGHS) This sets up an environment to work through shared approaches and to provide more consistency for children and young people, both at home and in their learning community. Another benefit for educators is that when families better understand your role, they're more likely to appreciate you and what you're doing for their child and support your efforts.

This may be highlighted particularly for families with school aged children coming out of this period of home supported learning and for parents with their transition back to the workplace and what that means for their child in early learning services. We know that parent engagement and care engagement also supports well-being and behaviour management.

So, when the most significant people in the lives of children and young people come together, messaging is really amplified. An open conversation allows school and services and families to adopt a shared approach to addressing challenges and families learn new ways to support their child. And examples of this may be where there are some behavioural challenges that are arising and you may have a shared approach as to how to calm the child or to diffuse a situation. And having those strategies and having the same messaging coming from the parent or carer, as well as within that school or service, it really allows concerns to be addressed easily and quickly, and really helps the situation.

We know that family engagement also supports student transitions and during these times we know that there may be multiple transitions occurring concurrently for people, our children and young people as well as the adults in these circumstances. Transitions can be really unsettling and challenging for children and young people, but as mentioned earlier, a shared and consistent approach and messaging between the home and the learning community can make this a lot easier. So, getting that consistency and the same voice coming from the two sides is really important.

Kate Johnson

And as mentioned, our Be You website houses a number of fact sheets. So, we've actually got a link to one of our new fact sheets just being populated into the chat now which talks all about transitions and information on those transitions from home to schools and early learning services.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic, so we've got a lot, and again, it really amplifies how Be You can really support you through your whole of community approach. So, understanding that family context also helps educators better understand children and young people in their care and really support stronger relationship building. There will be benefits to children and young people in terms of being exposed to different family types and understanding what they are and knowing there are different values, routines and ideas about the world and what they know helps the educators around them to tailor things to them, to help them to see those things more clearly, and really enhance feelings of security and acceptance.

And it's really important to remember that children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities often feel that sense of being different from the majority. So, engaging with families and seeking to understand diverse home lives really provides that opportunity to create more inclusive spaces for children and young people and remove barriers that come from different cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

Kate Johnson

That's right, Geri. And we're just putting up on the chat now the link to our fact sheet on cultural diversity as well.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic.

Kate Johnson

Now, let's have a look at some of our Be You learning communities and strategies they are adopting relating to partnerships.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic.

Kate Johnson

We're actually going to play a video. If we can play the video, please.

Woman

They say it takes a village to raise a child and we know full well here that it's just not the educators on the floor here with the children, we need to be mindful of what's going on at home. The schools are only there, you know, six hours a day, five days a week, we can't have eyes on students 24/7, we need to work in partnership, it has to be a collaboration space. To set up a trusting relationship with the families allows us hopefully to put in preventative measures if necessary before something comes.

We meet with each family, we get to know a little bit about the family structure and organisation, as well as assessing what learning needs the child might have. When parents are prepared to talk to the school and share strategies and then try them at home so that we have consistent approaches at both school and home, and also school listening to what the parents are doing at home so that we can copy some of those strategies as well, it's great for the children's mental health and well-being. So, these strategies that we use have benefited our families in a number of ways. I think the most important part of that is we see more open communication around our families, both within their family unit and with us as educators.

They all love their children, they want to protect their young people and when they know that you're there to help and support them to do that, you can really work in partnership. To create best practice partnerships, the best advice I think I would have would be to be well trained and well versed on the information that's available from the professionals. Second to that would be keep lines of communication open at all times and that is a difficult thing to do sometimes because there are families who are perhaps not on the same page as we are here. However, if we dig in a little bit and we work a bit harder to get that really good line of communication open, it's very much well worth it.

Geri Sumpter

So, we really hope you enjoyed that, it's great seeing what our learning communities are out there doing, and that really gives some great examples of how partnerships can be effective. So, we're now going to go on to look at how families are involved and engaged with you and we recognise that there's so much excellent work happening in schools and services already. When we've been allowed to, we know we see lots of family involvement.

So, families involved in classroom activities, excursions, working bees, canteens, etc. And I know for myself, I run my oldest daughter's, who's in high school, her second-hand school uniform shop. How about you, Kate?

Kate Johnson

Oh, look, I've helped with some fundraising for the school fete and been involved in some working bees as well, Geri.

Gerri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. So, these sorts of activities offer a really valuable community and social and governance function. And involvement may be a really good way for families to start to get integrated with a school or service and can work with a level of commitment they actually want to make at that time. However, benefits really start when involvement is taken to the next level and becomes engagement.

So, rather than helping and being led by the school or service's needs, engagement becomes about a partnership to really benefit the children and young people. So, the goal of engagement is about to motivate families to contribute to the learning and the mental health and wellbeing of the child or young person at home, as well as in that school and service.

So, really getting that coordinated messaging. As an example, during our periods of remote learning, families have also adopted a more central role in their school-aged child's learning. We've seen some great examples of where families have been sending pictures of their children's learning to educators and schools where parents became partners in looking at their child's positive behaviours to promote their motivation for learning. I know that's certainly something that happens in my household.

Kate Johnson

So now, we'd love to hear from you and we have a reflective question that we'd love you to populate some answers in the chat. How are families involved or engaged in your learning community? And we're really keen to hear from those of you who've changed family engagement strategies during isolation. What did this look like in your learning community? So please, start populating into our chat, and we'll share some of those responses shortly. We're also going to populate into the chat, as mentioned, our Be You website has links to professional learning modules, and we've got a module summary on partnerships, as well, and we're just sharing that link, as well.

Gerri Sumpter

Fantastic. So, really excited to see what you're going to tell us in this space. So, while you're continuing to write in that chat, I'm going to run through five key elements to developing partnerships with families. And this is with the acceptance that some partnerships will take longer to develop than others, and we know that, you know, everything takes time, and it's about perseverance in this space, as well.

And so, our five key elements really relate to building trust. And we know that when you and the families partner, you're going to be able to really explore and value each other's knowledge of each child or young person, as well as each other's contributions to and roles in each child or young person's life.

So, honest and respectful communication and a genuine interest in one another helps to build trust, which in turn, allows people to be open about their thoughts and feelings. And this can really be beneficial when you may have challenging circumstances that you want to discuss with a parent or carer about that child or young person. Or where you're noticing things and you want to make those inquiries, and we have those modules in Be You, as well, about notice and inquiry around mental health challenges.

So, really dig into those professional learning modules. We then want to look at family centred practice. And we know this is all around supporting parents and carers to be actively involved in their child or young person's learning and mental health and wellbeing. And we want to draw on family knowledge, their resources and strengths, and use that information. And we've got to share that information in an open, respectful and collaborative way. We need to think about how we can help these families to participate with us, and also find out why families aren't participating. So, if you notice that there isn't participation within your school or service, do some explanation and some exploration as to why.

So why aren't people, what is it that you're not doing or that you are doing that's engaging or disengaging them? And I think that's a very worthwhile activity to undertake. We know we also need effective communication. So, thinking about communicating around the young person's strengths and their challenges, and working together to support one another. And so, we've got to think about, how do we

remove barriers to communication? It might be all around the timing of your communication. You may not have enough time to really explore the conversation you want to get into. Or the parent or carer or family member may not have the time.

So, think about your timing in advance and pick a time that's going to suit everybody. Think about how you're feeling at this time, as well. It may not be the right time for you as an individual to engage in challenging conversations with others. So, you may need to seek support to communicate well with those families during these times. And that's OK. We've got to reach out for that support when necessary. And that might be reaching out to a colleague or someone else within your school or service that may be able to have that conversation for you or with you with that family. And it's really around making sure that you do still have that conversation and that you just find an accessible way to do that. We also need to make sure when we're having these conversations that you're communicating and you're listening non-judgmentally.

So, some things you may hear that do not coincide with your own values set, you need to put that to one side. When somebody's trying to tell you something, listen non-judgmentally, take on board what they're saying, and think of a way forward. So, enjoy the, you know, explore the strategies that you can to help you to do that. We need to be empathetic. Try to see things from the family's point of view. So, if the family is too busy to stop and chat, pick a time, be understanding of how stressful it can be for families when time is limited. And to wrap this up, just have some respect for diversity. And review your environment with inclusion in mind, removing those barriers.

Kate Johnson

And look, we've had some great feedback coming through the chat, so I'm just going to share a couple of comments. So from Ralph, "We use key educator approach at our service. This allows us to truly develop a collaborative learning community between educators and families. We use various online platforms to communicate regularly."

Geri Sumpter

Oh, fantastic.

Kate Johnson

And from Emma Louise, We have parents on the school council, canteen, we have English lessons, parents come in for bilingual storytelling during Harmony Week. Parents provide their cultural food and attend our Harmony Week picnic. We hold an annual parent volunteer morning tea to thank them for their support. So, lots of things happening there. Just a couple more. We've got so much; I'll just do a couple more. Suzanne, "Our school," this is obviously in recent times, Our school phoned home twice a week to check on progress and answer any questions that arose. We also did a home visit once a fortnight to once a week." So, that's amazing.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, that is.

Kate Johnson

And also similarly, Elizabeth, Calling families every week, recording educators reading books and singing songs. We created the rainbow trail at the front of our fence so the community could join in and know we're all in this together." And I know in our primary school, we did something similar with the rainbow, so...

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And in my daughter's primary school, we also had in their learning... The learning that was coming through for them, they put little bitmojis of the teachers in there, and so they could really connect and engage with the personality and the knowledge they had of their teacher to get them connected on that educator-student level, which was just gorgeous.

Kate Johnson

OK, now for a bit of fun, we're going to do a poll. So, if we can put the poll up on the screen, we'd love to do

a bit of a survey to find out which parent engagement strategies have you found to be the most successful in your learning community?

So, is it helping families establish home environments to support their children as learners? Communicating with families about your learning community's programs and their child's progress? Recruiting and organising parents to help them support within your learning community? Providing families with strategies to support learning at home? Involving parents in decision-making processes? Inviting parents to participate in celebrations? Or maybe there's something else specific to being in isolation due to COVID-19? You know, share any other comments in the chat. So, I can see results coming through straight away, but we'll let them go through... (CROSSTALK)

Geri Sumpter

..accumulating. It's lovely knowing that so many people are out there participating with this whilst we are in the studio. So, I just want to share a story that we have from one of our Be You communities. And this is about a high school educator called Hannah, and she had a year eight maths class where she noticed there was some levels of anxiety between the students in the class around their maths. And she was trying to think of some strategies she could help to alleviate this anxiety. And when it came to the parent-teacher interview, she got a little bit more insight because she was talking to the parents and finding that they had some interesting, I guess, approaches with their children.

So, some of the parents were thinking, I never did well at maths by himself at school, so how can I expect my child to? Whereas, others were sort of a bit dismissive of their child's capabilities or their engagement with their educator. So, what she did was she reflected on this with her cohorts of educators, and she decided to run a session around... that was linked into one of our poll subjects, which is around providing families with strategies to support learning at home. And what she did was she ran some sessions with the parents face-to-face around what the curriculum looked like, what they could expect from their children, how they could support their children, give them a bit of skill in this space, as well. Which is something, I think, you know, parents all benefit from. And then she put some resources online that those parents could keep dipping in and out of.

Over the course of that year, she did notice some greater engagement from her students. She continued the conversation with them, and their anxieties did seem to be lessening. And then across the end-of-year parent-teacher interviews, the parents were talking about how they had actually been discussing this with their children, which I think is just fabulous. It shows that benefit that there is still a role, even in high school, for family members to play with their children in education.

Kate Johnson

We've also got... I've got a case study that's actually on our Be You website, from one of our Be You early learning services. And it talks about Mary, who is an educator in the three-year-old room. And she was having a difficult time with one of the children, James, who refused to do what she said and often threw tantrums. Mary was really unsure whether she should talk to anyone. She didn't want to be judged. She felt like she should be able to manage the situation. But after talking to other educators, she approached James' mother and asked if they could catch up later in the day to discuss the situation.

When they caught up, James' mother described how she supported James at home, the boundaries she sets, the approaches that generally seemed to work, while showing her understanding of her child and how things might be different for him at pre-school. So, this information really helped Mary and allowed her to understand James in a new way, and to really reflect on how she might support him. So, the women agreed to meet again to talk about his progress and it, you know, really, I guess, highlights the importance of that communication and that relationship.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, and the benefit of that information being shared, and then having those shared strategies, that's fabulous.

Kate Johnson

So, we're going to quickly show our poll results, cause we haven't done that yet. And we've actually got a clear lead here with almost, yeah, 36% of you saying that communicating with families about your learning community programs and their child's progress. So, it's probably demonstrated quite nicely in those two examples. And followed by providing families with strategies to support learning at home. Which obviously, has been very relevant. And involving parents in decision-making processes.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And it's good to see how you're all engaging, that's fabulous.

Kate Johnson

That's right.

Geri Sumpter

What we're going to do now is move on from looking at those family partnership relationships and really start looking at the wider community. So, we do know that families are that important part, but there are really important reasons also to connect with the community more broadly. So, the broader the community connections that exist within your learning community, the greater the range of support that exists for your children and young people. So they'll have more to think about and choose from that's relevant to them, and the more readily you can refer to them and make them accessible. So, we are living in a time when connections to others and the mental health and wellbeing benefits of connections have never been so much at the front of our minds.

So, it's an opportune time for us to really start planning for and building additional connections with groups in your local community. So, community partnerships are important. They can be rewarding and beneficial for the mental health and well-being of everyone involved. And we're going to go through a bit of consideration of benefits relating to children and young people, to families, and the community more generally.

So, in relation to children and young people, when they feel they have a sense of belonging and feel safe, secure and supported, they have the confidence to play, explore, take risks, and learn more, and they thrive in an environment of mutually supportive and caring relationships. And community engagement really helps support children to then live interdependently with others, be decision-makers and have influence. So, the ability to participate in their different communities is a key element to citizenship and it helps our young children and young people to respond to diversity and become socially responsible.

So, a really important factor. When we're looking at educators and their community partnerships, I really want to focus in on here on support services. So, we know that where we've got strong links with support services in the local community, it provides educators with invaluable information and resources. So, they can draw on community knowledge and expertise, understand the children and families they're working with and better be able to provide children with learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant to their lives and support them through any difficult circumstances, they can reach out to those communities they need to be involved with. And we really know that when families are well supported, they're better equipped to nurture their child's development, well-being and learning.

So a service or a school that is connected and collaborates with support organisations can be really instrumental in facilitating targeted support for families. And when the family partnerships exist, they can more readily introduce and talk through family engagement with that service. Child health, child education, family, and community organisations that support families and children as some examples.

And I know in here, you know, if you've got some challenging circumstances and you really want to connect a family with a community support service, when you understand that service and when you can explain and get the family understanding that service, you can have that warm transition with that relationship. Really make sure that, you know, the experience there is positive. And it's understood by all about the

benefits that that will bring. And with the community, the opportunities for new connections can build the social capital of everyone involved and support the social and emotional well-being of people through a new sense of belonging and purpose.

Kate Johnson

So, now, let's have a look at an example of a community partnership in our Be You community. So, we're going to show you another quick video. This is Kids Capers, North Lakes, and we'd like to show you their kindness garden and fairy lane.

Christina

My name is Christina, I'm the assistant centre manager here at Kids Capers, North Lakes. I'm also the educational leader of the service so I mentor staff in programming and practice. The support from Be You has been really good. They're always there to touch base with them, they call us and just say hey, how're you going with that module, was there anything that I can help with?

Speaker

Relax! Is that a beautiful rock? This kindness garden is awesome, isn't it? We're sharing the kindness throughout the whole centre, not only for the staff but the whole community as well that come through. Off to fairy lanes, it's a community initiative that one of my good friends has started off. Wow.

Child

We hide in some rocks. After that we got to find some rocks, then we would go and see everything like the pinecones hanging and the fairy messages.

Speaker

Now we know what it's all about. Yeah, absolutely.

Christina:

The community can't raise the children alone; the centre can't raise the children alone and the parents can't raise the children alone. If we're not linking all of those things together, then something falls down along the way.

Child

I found one!

Geri Sumpter

So, we hope you really enjoyed that video. I just think that's a beautiful example around community partnerships and the benefits that that can bring. So, now we're going to do a bit of exploration around how community partnerships can be developed. And it's important to remember at this point that each learning community is unique. And what's appropriate and possible in one setting may not work for another.

So, it's important that you consider your individual context. And you nurture the relationships that are available and meaningful within your own community. So, some key principles to consider as a starting point are what I'm going to talk through next. And in this space, we really need to consider the mutual benefit of partnerships.

So, it's the, what's in it for each of us aspect of this. And so some businesses or organisations are going to be happy to engage with you purely from a social responsibility perspective, or to share their cause. And but it can be a really good idea to have an idea of the benefits that you might be providing to them also, as well as what they're going to give to you. And so we need to go into these partnerships, really understanding what are we each going to get out of this? What is the value of doing this? What's that return on investment going to be? And for the time and energy we're going to place into this relationship.

We also need to make sure we're thinking about the culture and the values in the learning communities.

And considering if they align with those of the companies or organisations that you're looking to partner with. And I think this is a really important aspect. Is, are you getting people that are going to be giving that same message that you want to give to your learning communities? Making sure those culture and values align really mean you can work well together and get the greatest benefit from the partnership that you're having.

Another really important point is to make sure that any connections made have the full support of your leadership teams. So, I think this one's really important to remember because you might be in this partnership going into this situation, as an action team leader or connected person within the school or service. Having real gusto around what you want this relationship to look like. And you might be spending time going down the track with developing that partnership. But unless you've got the full support of your leadership team and the leadership team of the organisation that you're partnering with, you may ultimately find that you've spent your time wasted. So, it's really valuable to make sure that you're thinking about your partnerships, and you really almost putting that business case forward to your leadership teams as to why this partnership is valuable to you both, and what's necessary.

And once you know you've got that full support of your leadership teams, you can invest the time you can get the community engaged, and you can really make the most about what this partnership can bring to you both. And another point with this is, you need to be prepared to spend time building the relationships relating to your partnerships and ensuring they're sustainable. So, one thing that I've seen broadly across health promotion activities and other sorts of partnerships within our learning services and schools, is that you may have a really engaged action team leader or person within the organisation, and that really wants to partner with something specific.

So, it might be, for example, they really want to partner with a local netball club, because they really love netball. And that's what they think will bring benefit to their school. However, once they leave that school or service, nobody else interested in netball, and so their relationship may drop down. So, you need to make sure when you're building the relationship, that it's not a single point of contact, that the relationship has several people that are connected across the school or service and you're making sure you're spending that time to engage those people, and making sure your partnership is really sustainable.

And another thing to consider is the resourcing and the requirements on your learning community from entering into that partnership. So, again, you might have an organisation that's willing to engage with you purely from that social responsibility perspective. And they might be saying, we don't demand any expense from you. It's not going to cost you anything to partner with us, and in fact, we'll be bringing things to you. And but it might be that the amount of HR time and admin time that needs to be put into this partnership makes it one that's not viable for your school and service.

So, really important to be considering about, what's the return on investment in terms of the time spent? And is that where your community's needs actually sit right now. So partnerships, they can look really glossy, etc, when you first think about what the partnership is going to look like. But it's really worth spending the time really delving into what it's going to mean for your community, and making sure that you're making the right partnerships at the right time, and considering the needs of your communities.

Kate Johnson

So, we're going to put up on screen now our second poll for today. And we're really keen to understand what types of community partnerships will you look to build in your learning community? Is it connections with local businesses, engagement with local community groups, investigate local government facilities, or researching volunteer opportunities, or maybe you've got something else in place. Again, share your comments in the chat for everyone to read.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic, and really welcome you to engage with that. And I love seeing those examples that were coming through previously. So, while you're sharing information about your partnerships, we're just going to

unpack some of these options just a little bit further, might give you a bit more insight, and help you think about something that you might pop into the chat for us. So, connections with local businesses, as we've mentioned, they can be really beneficial and they can lead to sponsorship or even financial benefits for your learning community.

But they've got some interesting aspects of them too. They may provide existing connections for young people looking for work experience, for example, or work placements, or alternative pathways such as apprenticeships, so really helping your community to see what's on offer locally and exploring those options. They might provide opportunities for excursions. And out of room or classroom learning experiences. And I think the kindness garden, you know, really explores that for us and shows us what that can look like.

Or it may be engagement that allows, you know, a different opportunity to get out to explore and to see the world a bit broader. And there might be possibilities for businesses to provide information in their area of expertise to promote themselves and to really benefit you as well. So, an example of this might be a local dentist, you know, giving a presentation on dental hygiene. And potentially in return, you know, the quid pro quo for them is that they might get some new clients as a result. So, connection to local businesses can be really helpful.

Connections with community groups might really help children and young people to think about what sort of community activities or social activities there are out there within the community and think about something different, so they may never have thought about a certain activity that they might be able to undertake or a certain way of thinking that they might be able to explore through some connection with a community group.

So, they provide them with opportunities for their families, as well as the students to build their connections and their social capital. Engaging with local cultural amenities is a really important one as well. So, this might be anything from a theatre to a music centre to some heritage centres, or some voluntary groups. And, I know, for example, in my local area, so I'm in Mentone, in Victoria, if anybody's out there from Mentone, please pop it in the chat. And we have a lot of little heritage areas around our area.

And I know that our schools and services, you know, they take the children and young people on walks around the area to really connect into what's in their local community. And there's lots of volunteer opportunities that could be considered, we know that volunteering opportunities are really beneficial for mental health. They're rewarding for children and young people as well as the people they help and some beautiful examples come in around children visiting aged care homes or animal shelters, for example.

Kate Johnson

So, we're going to have a look at our poll results and we really have a clear winner here with over 70% saying that engagement with local community groups is the type of community partnership that they're using in their learning community. Just a couple of comments. Many of you are saying that all of them are important, which is absolutely valid. A comment from Liz, "My kids are at the older end and so, volunteer work can really help them to safely prepare for work in the future." Which is great. And another comment from Francis. "We've invited residents from an aged care home for afternoon tea made by the hospitality students."

Geri Sumpter

Oh, fantastic. That's great. Really often there's great ways to engage.

Kate Johnson

Oh, and another one just come through, as well. From Tracy, "We are connected with the local op shop kids and the kids do volunteer work there and welfare support connections."

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. So, I'd love to see some more examples to share in that space, as well. So, keep popping

those in. That would be really great to see. Some other examples and strategies - excuse me - to build partnerships. Really think about, you know, ways to seek connections with those local groups. And obviously, the local groups is a great example that is being reflected. And I'd just really like to give a shout-out to parent support groups.

So, parent support groups can be a lifeline for parents and I know, for myself, I've used many a support group over time. Especially, I migrated from the UK with a small child, and then had another baby here. And it's really helpful to connect with those like-minded people or people that have those similar needs at the same time. And often, what can happen with a school or a service might be that they could offer space for those groups to gather, which might lead to greater attendance by your parenting community and lead to more confident and informed families.

And I think that's really beneficial. The other aspect of this, going back to our family partnerships, is that whilst those parents or carers are in those support groups, it also gives the educators another opportunity to be able to tap into them and have those conversations about how they can, you know, get that mutual understanding. We said about that shared benefit, those shared approaches, and really build that trust in those relationships. So, I'd like you to, you know, think about how you can explore those groups.

Other areas, as well, to explore may be around inviting members of local organisations to sit on your council or any management committees. So, is there somebody that could act as that bit of a critical friend at a certain time or need? And I know that, you know, there's certainly well-placed school council members at certain times when things need doing in the school council groups that I've been a representative on. So, it's using things to your benefit, thinking about what's necessary, and really building things into your practices.

Kate Johnson

And another strategy that you could consider, too, is to think about how you can respectfully build ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in your area. Each local area and context will be different, but you could contact your local Aboriginal lands council, local Aboriginal educational consultative groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned businesses and art centres or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community liaison offices for advice on that.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, so again, reaching out into community and taking the information and the support from where you can get it from to help you. And so, researching what community hubs are available in your area for culturally and linguistically diverse communities is such a beneficial activity, and really can help you think about how you can connect with them in your learning community, and the needs they might bring or needs they might solve for you. But the benefits they might also bring to you in your learning community. And so, really think about that. Now, have we got any other comments in the chat that we need to be putting through at this stage?

Kate Johnson

At this stage, I actually thought it would be a good opportunity for you to share the partnership that your school has with the local real estate.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. So, our local school, Mentone Primary School, give them a shout-out while I'm here, they have a partnership with a real estate agency and in that, the real estate agency really provides a lot of promotion of the school. It gives them that support as they are, you know, involved in certain activities or certain needs that they need to solve. The agency also offers lots of activities for the families within the community, so they will run Easter egg hunts, for example, and Easter egg colouring competitions and certain activities throughout the year.

And they might then feed back into school assemblies with some results and really engage our school

community with their, you know, with that local community and have some benefits drawn for everybody. I mean, it's a real way for the school, the families, and the community all engaging together and gives everybody those great opportunities for conversation and connection.

Kate Johnson

And just a couple of other comments that have come through. Veronique, "We have local Elders coming to spend time with our Aboriginal students. They do paintings and storytelling, etc."

Geri Sumpter

Beautiful.

Kate Johnson

And then there was a comment from Kylie here. We engage in the community by visiting the doctor's surgery, local garage, library visits, post office visits, and have had cooking sessions with the QCWA ladies, have provided parents with the opportunity to attend positive parenting programs." And there's still more coming through. The iPad's scrolling away here.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. No, that sounds great. It's really good to see how you're all connecting. So, what we want to move on to now is really another reflective question. And we are coming to the end of our session. But we want you to think about what will the next steps be for your action team in engaging the community? So, going away, reflecting, thinking about partnerships in general, and thinking about the family partnerships as well as the community partnerships.

So, what will the next steps be for your action team in engaging the community and how will you do it, you know, differently and in a different way, an improved way based on the different information that you've heard today? And I think it's always great to leave one of these sessions with that reflective question. Think about your community and have a really good think. In relation to the community, it's just also that reminder that the businesses and organisations have also been impacted by these current circumstances and that having those connections with, you know, the schools and their learning services in their areas will be as much as a boost for them as it is for you. So, please take that away and discuss.

Kate Johnson

And Geri, just finally, if we can squeeze in just a couple of questions that have come through, and they're quite good ones to share with everybody. How do we find opportunities to link in with the local community?

Geri Sumpter

Ah, fantastic, so finding your opportunities. Well, I think there's so many ways to do this and really, one of the best ways is around using those consultation skills that you have. So, thinking about who you can get information from, and that might be from colleagues in the local community, it might be from families, from the parents and carers. It might be from networks that people have got. So, ask them, ask them who they'd like to be connected with. Ask them who they know.

So, sometimes it's not what you know, it's who you know. And this might be a prime example of that. I know, again, you know, some great stories around where people involved in organisations, they know the right people and they can make those connections to make things happen for you. So, connect with the people in your networks. And also, connect with the early learning services and schools. Ask them what they're doing and think about how you can benefit each other to really build and, you know, promote each other's services or to connect other schools and services in with them too and to help get that messaging, or those great opportunities discussed and then put in place.

Kate Johnson

And we've actually had someone come through with a comment suggesting creating a plan for when we're able to get out into the community and what we can start to plan.

(CROSSTALK)

Geri Sumpter

And we've got some action planning tools within our Be You kit, as well, that you could use to document such plans, so that's fantastic.

Kate Johnson

And if I can squeeze in one more question, I know we're heading towards our time. This question here, My learning community has not yet started connecting with families and the wider community. How should I go about getting my leadership on-board?"

Geri Sumpter

Ah, fantastic. So yeah, so that really is coming back to that building your business case. Just build your business case around it. And within the Be You tools, as well, we do have some surveys. You might go out and you might do some surveying within your communities. You can survey in there amongst educators, amongst families, and the children and young people within your services and schools, as well. And really thinking about what are the needs that your services and schools have got at the moment and how might they be best fulfilled through partnerships and connections? And once you've got those needs articulated, that might then be the time where you can take your ideas to the leaders and think about how to fulfil those needs, and really sell in, "We need to spend the time doing this because it's going to be really beneficial to our community."

So again, focus on that return-on-investment, the what's in it for us if we go down this line and how are we going to show that any changes that we do make and any partnerships we do make are going to lead to an improvement? And really, you know, resolve some of those needs related to mental health and wellbeing that our communities have right now.

Kate Johnson

Fantastic.

Geri Sumpter

Hope that helps.

Kate Johnson

I'm sure it will.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. So, what we want you to do now is keep coming through with any questions. And the reason for that is that beyond this event, we will be documenting what's happened within the chat and we will be putting together some information to answer any questions that we really just literally haven't had the time to get around to today.

So, keep populating and we'll forward you those and make those accessible on the Be You website, etc, once they've been fulfilled. But what I want you to do now is really think about your takeaways, as well. So, as well as the reflective questions, and I do appreciate, I'm giving you a lot to do this afternoon. As well as those reflective questions, I really want you to learn more about Be You. So, we encourage you to continue to engage with Be You, learn more and keep yourself up-to-date. So, if you're learning community isn't yet implementing the Be You whole learning community approach, we encourage you to register online and get started with support from our Be You consultants through Early Childhood Australia and Headspace.

So, there's consultants there to help you and are really keen to connect through the different types of events and check-ins that we have that can support you. And if you're looking for resources to support you with a specific need or concern, such as adapting to change, visit beyou.edu.au and really get stuck into our resources. And the adapting to change will have focused on the coronavirus situation that we're in at the moment, as well. And then finally, keep up-to-date with our Be You resources, our events, our tools and our

tips, through our socials, and we've got plenty happening on socials and including Twitter today. So, #BeYouVirtual is where you'd go with Twitter if you wanted to put anything in there. And please make sure you're also subscribing to our Be You YouTube channel. Now that's a mouthful to say. (LAUGHS)

Kate Johnson

It is.

Geri Sumpter

And then you'll receive all of the updates on our new videos from Be You. So, thank you so much for joining us today and I want to give you the full ten minutes to go and have your self-care time and make the most of this break between us and our next session. And we're actually leading now into our last session for the Be You Virtual Conference, which is all around a panel from ECA and Headspace. There's some great representatives from those organisations, our partners, talking to you about how Be You can support you moving forwards.

So, I strongly encourage you to go and watch. So, thanks again for all of the great work everybody's been doing during this time. We really do appreciate it wholeheartedly from all of the Be You team across the organisations and we look forward to joining you again in the future. Thanks very much.

Kate Johnson

Thank you.

End of webinar.