

# Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

## Be You and School Age Care

**Presented by Sara Richardson, Jeremy Tucker and Brooke Capovilla on 2 June 2020**

**Sara Richardson:**

Hello everybody. We are really excited to welcome you to our In Focus webinar today, Be You and School Age Care. I'm Sara Richardson, a Be You Early Childhood Australia State Manager based in Adelaide. I'd like to introduce one of our panellists, Jeremy Tucker from headspace.

**Jeremy Tucker:**

Morning, everyone.

I'll give myself a full introduction. Hi, everyone. My name is Jeremy. I'm one of the Education Consultants with the headspace Schools Team. I'm working here in sunny Western Australia.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks, Jeremy. And I'd like to also introduce our other panellist Brooke.

**Brooke Capovilla:**

Hi everyone. My name's Brooke Capovilla. I've been working in the education and care service industry for the last 25 years. 20 years of that time has been in local government children's services, and for the last two and a half years I've been working at a community based not-for-profit OOSH service in Castle Hill, Sydney.

I'm also the Action Team Leader for the Be You program. I am delighted to be asked to share some of our journey so far with you today.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks so much, Jeremy and Brooke. They'll go off screen now, but we'll come back to them in a minute after we've done some of the introductions. Hopefully you can all join with us to have a really great chat about what Be You might look like in a School Age Care context. Just a little bit of background for those of you who don't know, Be You is a national initiative. It's led by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, who I work with, and also headspace, which as you heard from Jeremy, is where he's from, and it's funded by the Australian Government.

The vision for Be You is that each learning community – and when we say a learning community, we're looking at school age care, early learning, or school – is positive, inclusive and resilient: a place where every child, every young person, every educator, and their family can achieve the best possible mental health. It's really aspirational, but it's really exciting to be part of something that's looking to change and create a mentally healthy generation. If you are registered for Be You, you will already know a little bit about what we're going to talk about today, and it would be great for you to share some of your experiences

if you can. This might also give you an opportunity to think a bit differently about what you might add to your Be You program. If you're not registered and you'd like to be, this might be an opportunity or a starting point for you to start thinking about how you might do that.

As part of the Be You initiative, and also as part of Early Childhood Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan, we continue to learn and be inspired by an ongoing process of embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches and perspectives in our work, the ways of knowing, doing, and being, and we focus on them to make mental health matter.

I'd like to acknowledge the land that I'm meeting with you on today, the land of the Ghana people of the Adelaide Plains region and pay respects to elders past, present, and emerging. You might like to acknowledge the lands that you're meeting on from today in the chat as well. As we go through today I'd really like you also to think about is how you can be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all of the work that you do.

The other thing that we really need to do when we're having this conversation about mental health is to think about how we are going to take care of ourselves and each other.

This slide has some of the Always Be You symbols for self-care, Make Safe and Learn Many Ways. These symbols are informed by and part of the Always Be You resources on the Be You website. I think it's really important that as we have this conversation we think about taking care of ourselves.

If you at any time need support, please reach out either in the chat or in your own context as well. Remember talking about it and looking for help is really important, but so is taking care of each other and remembering to be respectful when people have different opinions, ways of viewing things, ways of seeing things and different ideas. Self-care is about taking care of yourself and each other.

I'm sure that over the last few months you will have been in a number of different online spaces. We're using the GoTo Webinar platform today and this might not be so familiar to you. If you've been to one of our webinars before you will know there is a question and answer function. I'd like to say hi and give a shout out to people working behind the scenes today from our Early Childhood Australia team, Dino and Steph, and also Emma and Sammi who will be responding to some of your chat questions and sharing some of your responses with everybody and with us.

I would also like to thank Maria, who will be adding some content into the chat box to give you some ideas, additional resources and support for thinking differently along with some reflective questions as well.

There is also a handout that you can access. Remember that all of these things will be available post webinar so if you don't get to download that today and you just want to listen and participate that way, then maybe you can access the handouts and other resources later on. We'll also be having polls throughout the session. This is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts and ideas. As a poll comes up on screen you'll be asked to respond, so please feel free to do that. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas in any of these spaces in the online space today.

Let's get back to the conversation that we're going to have today. We welcome back Brooke and Jeremy to the screen.

The focus for today is Be You and School Age Care. This is a national initiative; we've had a lot of conversations about how we describe the school age care space. I know that each of you – and Brooke's already mentioned it – use different ways of describing this space. Today we are going with school age care as a way of covering everybody, but I want to acknowledge that you may refer to yourselves perhaps as OOSH or OSHC. However we talk about it, hopefully you feel like we're talking about you and what works for you and your service.

The other conversation we want to have today is how does a conversation about mental health and wellbeing fit into your context? What does it look like? We're going to look at the how and talk about what that looks like for those children that you work with from four through to 13 – where it might fit, how it might fit, and also the why. I think that's a really important thing to consider.

We'll look at that in a range of different ways and have a conversation with each other about what that looks like. We are talking about mental health, but you might know that as social emotional learning or you might refer to it as wellbeing. One of the things we want to do today is make a connection between that.

If we think about the question “is there a place for mental health and wellbeing in the school age care context?” – Brooke, from a service perspective, how would you respond to that kind of question?

**Brooke Capovilla:**

A response from my perspective would be that mental health and wellbeing is crucial in out of school hours care centres. As children are progressing through infants and then the primary school years, they are faced with new challenges. Whether it be developing or maintaining friendship, academic and sporting achievements, not getting into particular groups at school – which can be disheartening, and also their personal development, particularly Years 5 and 6 as they become more conscious of those areas which obviously can impact on their wellbeing. I also feel that children start to develop a stronger sense of the mental health and wellbeing of family members and the friends around them.

Regardless of how each child participates in out of school hours care, where some children come for 15 minutes and some are there every day getting picked up at six o'clock at night, they all need to have that sense of true belonging and acceptance from the service as a whole and also from the educators. That's obviously why collaboration between children, educators and families is so important.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks, Brooke. Jeremy, from your perspective is there a place for mental health and wellbeing in school age care?

**Jeremy Tucker:**

Definitely. I think a huge part of my work and the work that I do with the headspace Schools Team and through the Be You initiative is supporting best practice mental health and wellbeing from a whole school approach.

I find every school does mental health and wellbeing in some sort of way because everyone in every school is a microcosm of their own world. When I think about what that looks like in a broader sense for school age care - from my experience, many school aged kids, including my three kids, are attached to the service. It is the first people that they see in the morning and the last people that they see in the afternoon for the days that they attend and they are a huge extension of the school and the community.

I think even in a broader sense many school age care centres are attached to a school, sit next to a school or have a very close relationship to a school as well as the broader community.

Even if you think of a Bronfenbrenner model about the people that support our children and our young people, you've got the young person at the centre and the family, community and school surrounding them. Then you've also got all the other services that that young person comes in contact with.

When we're thinking about mental health and wellbeing, as you said Sara, there's different languages that we use for that, it's social and emotional learning, for a number of school age care services we might even be thinking about something like behaviour and some of the things that we might be doing to support a young person before and after school, or in the time that we see them. We know that behaviour and mental health are often the flip sides of the same coin because what might be coming up for that child or young

person, they might be verbalising and acting out in certain different ways or not acting in their 'normal' sense. I say 'normal' because everybody's normal is totally different.

It becomes an integral part of the way that we work and already work. A reflection I had when we were chatting, Sara, was every school age care service already does this in so many different ways and that's why today we can focus on what that looks like and what are some of the things that we can do to really hone in on that and have a focus on or create a bit of a strategy. It definitely has a place.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks, Jeremy. It's interesting you say that because for me one of the things coming into this from an education background is I really came to understand that we hear the words 'mental health' and we think it's something quite separate but actually it is the core of our work.

How we would describe it in an education setting probably is social emotional learning or wellbeing but good practice is supportive of mental health and it's really the same thing. I agree with you, it is what we're doing already. We just haven't ever called or referred to it as supportive mental health. I think the other point about that is that when we talk about mental health, we talk about the breadth of mental health. Good mental health is part of that whole picture.

When we have mental health concerns or when a child might need some additional support because there is perhaps a diagnosed mental illness, then we're talking about all of those things and how we might explore the big picture bit more. Have I use the right language, Jeremy?

**Jeremy Tucker:**

Definitely.

**Sara Richardson:**

I think that's part of what this journey is about, learning about, exploring and starting to use that language. Have we started using that language or are we still sitting in our comfortable social emotional learning and wellbeing language?

**Jeremy Tucker:**

I think this is the most important thing. A huge thing that I've taken from the work that I do with schools and educators is we really want to acknowledge that mental health and wellbeing, or mental health literacy, isn't our first language when we're speaking to educators. You think about the amount of people that are working in school age care – you've got full-time staff, casual staff, people who've been working in the industry for a long time or people who ebb and flow out of it. Everyone who works in school age care obviously has care in their role and is in that industry because they do care about the children and young people.

Even with myself, at the moment I look after just over 200 schools here in WA supporting mental health and wellbeing from an educator's perspective. The mental health literacy of every single educator is totally different and that's because we bring our own lived experience. We might have that from our experience within families, the schools that we work in or the communities that we live in.

Everyone's understanding of that might be slightly different and as you said, the languages can be totally different. Language by definition is a construct. We might call it something totally different and have different understandings of what that is. A good starting place is to think about mental health that sits on a continuum – sometimes we are good, sometimes we are bad and we go between that daily, weekly and monthly. Having that understanding and knowledge is really important. One of the things that I love about the Be You Framework is that it gives people common knowledge and common language to be able to talk

about what that looks like for them as an individual, in the teams that they work in, and in the services and schools they work in as well.

**Sara Richardson:**

I think that leads really nicely into our first poll because it would be great to hear from you about how you see yourself and whether you think having more mental health awareness would support the work you do. Part of the conversation we have been having is around whether learning more about what mental health actually means or building our mental health literacy as Jeremy described, would support you in your work. If you would like to participate select one of those options and if you're not sure, that's fine too.

Jeremy, you talked about language and that's the other thing to be mindful of. Different people will describe their school age care program in different ways. You might describe it as a place and an opportunity for children to develop life skills, a recreational program or a leisure program.

All of those things are unique to your context but they all also feed into the social emotional learning and wellbeing of children and their mental health.

We will now close the poll and have a look and see what people have said.

People have overwhelmingly responded yes, which is great. I guess that's why you've chosen to come today because you are interested in this and you think it's something that might be helpful and supportive in the work you do. Hopefully as we go on you will have more opportunity to explore what that looks like in a bit more detail. Some people are not sure which I think is really important too. Maybe that's why you came today because you're thinking, maybe this might help me. I think perhaps now it is really important to acknowledge that the work we're talking about and the Be You Framework is not therapeutic work.

I have a question for you, Jeremy, around that whole notion that this is within the realm of our work that we currently do, as you touched on that a bit before. This is the work we do, this is not about being a mental health expert. This is about supporting children's mental health and wellbeing in the frame or the limitations of your role. Do you wanted to add anything to that?

**Jeremy Tucker:**

When I think about the Be You Framework, it's made for our schools and services to be able to use and utilise how they want and how they need. I think what you were touching on, Sara is that wellbeing and mental health is a huge space within schools and services and it's really hard to figure out where to start, how to keep going and what to do because there is so much work that you can consistently do in this area without seeing quick results. We know that mental health and wellbeing is an ongoing approach. It's a circular model with what is going to be happening.

To the point you said before about how we're not all going to be pseudo-counsellors for every student and young person that we see - absolutely not. The Be You Early Support domain has a fantastic tool to support this, the Notice, Inquire, Provide module. It's about getting our young people the best support that we possibly can as quickly as we can. It sounds really simple, but it can be really tricky for a child or a young person if we know that they're struggling. It's about increasing two things: confidence and competence. It's about us as educators, as people working in a service, as people who have young people and children within our lives that we see and interact with, and being able to notice some of the things that are going on for that young person, some of those changes in their normal day-to-day lives and signs and symptoms and getting them to support. That doesn't make us pseudo-counsellors.

It does have a bit of onus to say, we can do a lot of great work in this. We, as every individual can, can have a bit of literacy and understanding to increase our confidence and competence, and then figure out within our services, schools and all the places that we work what sort of processes and procedures we have and need around that. That can be a really good onus about some work that you can do in that area.

Sara Richardson:

That leads us into you, Brooke, and how you are already using the Be You Framework within your context. Do you want to talk a little bit about what it looks like at your place?

Brooke Capovilla:

Yes certainly, Sara. I totally agree with what Jeremy is saying. I think that wraps it up for me, that we haven't had that expectation of our educators to be experts in mental health and wellbeing. I am the Action Team Leader but I am far from an expert, I'm just passionate about implementing the program within the service and we've already been doing so much. For a lot of services, I am sure when you sit back and create your action team you'll actually discover all the things that you're already doing that you can extend on or things that you can implement new for your service and making that a true reflection of what's happening. Ideas that I might talk about today or the panel might talk about are obviously not going to be a copy and paste model to take.

You need to make it reflective of your educators, your children, and obviously the whole community. Whilst we have an action team, we've always consulted with all our staff through meetings or e-mails. We have kept communication open to everybody so it's not just limited or driven by the Action Team, everyone's consulted.

Through the early stages of our consultation with our educators and children there were some new things that we were able to implement straight away. Looking at each age group and sitting back and realising, if they're not engaged in an activity it doesn't necessarily mean that we aren't programming to meet their needs. We've got to look at things differently. A good example of this was last year when we had some Year 6 children. Mainly towards the end of the year they were getting ready to move on they would just lie on the grass on the oval or on the tennis court and they would just be chatting and looking up at the sky. When we spoke with them, it was just about having a place where they could have that time and space: where it didn't have to be that they were running around the playground or busily engaged in a craft activity. For them, fun at OOSH was just being able to have their own space so we purchased little shade structures from Kmart that were really cheap and easy to pop up and move around in an outdoor space.

We also implemented year group leaders last year. Because we're a large service catering for up to around 140 children, we felt there was a need to allocate year group leaders. Like Jeremy said, sometimes we're just looking at those children that are displaying obvious behaviour issues or those who we're aware of some circumstances at home that might be impacting on the child. We thought through having year group leaders we would be able to ensure that all children are looked at, regardless of what's going on their lives or standing out to us because sometimes those little things go under the radar. Often the parents of those children come in and out quickly and you find it very difficult to have chats with them.

An objective last year for the service was to bring more music into the service. We felt that wasn't happening enough, whilst there is enough noise happening with that many children in an indoor space, there's time before school care when we open up and the children are walking into an environment with some nice, relaxing music or music that they can bop around so it is really important we've been conscious of that. We've had some challenging behaviour with some children that didn't want to come outdoors or stay engaged in that outdoor activity for a long time.

After observing those children we found that perhaps it was the train set or construction that they really enjoy when outside so we've gone from just having the colouring box outside and opened our mind to say, why can't the train set come outside? Why can't the building blocks come outside? The relationships and conversation that's created with other children has made the time after school a happier place for many children.

Sara Richardson:

Thanks, Brooke. That moves us into the next question we would like to think about: “How might Be You help you?” I think school age care settings have this unique opportunity because it's got a recreational, leisure or life skills focus, it's not just focusing on the educational skills or content. We've got an opportunity in the school age care space to explore the whole concept of mental health.

Do you want to add any more to that, Brooke?

Brooke Capovilla:

No I think that's it, Sara.

Sara Richardson:

Jeremy, do you want to add anything?

Jeremy Tucker:

I think Brooke has touched on some really awesome points there about how Be You can support services.

For myself as a parent, when I think about picking up my three kids from school and coming home, we almost have to get into battle stations to figure out how they de-stress from their day. I think about my eldest who loves his space and time, and he loves his quiet. However my middle child in kindergarten is a strong, independent woman, she loves to run her energy off and that's how she de-stresses.

Brooke's examples about having a look at what our children and young people are wanting and needing and looking at what strategies you need has a real value in every service and every school age care centre. As a framework Be You is really there to put a bit of scaffolding around to figure out how we do mental health and wellbeing and how to have a focus for it. As I said, every service is already doing it, but sometimes it might be a little bit ad hoc, we might have some awareness raising here and a couple of programs there, or a few things that are suggested from staff or students.

Be You gives a bit of scaffolding around the ways that we can focus on mental health and for me it's really about:

1. Celebrating what we are doing really well, and then,
2. Thinking about what are some opportunities that we want to improve

Within the Be You Framework there are a lot of planning and implementation tools to celebrate. One thing that I really love and I've found useful when working with schools that have a school age care centre attached to or work really closely with, is a tool called the Actions Catalogue which is a PDF document that goes through all of the domains and what some of the actions from each domain that we can do to support mental health and wellbeing in our space.

I can think of a specific example of an OSH Club that sits inside a primary school that had great connections with the families. They had about six or seven educators that were available to have a quick, informal conversation with the parents or carers when the child or young person was dropped off or picked up of an afternoon, whereas within the school context, it was one teacher to 30 students and those informal conversations are a bit more difficult. The OSH Club looked at all the things on the Actions Catalogue that they were doing really well with the families and how that works for them.

Then they met with the school and discussed some of the things that both the OSH Club and the school were doing really well and looked at how they could merge the two together. They particularly looked at the Family Support section of the Actions Catalogue and had an opportunity to celebrate the amazing things they already doing. Through meetings and interactions with educators and staff they were able to figure out

where they want to go as a community. For that particular school it was about getting students early support.

The focus was getting young people that weren't doing so well to the best support that we possibly can. They came up with internal strategies about how they communicate struggles students may be having with the family and school. Be You is really supporting mental health and wellbeing in that whole school approach. As I said, the two simple ways every service can do that is:

1. Celebrate what you do really well, and then,
2. Look at what do you want and need to focus on, how you want to improve and what tools and resources will you need to implement.

**Sara Richardson:**

That's a great example, Jeremy. One thing that we did not mention before is that Be You is a birth to 18 framework. Not all school age care services have the opportunity of having that really close relationship with the school. Although if this is the case and both the school and school age care service are using the Be You Framework, it gives a shared language to have some of those conversations. It could be an opportunity to bring the school and service together in ways that you haven't been able to do before. We do acknowledge that the reality of this context is that this does not always happen and a strong relationship may not be there, but one of the things that Be You strives to create is a community approach and we want the whole community to be mentally healthy.

One of the main things we are talking about today is how we can be more intentional, more purposeful and more thoughtful about bringing that planning and thought to not only what's happening for children and young people, but what educators are doing with families and perhaps the school as well. Brooke, would you like to talk about what exploring a mentally healthy community with educators, children, young people and educators might sound like, feel like and look like for the children that you are working with?

**Brooke Capovilla:**

Every decision that we make at our service is in consultation with the children. We can come up with something at a staff meeting and yes, it's quick and easy to make a decision on an educator level, but we know it needs to be discussed with the children. We need to get their thoughts on it. For example, at afternoon tea time we have a daily announcements sheet where we are informing the children what activities have been planned for the afternoon.

We also include room for any other suggestions of what the children would like to do that afternoon. The children know that it is okay to get the tennis racquets or yoga mats out, or play some music or catch bugs, whatever the children want at that time.

We also have surveys that we will ask the children throughout the year and we make sure to bring the results back to the children. We are in the process of revamping our bush space, which was originally our tepee area, but has now been extended through consultation with the children. This was done by taking photos of the different spaces like the mud kitchen and music station and the children were able to vote on what they wanted.

I think that's a good way of showing the families that that the children's voices are heard. We also allow the children each year to select the charities they would like to support. There are ones that we will support every year, for example the Biggest Morning Tea. Last year our children actually nominated Be You because they have heard us talking about the framework so much, which made us think the message is getting through. It was a really satisfying moment to think that the children had actually thought of that.

Our service has about 19 staff and only six of them are permanent staff. Like most OOSH services, most casual staff members are university students, many of which have second jobs as well. We've been very

fortunate to have a small base of male staff, and not to say it is the male's job, but they have been able to create connections with the children who love to run around and play cricket or soccer, particularly the older children.

We have had to be very conscious that there is a broad range of experience and qualifications within our staff. Be You has been great because it has allowed all staff to access the online training and have conversations which builds up staff members confidence in discussions they can have with children and families. Often, the casual staff will think that conversations with children and families need to be by a responsible person or a senior member of staff. This was identified at an action team meeting and from that we felt we needed to have staff members mentor and guide them so they are confident to approach families. Some parents are very approachable where others are often in a hurry and are out the door really quickly.

The tips I gave some of our staff included building up confidence and courage by picking a family that you know and are comfortable with and discuss something positive about their child first.

Having that as a goal every day builds up and increases their confidence and their sense of belonging so they know they are not just a casual staff member, whilst their employment is of a casual nature, they share the responsibility with our permanent staff.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks, Brooke. I am struck by how much you have been able to integrate the Be You elements into everything you do at your service every time I hear you talk. If someone was listening to you talk, they might not actually think you're talking about anything other than a normal, everyday school age care program.

All of those things you're talking about are the things that people need to think about and explore every day. What Be You does is bring a focus and a link to the fact that you're doing this with an intention to support the mental health and wellbeing of the children in particular, but also the families as well.

I know, Brooke you've said you haven't gotten to the point yet where you have been able to fully explore that with families, and that might be one of your next steps. I think even people just becoming more aware and more confident helps with that in its initial sense but it feels really integrated into everything you do. Not another thing to do, but just part of everything you do.

**Brooke Capovilla:**

Yeah, definitely. A lot of those things are what we're already doing. We're very fortunate to have a supportive director and a management committee that want to get behind this. All the initiatives that we've introduced have been low cost and the workload is not just on the Action Team, it's across the whole team. In terms of staff initiatives, we have implemented staff recognition and appraisal. In terms of the children, everyone's always updating their resources based on children's interests or requests. It has certainly been a way of recognising what we already do and thinking of how we can make it better.

I know when I talk to our Be You Consultant often I'll go into those meetings and think that we haven't done much since our last chat, but our Consultant is able to recognise things that we can put in our Quality Improvement Plan, or achievements that we maybe haven't recognised as accomplishments. You actually do achieve more than what you think you have.

**Sara Richardson:**

What you do for Be You should feed directly into your Quality Improvement Plan. Some people have chosen to have a separate action plan for doing Be You and some people integrate it into their Quality Improvement Plan and just fit it into particular areas.

I think it also fits really strongly with the My Time Our Place framework. Be You sits with nearly all of the outcomes in terms of children being effective communicators, children's wellbeing and children's sense of identity within the service.

**Brooke Capovilla:**

Whenever our service has meetings we always have a minute taker. Anytime I'm having my consultation session with our Consultant I take 15 minutes to write up my notes about what we discussed so it's not just all in my head or in my diary. We have a Be You folder at our service as a record of what we have achieved and also as evidence. Be You, like the QIP, is not just a document that you open and close. It's an ongoing process that you can go back and reflect on.

**Sara Richardson:**

Jeremy, do you want to add anything? You've alluded to some of the tools that we can use. The process of doing Be You also fits with the Plan, Do, Review cycle.

**Jeremy Tucker:**

The Be You process and how every service in school utilises Be You is going to be up to them. Brooke has some amazing examples, and it sounds like work that they as a service were already thinking, doing and planned in their strategic plan. Be You brings a focus around wellbeing, mental health, behaviour and all those different words that we like to use to make sense of the space that we're working in.

It brings to the forefront of our minds why we do these things and why it's important. When I look at that question of mentally healthy communities and how it supports families and how it supports the program, I bring it back to educators as well. It's about that common language. The example that you were talking about before, Sara, is a huge one. Schools and services sometimes don't have that naturally close connection and other times they are not situated within each other.

If a school is implementing a certain program that uses different language around mental health and wellbeing to what a school age care service is using, of course children and young people are going to be confused.

I commonly pull myself up and think about what language I should be using. As long as we have that basis and that understanding of why this is important and why we do this, it's going to have a huge improvement on the ways that we do things and the things we prioritise in our services as well.

**Sara Richardson:**

That is really important. There are some really strong connections to the work you do but I think it is important to do what is right and what is doable for you at your service. When I first had a conversation with Brooke I asked her how she has the time and resources to implement all that her service does, surely they have a bucket of money and additional time to do this, but that isn't the case. The service has prioritised it and is doing what they can and what is right for them. That is the beauty of the Be You Framework and the process. You can do what works for you in a time and place that works for you. Like Brooke said, sometimes she doesn't even realise she is doing it. When she has that Check-in opportunity with her Consultant to see where they are up to is when she can look back and have that reflective process to recognise that the service is doing lots of things that support children's mental health and wellbeing.

Now that we have had a conversation, it's time for everybody else to participate. What underpins this is how we support educators. We will get Brooke to talk about what they have been doing at her service in a bit more detail shortly, but we will now launch our next poll where we ask you to think about how you view yourself as an educator in a school age care setting.

I know this has been quite topical recently as there has been a spotlight shone onto who we are, what we do and how it is viewed. This is an important opportunity to acknowledge that when we are thinking about a mentally healthy community, we have to think about ourselves as well. You can select one or any that apply to you.

**Jeremy Tucker:**

I am very interested to see what the results of the poll look like.

**Sara Richardson:**

As I said, you can choose more than one response. I think sometimes it might fluctuate. Even from moment to moment you might feel like you more than one of these responses. It's not just about how other people view you but it's also your experience. Our work is really challenging and it's really hard and important work.

As you spoke about, Jeremy, knowing why we do our work is important. Some people are saying they are having trouble accessing the poll. If you are having trouble, feel free to write your response in the chat box.

You might want to go away and have this conversation back in your services. This webinar will be available to view later so this could be an opportunity where you stop and have a chat about what this looks like for your service. Brooke, I know you were talking about how you have quite a lot of casual staff and you have come up with a way of communicating with all staff.

**Brooke Capovilla:**

We ran two general staff surveys, one last November and one this May. We asked the same series of questions and the key issues that came out of the survey were around communication which is often found at outside school hours care, given that staff run in to start their shift at two and run out at six. Our service doesn't run, vacation care either so sometimes the 19 staff members don't see each other over a week.

Communication was an area that we needed to improve so we introduced a WhatsApp group. We have staff ranging from 20 years old up to 65 years old so everyone's communication preferences can be quite different. We felt that e-mails were getting lost particularly for our staff members attending university because they are inundated with their university work and so forth.

The WhatsApp group is basically used for gentle reminders or upcoming events. We have also implemented a 'Staff Member of the Week' award which is communicated via this group, as well as 'Happy Birthday' messages for the staff as well. This has been a good thing to implement that has created a bit of a teamwork and ensured that quick messages are going out to all staff instead of lengthy e-mails.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thanks, Brooke. Now that the poll has closed we can look at the results. Most people have selected that they see themselves as making a difference to children and young people and a professional educator with knowledge and skills and I think that is really true in terms of the conversation that we are having today and it is great to see that you, overwhelmingly, see yourselves this way. I did see a few comments in the chat box saying that although we as educators might see ourselves this way, perhaps we are not perceived in this way by others (e.g. families, or in a bigger context). It is great that you see yourselves this way and I would like to acknowledge that as well.

Thanks, Maria. We might move on from the poll now. This feeds into our next question about how Be You can also support educator wellbeing. As I said before, if we are going to have a mentally healthy community it is really important that we focus on the mental health and wellbeing of everybody in the context. Brooke, you have spoken about some of the things you do to support your educators, do you have anything else to add in this space?

## Brooke Capovilla:

Yes, I do. Educators' having a good understanding of wellbeing is important because of the information and support that they provide to the children and young people.

Through our Action Team meetings and our survey results we were able to reflect on what could be done to create greater teamwork within our service and support our staff as individuals. We created a wellness policy for the service and along with that we created a 'wellness bag' for each staff member leading into the Christmas period which we referred to as their Christmas survival kit. We know that life at Christmas time can get challenging and overwhelming for everybody. Last year we also made sure we had termly wrap up meetings that all the staff are invited to attend. Perhaps they can't get the every meeting because of university commitments, but it is an opportunity to sit together and talk about what's happening in our service.

Regarding our staff awards, our action team reflected on how to acknowledge the performance or the commitment of the staff. We didn't want it to be a tokenistic thing where everyone received an award for the sake of it. We also were conscious of our budget.

The awards suggestions included a coffee voucher or a \$20 Coles voucher. The younger staff on my action team suggested that being able to get the recognition through the WhatsApp group would be wonderful, along with a small prize. We now have a chocolate box in our fridge. We get them when they're half price and they include everybody's favourite chocolates in there. Another staff member on the action team said they would just love to have a Zooper Dooper at the end of the day for an award, which surprised me because I thought they would come up with more costly prizes. It wasn't about the cost or the value of the award that they got; it was about being formally recognised and having all the staff were made aware of it. That's been a really positive thing for our staff.

We've also allocated mentors to all our staff and we reviewed our staff orientation process with a list of all the things they need to know. We know in childcare the policy folder is very thick and there are lots of things that educators need to know.

We felt that the time between starting and getting that process done, we should be meeting with the staff more regularly so we've created a four weekly check-in. We ensure the check-ins are allocated to and carried out by a senior staff member. The main purpose of the check-ins is to get some insight from educators on areas that they would like more training or support in or what they're finding challenging. When you talk to new staff it is always around behaviour management. Educators have to give us a scenario of a situation around behaviour management so their mentor can provide some guidance to explain how they would have handled it and provide an insight on how to handle the situation next time, or praise if they are handling the situation really well. We have also looked at the appraisal system and are not doing annual performance reviews just to tick a box, but making it more meaningful.

Our staff need to have a different number of reviews depending on their employment. This differs from casual staff to permanent staff, but all staff members have to create termly goals. One of the goals has to be of a professional nature and one has to be of a personal nature. They might express their interests, for example we lost someone off our Be You Action Team because she moved to a different area of interest, and another staff member showed interest to join the Action Team in this space.

I have found that these conversations have been really valuable and created a better teamwork environment because before there had never seemed to be enough time for these conversations. We've now created the time for that. The conversations don't need to go for half an hour. I think sometimes if you've got more time, you'll drag it out longer, but you can spare 15 minutes before the end of a shift to have a quick chat with your staff. These check-ins are really important. I know particularly with the current climate of COVID-19 when all of our casual staff were off, taking that time is time consuming, but taking that time to do those check-ins with the casuals was really well received. Our families were reaching out to

our service just to express their concern and were worried about how our staff members were going and if they were going to lose their jobs. For us to be able to explain to the families what actions were put in place to support our staff was really well received by our families.

**Sara Richardson:**

That's great, Brooke. I am really struck by the fact that you are embedding Be You into all of the systems that you're already doing. You talked about policy and processes and the same is true for your staff wellbeing. Just as we're finishing up, Jeremy do you want to add anything about the educator wellbeing focus for Be You.

**Jeremy Tucker:**

It is awesome to see the results of that last poll and that so many of you see that you do make a difference and you are professionals in this space. Looking at the results I acknowledge that we do feel different from day to day and time to time. Sometimes we do feel like a baby sitter. Sometimes we do feel undervalued. I also want to acknowledge the comment made about how we feel we are perceived as well. We might be on top of our game doing such an amazing job and then we have one negative family, one negative comment, or even one perceived negative comment that within ourselves we take in a negative sense because maybe Mum and Dad were rushed when picking up their child, so it is really important to think about how we can look after ourselves. Brooke has given so many examples of things we can do specifically, but more broadly within the Be You framework, there are so many resources and supports including Fact Sheets and things that you can distribute out in your newsletter across your team, PDF resources or just some helpful hints and comments.

Resources can be found by heading to the Be You website and searching for educator wellbeing or staff wellbeing. Have a look throughout the resources because there is so much available.

**Brooke Capovilla:**

One thing I do want to say to services is: celebrate what you do and what you achieve. We have a closed Facebook page and in the last six months we've doubled the number of families on that. We have now introduced an app and since it launched last week, we've had a slow uptake so we will review this in a few weeks to see if we will continue or if we will survey our families and discover that e-mail and a Facebook page, is the way to go for them. I'm a parent and I love all apps and things that you can scroll through in your own time. When looking to implement something, it may seem time consuming but once you allocate it to a staff member you'll find that those parents who perhaps perceive you as a babysitter have changed their attitude or perspective of you. You can do that through showcasing all the wonderful things you do, whether it's through a newsletter, a Facebook page or displays at the service.

We don't have Be You posters all over the walls of our service but we are demonstrating and highlighting to our families and our staff what we do. We've got a Kindness Tree which has featured in the newsletter to explain to the families what that means. We have also put it on our Facebook page.

We have created a 'Be You box' for children to use when they need time away. The box includes little items for the children to take into a space where they feel happy and when they are ready to join in with the other children again we put the box away. I just wanted to stress these things because I'm a parent to a child in out of school hours care as well and the lengthy newsletters you can get can get overwhelming as a parent so really utilise any communication tools that you have with your families to get them to learn a little bit more and see all the wonderful things that you're doing.

**Sara Richardson:**

Thank you for that, Brooke. Before we finish, Jeremy have you got a takeaway from today's webinar?

Jeremy Tucker:

Be You is made to be able to utilise what you want and what you need. We are already doing this work and it's about celebrating what we are doing really well and reflecting on what we want and need to focus on going forward. There are so many tools within Be You to be able to do that.

Sara Richardson:

Thank you, Jeremy. I want to thank everybody for your time and contributions today. We really look forward to seeing you again in this space. Hopefully you see school age care and yourself as part of the Be You space. Be You is relevant for the school age care context.

Join us online during an Early Years Learning Community or National Check-In to have a professional conversation, have a view of the website and visit our Facebook page. We really look forward to seeing you in whatever space, perhaps another webinar or our virtual conference that's coming up this month. Thank you very much for those of you who've joined us and a special thank you to Jeremy and to Brooke. If there was a crowded room, we would all be clapping loudly for you both.

Bye, everyone.

End.