

# Be You In Focus webinar transcript

## Considering and acknowledging our strengths

Presented by Renee Wright, Maree Kirkwood, Lisa Watson and Margaret Ross on 11 November 2020

### Renee Wright:

Hello, everyone and welcome to our In Focus Be You webinar *Considering and acknowledging our strengths*. My name is Renee Wright and I'm one of the State Managers at Be You.

Joining me today are three panel members: Maree Kirkwood, Margaret Ross and Lisa Watson. We'll catch up with our panel members a little bit later. This webinar goes for one hour, but we have a 30 minute Q&A session afterwards and we'd really love for you to stay and chat more with us about how we can use strengths to support our entire learning community.

As some of you already know, Be You is a national initiative that equips educators to support mental health and wellbeing of children and young people from birth to 18 years of age.

Be You is delivered by Beyond Blue, in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace.

Our vision is a pretty special one, and that is we want all learning communities to be positive, inclusive and resilient, a place where every child, young person, educator, and family can achieve their best possible mental health.

As some of you already know, Be You provides free online interactive sessions and events, accredited professional learning, fact sheets, planning and implementation tools and other resources. If you haven't already, the best way to sign up is as a Be You Learning Community. This gives you access to the full range of resources and consultant support.

You can register as an individual educator, including if you're pre-service or training.

I would now like to pause and take a moment to acknowledge the traditional custodians from all the lands that we're meeting on today. I'm sitting in a relatively warm Melbourne today and would really like to acknowledge and share my gratitude to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation for sharing their land with me.

I would like to pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge their continued connection to culture, country and community. I acknowledge recognition of this is a start to enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We're very committed to this at Be You.

Throughout today's webinar and beyond, I invite you to consider how we can support educator, child and family wellbeing informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

Let's move directions slightly and have a chat about today's webinar. Today's webinar is an opportunity for us to come together as professionals to connect, reflect and learn. A great benefit of these shared learning spaces is that it allows us to unlearn and relearn new practices and knowledge and gain some new perspectives as well.

We want this space to be a safe space for everyone. It's really important. This means that people are safe to be who they are, express their opinions and beliefs and feel heard, valued and respected.

During the webinar today you will be provided with opportunities to reflect on your practices through polls and reflective questions.

Please remember to take care of yourself as we talk about mental health today. We acknowledge that sometimes unexpected feelings can emerge – even difficult ones – so be aware of feelings that come up for you. Make sure you talk to someone if difficulties arise or if difficult feelings occur. It's always good to have a yarn.

Helplines will be posted in the chat throughout this webinar. Please use them to talk to someone if you or someone with you experiences difficult feelings.

Let's move on and have a chat about technical tips so that you can really get the most out of today's webinar.

For those unfamiliar with the webinar platform, that's perfectly okay. This is what your screen would typically look like, with the webinar view on the left and the control panel on the right.

Throughout the webinar, you can ask questions about using the webinar function and we will have some technical support available.

The control panel with the question box is highlighted in blue. The responses in green are public responses, whilst the ones in red are private response. You can also use your control panel to manage your phone or computer audio.

Everyone is placed in listen-only mode and your microphones have been muted as we have a large number of attendees.

If you are experiencing any difficulties at any time, please note the customer care details on the screen and contact the team directly and they'll be happy to help you.

Throughout today's webinar, we encourage you to get involved as much as you feel comfortable. Again, it's really important that everyone feels like this is a safe space and that everyone's contribution matters.

You can ask questions via the question box and we hope to respond to as many of your queries as possible during today's session.

If we run out of time to respond to your question, just be assured that we will get back to you after the event concludes.

This reminds me to acknowledge the team in the background who are working their magic and really supporting this webinar to be successful.

Hello to Dino, Steph, Maria, Shona and Juanita. I look forward to catching up with you a bit later.

Just a few other reminders for today:

Any links to resources or references to the content we are using today will be posted in the chat. You're more than welcome to copy these if you want, but we've also got a handout including all of these references along with some reflective questions so you might just want to relax, participate in the webinar and then download the handout after the webinar.

It's a great idea to share some of the reflective questions with a colleague or maybe during a team meeting as well.

We also invite you to participate in the three polls we'll be launching throughout the session. This is a really fantastic way of sharing your experiences and perspectives.

We will also be making the attendee list public from now on and all event participants will be able to access a certificate of participation and a recording of this webinar after the webinar.

Now that the housekeeping is over, let's get into the fun bit.

Today we're going to be talking about strength. Like I mentioned, we want this to be really conversational so we invite you to share some of your thoughts or reflections in the chat box.

Today we will be focusing on what we mean by strengths, why it is important in our practice and how we can identify our strengths. We will also be looking at strategies to acknowledge, use and build on existing strengths and think about strength based practices in the entire learning community.

Now I'd like to invite our panel members back on screen.

Hi again Maree, Margaret and Lisa.

We've got a great session planned. I'm really looking forward to getting into the conversation but before we do, I invite you to share a little bit about yourself, including your role at Be You. Lisa, would you like to start?

**Lisa Watson:**

Hi. Thanks, Renee. It's great to be here. I'm a Be You Early Childhood Australia Consultant based in Western Australia and I've been in the role for close to three years.

I've spent 12 years as an early childhood teacher and then I shifted into a completely new role when I managed teams at the Western Australian Museum where I developed and delivered education and public programs. I've also had a role in education and care with a large provider of education and care as a program manager and mentor to the Network of Early Childhood Teachers. I've had a bit of diverse experience.

**Margaret Ross:**

Thanks, Lisa. We really look forward to drawing upon your experiences. Margaret, would you like to share a little bit about yourself and your role at Be You?

Absolutely. Thanks, Renee. I'm Margaret Ross. I've studied in early childhood and I'm an early childhood teacher. I've also had tertiary education in the disability field as well. My main experience is in mainstream early childhood services as a teacher and educator, mostly within the not-for-profit sector.

I've also worked within the disability specific stream and have managed an early childhood intervention centre working with children and families with complex and diverse needs. Currently, and very happily, I'm with Early Childhood Australia as a Be You Consultant.

**Renee Wright:**

Thank you so much, Margaret and welcome again.

Finally, Maree, would you like to introduce yourself?

**Maree Kirkwood:**

My name is Maree Kirkwood and I am one of the State Managers for the early learning component of the Be You initiative. I have a background in early childhood education and teaching, psychology and leadership and management. My interests professionally lie in professional identity and advocacy.

Today I'm putting on the family hat when we have our conversations to share experiences that I've had as a family member with children in early learning services.

**Renee Wright:**

Thank you for sharing, Maree.

Let's get into the webinar. We've got a poll that will be coming up shortly, but I thought it's really important to actually frame and situate what we mean by strengths.

I'm curious about what words come to mind. Margaret, I might put you in the hot seat to begin with.

What do you think of when we think about strengths?

**Margaret Ross:**

On initial thought, strengths are things that we do well or the things that we find easy to do.

I also think strengths can be things that we're born with, but they are also things that we can develop over time.

They might be particular skills or activities that you spend a lot of time practicing that become strengths in your life as well.

Strengths are dynamic, which means that they change over time. What might be a strength today may not be a strength tomorrow. It changes with time. A good example of that is that I've always had really good vision, but now as I'm aging, I have to wear glasses. I think the batteries in these ones are wearing out, and I'll have to get stronger ones soon. That's an example of how strengths change over time.

**Renee Wright:**

Thanks, Margaret, such good points. I like this idea that strengths are fluid and dynamic. It's so true. Often when we are reflecting on our strengths, a good starting point is thinking about what you enjoy. Maree, would you like to add anything putting on your parent hat?

**Maree Kirkwood:**

Thinking about it and positioning myself as a parent in an early learning service or school aged care service, it's really about having my strengths and my family strengths acknowledged and celebrated and that recognition that we as families really try to do the best that we can with our children. Having educators acknowledge and be responsive to that is so important. I found what Margaret was saying was so relevant, but it was internalised.

I was thinking more externally about how others perceive me as a parent and my strengths, rather than answering that question about what strengths are for me internally.

**Renee Wright:**

That's such a good point, Maree. Often I think we seek feedback from people which helps us to construct our identity, which includes what we are good at and what our strengths are. It's also the things that are not so tangible like a child's disposition or our personality and temperament which really requires relationships in order to really unveil that.

Let's have a look at our first poll. We'd really like to hear what you think in terms of what your strengths are. There are quite a few options here.

We've got meeting regulatory requirements, building and sustaining relationships with families, mentoring and supporting colleagues, providing an empowering learning environment and relationships with children.

Think about what some of your strengths are in your practice. We'll give you a few minutes to have a think about that.

I find *mentoring and supporting colleagues* quite interesting. It absolutely is a strength, but I think that with regulatory reform and the enactment of the educator leader role this is probably more visible at times in early learning.

It's interesting to consider strengths through the social and cultural environment, and in this case, the legal and quality assurance space, as well.

Let's look at the results.

44 per cent consider meeting regulatory requirements a strength, which pales in comparison to some of the others, doesn't it?

It's fantastic to see 83 per cent see building and sustaining relationships with families and 86 per cent see relationships with children as a strength.

Panel, do you have any thoughts about these results, any surprises?

**Lisa Watson:**

No surprises for me. When I looked at that list, I could really easily identify for myself, and I'm sure the educators that are joining us today, could do the same.

They are all so inter-connected, especially that families and children response. If we believe we're partners with supporting children, the relationship with children is key but to have that partnership organically links into the relationship you have with families because we're partners in supporting the children way we work and learn ways.

**Renee Wright:**

That's a really good point, Lisa that all of these different areas don't sit in isolation and they are inter-dependent. Margaret and Maree, any thoughts about the poll results? I know they've disappeared from the screen, but relationships with children had a lot of representation.

**Maree Kirkwood:**

I feel really re-assured by the identified strengths of the audience with the building and sustaining relationships with families response. I just think that's a really profound skill to have.

When I think about what skill sets I could offer an early learning service or school age care service, I'm not a very good cook and I can't play a musical instrument so my skill set and strengths are not something that is very tangible that can be easily sourced on, but I am really good at organising, sorting, arranging and connecting different ways of doing. Being asked to share those strengths in the early learning space would be something that I would feel as being valued as a family member.

I just think really acknowledging and making use of family strength doesn't need to be big, grand gestures, like playing the guitar to the children, but it's also those little important things. They are so powerful to support and be a protective factor for the mental health and wellbeing of children and their families and also promotes that sense of belonging.

**Renee Wright:**

It's such a good point you've mentioned, Maree, about building and sustaining relationships with families and really supporting and identifying their strengths and celebrating that with them.

It doesn't have to be that Mary's mother is a piano teacher so she can do some lessons in the classroom. It can be something that's much more subtle than that.

Margaret, any thoughts from you about the poll?

**Margaret Ross:**

Meeting regulatory requirements came in on the lower side of the poll results. I think that is a huge strength to the early childhood profession. Hand washing practices and nose wiping and nappy changes procedures are the everyday practice and a real standout strength of the profession. All of these things are wound into everyday routines and are carried out by everybody – the children, the families and the educators. It may not be your favourite strength, but I certainly think that that's a strength.

Within the early childhood profession, working from that strengths based approach to building relationships is a really great strength we see within the profession.

When we're working with children and families who have complexities, being able to articulate for the family where their strengths lie and acknowledging the strengths of the children when it can at times be challenging to find them is really important.

**Renee Wright:**

There is a strength in just being who they are. I think there is real power and a lot of value in that.

Now that we've had a chat about what we mean by strengths and how we might consider them in practice, my next question for you is, why are strengths so important?

We have briefly touched on this, but I'm wondering if any other thoughts come to mind.

**Lisa Watson:**

One of the things that comes to mind, that ties into what Margaret and Maree were saying, is as educators, we are always collecting and using resources in our practice.

Sometimes strengths aren't seen. If we see our strengths as a resource that we can identify, that we can use in our work and that we can build on and grow, I think that's a really powerful 'aha' moment. Strengths are a resource that we can tap into as educators.

Everyone has natural strengths, gifts or talents. In my work as a Be You Consultant, I have talked to a lot of educators who are genuinely confused or shy about owning their strengths, but when you get talking, they are doing amazing things. Taking the time to celebrate and acknowledge is really powerful. Having the opportunity to identify your strengths and then grow, shape and build on them as a resource is a very powerful tool as an educator.

**Renee Wright:**

Absolutely, Lisa. You've emphasised strengths as a precursor to build resilience. It's like you have the strengths in your backpack and you can pull them out and refer to them when you need to which is just so important.

**Maree Kirkwood:**

To me it's around the whole learning community's strengths and how we can utilise all of those strengths collaboratively and collectively to support the mental health and wellbeing of all members of that community – children, families, educators.

**Renee Wright:**

Absolutely. It's a precursor to working as a part of a team and really acknowledging the diversity.

When you acknowledge and you know people's strengths, aspirations, talents and goals, think about all of the skills and knowledge that you can have and how you can utilise that to enhance outcomes for children and families. It's pretty outstanding. It's a contrast to working as an individual and feeling that pressure that you need to know everything. You can have particular strengths and it might be navigating regulatory frameworks as an example, it might be being able to build partnerships with families from complex backgrounds. It might be setting up beautiful learning environments or an educator might be really good at incorporating STEM into the curriculum. It ties into the idea of shared or distributed leadership. How great is that for your self-esteem when you can really contribute?

We are all in the profession as educators providing a really important service to children and families in the community. I think strength is tied very closely to identity.

I think it might be time for another poll, what do you think?

Let's look at how you identify your strengths.

Lisa, you made a comment before about educators you have spoken to who shy away from their strengths. I think preliminary to that is thinking about what your strengths are and how do you identify them.

We've got a few options here: through professional conversations with our team, reflective practice, feedback from families, stakeholders like inclusion support and validating what you're doing against frameworks. As an extension to this, it could be through position descriptions, Code of Ethics, and so forth.

While everyone is filling out the poll, I'm going to ask some of our panel members to share how they identify their strengths.

**Lisa Watson:**

I struggle with making the time to identify my strengths. It is really a common conversation I have with educators that I support in my role as a Be You Consultant. I think as lifelong learners, educators all naturally look to grow and learn, but it is really hard to stop and celebrate the strengths. For me, it often comes from external sources, so when someone tells me I'm doing well and tells me what my strengths are I can own them, but I find it hard to identify them myself.

I do often look to others feedback, whether it is a line manager or colleagues. It's probably a by-product of my training, and educators can probably relate that when you're on prac or when you're studying, you're always being assessed so you're always looking for feedback. I've always been told feedback is a gift.

In different roles I've had, I've gone through strength testing. It's interesting because sometimes the strengths that pop up are ones that I would have never acknowledged myself, but when I do a deep dive I can recognise it really is a strength of mine.

I also try to also use self-reflection, and I get educators I work with to do the same. I look at where I am and what I'm doing when I'm at my best and what comes easily and naturally to me and my work.

For me, parts that come easily and naturally are often my strengths that are really easy to own and work with. What I enjoy doing is often linked to my strengths and I found that with the people I work with as well.

**Renee Wright:**

Thanks, Lisa. That's really powerful. Asking yourself what you are doing and what come naturally to you and your work is a really nice way to start to think about your strengths.

That could be something that you do as an icebreaker or a provocation during a team meeting or conversation with some of your colleagues. I agree with what you shared about how sometimes initially we seek feedback from others. I think it's great to marry that with leaning into your internal reflections and thinking about what you're good at and what you're able to contribute to and how.

I can see the poll results are now up.

Margaret, I might come back to you about how you identify your strengths, and we'll now have a quick pause and chat about the results.

Thank you for participating to our poll. We can see 88 per cent of you identify your strengths through reflective practice, 85 per cent through inter-professional conversations with your team, 75 per cent through feedback from families and 30 per cent from early learning consultants of external stakeholders.

Thank you for participating, those results are really interesting.

Margaret, do you have any thoughts about the poll results before I ask you about how you identify your strengths?

**Margaret Ross:**

I think the poll results validate and back up what Lisa was saying so it's nice to see that's in unison.

**Renee Wright:**

I'm curious while we're talking about strengths, in your role as a Be You Consultant and in your many other hats, how do you identify your strengths?

**Margaret Ross:**

I identify my strengths from that whole range of resources like Lisa was talking about and the poll was talking about as well. I gather as much information as I can from a whole range of sources and from a whole range of contexts, then try to look at it in a really non-biased, unemotional, analytical way to pull out what I'm doing well, and look at if the strengths come naturally or if it is a result of something I've been working on and need to keep working on.

I must admit, working with complex families and children really helped me drill into that a lot better and realise that strengths are a lot more than just being a good runner, writer or listener. There are a whole heap of other strengths out there. Once you start drilling into those things you see yourself as a more nuanced person.

It's not easy; it's a skill that we have to learn as educators.

**Renee Wright:**

It's a really good point to actually give ourselves the time to reflect and think about what our strengths are because we're so busy. We are supporting others, whether it is colleagues, children and families, and we need to stop and take the time to reflect on what our strengths are and what we are doing well. It's quite easy to go into the negative default and think of what you should have done better, but we need to look at the fantastic things we have done.

Margaret, I'm very curious about your previous background. You said that you learnt a lot working with families with complex needs. I'm also thinking about Maree's earlier reference on how the little things are just as important as the big gestures.

It reminds me of a family that I was caring for about 15 years ago, if not longer. They had experienced some loss in their family and it was a really difficult time.

I remember the father would drop this little person to the long day care services sometimes in her pyjamas and be apologise for not having brushed her hair or feeding her breakfast. To us as educators, this didn't matter. Here was a family that had experienced loss and we're suffering, yet still made a commitment to drop their child to long day care. He knew that this was a good place for her and it provided her with security and safety.

I always think that's a really good example, and I'm sure the audience can think of so many similar examples where something on the surface may not seem inherently strength based, but if you look a little bit deeper you realise the depth of the strength.

Another example of this is around teachers that were quite critical of what parents are putting in their child's lunch boxes, but I thought isn't it fantastic that parents have thought about packing a lunch. It might not be perfect but that's okay. Strength based is not about perfection, it's an asset perspective as opposed to that deficit perspective.

**Maree Kirkwood:**

What you're saying there, Renee is really quite validating from my perspective as a parent. That acknowledgement that parents and carers are doing the best that we can, given whatever circumstance. It's something that is just so important for me personally.

When I was looking through the poll and the answers, I was looking at it through my parent lens, and I changed the idea of through feedback from families to through feedback from educators to me as a parent and how that supports me in identifying the strength of my family. Our family could be considered one of the challenging families in an early learning service. My children have a number of complex needs.

There was a time towards the end of the year where an educator approached me with a bouquet of flowers and I didn't know what she was doing. She told me they were for me and originally I thought she had palmed off flowers she received from somebody else to me, until I opened the card and saw a beautiful acknowledgment of what I do behind the scenes to support my children. That was just a very validating moment. It was such an important experience for me to have as a family member.

When I feel heard and understood, I was more willing to share mostly with this educator in an ongoing way. She was acknowledging a strength that I wasn't acknowledging in myself, which was my dedication to my children's wellbeing.

**Renee Wright:**

Thanks, Maree. There's a lot to reflect on that example. Thank you so much for sharing. I've said it before, but I always admire your authenticity.

I think it really highlights how strengths are a protective factor, not just for the child or for ourselves, but for the entire family unit.



Sometimes it's a bit challenging to separate the child and the family. I don't think that you can, but it makes me wonder, as educators how do we identify and then how do we celebrate the strengths of families? How do we embed that as a part of our practice?

**Margaret Ross:**

Thank you for sharing that story, Maree. I think a really important part of working with complex families is to understand that their life is different to a typically developing child.

I really appreciate the strengths in those families for turning up to enormous amounts of visits, taking on board information from a range of services and then trying to incorporate that all and bring it back into the early childhood service for the educators to pick up and marry into their practice as well. It was really quite eye opening for me and when I started to have some specific understanding of the perspective of a family it was a big 'wow' moment for me. I appreciated how strong and resilient they have to be to keep going.

**Renee Wright:**

Maree, I also found it interesting how you shared that once you felt affirmed and validated in your parenting role, you were more willing to share information about your family and goals so not only is it a protective factor, but it is almost an enabler, isn't it?

And Margaret, I'm assuming the same for you that once you were able to pause and see the reality of some of the families that you were working with and see what they need to do. Sometimes their right to privacy, which we can take for granted sometimes, is reduced because they have to share so much. Through true empathy and compassion, you would see a strengthened partnership and relationship.

**Margaret Ross:**

Absolutely. And that was one of the reasons that we moved our team around the child so that we could minimise the sharing of information and tried as much to minimise more visits for the family than necessary. The sheer costs of multiple appointments and additional needs adds to weekly limits which decreases families ability to partake in other activities as so much money goes into supporting their child.

The little things add up. Mainstream services that can have speech therapists, occupational therapists, or any other service at their service, it reduces the workload for the parent. The support these services provide is a great strength for the families. It's a great collaboration.

**Renee Wright:**

Absolutely. Thank you for sharing.

Let's move along now and look at Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System. We have looked at a strength based approach from an individual lens and have started to expand our thinking through a family lens and a community lens. I want us to think about what does a strength based approach look, sound and feel like for children, and families and educators and really unpack this quite deeply.

Margaret, we might start with you and think about what a strength based approach looks like from a child's perspective.

**Margaret Ross:**

The starting point is that all children, regardless of their abilities, their medical condition, their circumstances, have strengths. It's our role as educators to find those strengths and to articulate them.

One of the things I realised when I was working in the disability field is that so many of the other services that are working with the families are really looking at where that child is becoming and where they are going to get to, and that's the whole focus of their work. As early childhood professionals, we're looking at the being and the belonging. We're looking at right here right now and valuing that place and valuing and respecting that child's position and who they are. This is a really profound strength. In my practice, I have found this to be a profound strength in early childhood professionals. We value the being.

**Renee Wright:**

It's such a profound point that all children irrespective of any disability or if they come from complex backgrounds, have strengths. It's not negotiable. It's not philosophical. It's not about whether the child and family have strengths – they do. As professionals we really want to build those relationships and be vulnerable ourselves, but identify and celebrate that.

I liked your link to the Early Years Learning Framework, Margaret. It's so true. Sometimes we can be a little bit focused on that future orientation of becoming rather than actually belonging and the relationships being seen in the being. You can never get to the becoming if the foundation is wobbly.

Margaret, you said you have worked in early intervention. If you think about the training, historically it tends to be a bit more clinical based and more problem solving based, whilst you're right. In an early childhood space it is so much about advocacy and about strengths when we are documenting children's learning.

Even now when educators are doing summative assessments or transition statements there is a focus on being accurate and honest, but framing it in a respectful and strength based way.

**Margaret Ross:**

I used to find in the early intervention space it was wonderful having the specialist knowledge and we were able to take that knowledge and use it to inform our practice and make it even more dynamic and relevant to that child. It was a really powerful environment.

**Renee Wright:**

Absolutely. I'm just thinking about the influence of the early childhood sector. We now have allied health professionals going into early learning environments because it is much more strength based and empowering for that child, rather than – and I'm talking historically here – where a speech pathologist would work with a child in a very individualistic kind of way. I think early childhood has played a really key role in changing those practices and narratives around that.

Does anyone on the panel have anything else to add in terms of a strength based approach for children and what this looks like? I'm thinking if I was to go back into an early childhood service, how might children be behaving and expressing themselves?

For me as a parent, it's walking into that space and knowing that we're welcomed and that my children will be included, supported, nurtured and celebrated. It's knowing that their strengths are celebrated. Added to what Margaret said before about all children having strengths regardless of any complexities, I think about the flip side of some of those diagnoses that children may get and what are the strengths that children have outside of that. Being encouraged to come over and have a look at something my child created and have educators comment on how wonderful it is, or receiving an email with a learning story with what they have been exploring feels safe. We feel welcomed. Being asked what strategies we might use at home to support the children and discuss how we can perhaps replicate them in the service feels like the educators will work with us as a family.

**Maree Kirkwood:**

As you have said Margaret, it's about being a partner with the service for my children's wellbeing and learning.

**Renee Wright:**

Absolutely.

From the perspective of a child, I can think of an example of when I've supported a child to take a leadership role based on their strengths. I was once teaching a group of children how to use chopsticks and one of the children had been doing so since they were 12 months old so they assisted in teaching the other children. It's a great example of helping the children feel empowered to celebrate their strengths and share it with others. It isn't always about the educator putting on an expert hat.

This is a good point in time to pause and reflect on how we as educators can provide opportunities for children to really share their strengths with others.

**Lisa Watson:**

That's such a great story, Renee. We talk about partnership with families but the child is at the core of all of that and they are in this partnership with us as well. If you see your strengths as a resource base, you realise that you don't need to spend a cent. You just need to look at the families, the children and each other. Taking time as educators to acknowledge each other's strengths and lean on each other is so important. As an educator, you can't be an expert and have all the strengths all of the time. It's okay to role model to the children that an area may not be your particular strength, but you know it is for your colleague and you can ask them for support. It is important to role model this for children so they can do the same in their learning and know that it's okay to not know everything, but we are all willing to have a go and support each other.

It's about that partnership across families, children and each other as a team and taking time to acknowledge, grow and use each other's strength for our own professionalism for the benefit of the children we work with.

I was just thinking about what a strength based approach looks and feels like as an educator and the thing that comes to mind is sharing and leaning on each other. There is no competition. We are in this together. It feels like a respectful space and looks like chatter and laughter in the learning environment.

**Renee Wright:**

That's a great point, Lisa. There is no competition.

**Lisa Watson:**

It's so important to take the time to identify strengths, and we have said today there are many ways we can do that like through professional conversations with each other.

The Be You initiative has quite a few tools that you can use to identify strengths of your organisation or of your service. There's the Implementation and Reflection Tool which is a series of statements you can go through as a team and make a professional decision about where your service sits with each of the statements in the current moment. We also have educator surveys which has just recently been reviewed and launched on the website. It's a series of reflective questions for your team to answer. Each question is linked to the content of Be You, but it will give you a report of the areas your team may be feeling competent and confident in, as well as areas where they aren't feeling as competent and confident. These are both really popular tools and are a tangible way of doing some reflective practice and capturing what your team and your service's strengths are.

**Renee Wright:**

Thanks, Lisa, that's fantastic. Another fantastic thing about the Implementation and Reflection Tool is that it can be linked to your QIP, too. It's a fantastic way to get started and look at what the strengths of your learning community are. Lisa and our other Consultants are often supporting services with Be You tools during National Check-In's and some of our other interactive events so keep that in mind. If you're new to Be You, we'd love to see you.

**Lisa Watson:**

I do really like the Implementation and Reflection Tool and the Surveys. Be You has such a broad range of evidence based resources. It's very flexible and meets you where you and your service are at. Sometimes services just don't know where to start. Getting your educators to take some time to reflect and think about where they feel comfortable and confident is a great start. Every service I have supported to access the Be You Surveys have found resilience an absolute natural strength.

What comes through as an opportunity for growth where educators identify that they are not so confident is around critical incidents and what their role is in that situation. We are able to guide educators and identify a place for them to start their journey.

**Renee Wright:**

Thank you, Lisa. You've got lots to share and I love your enthusiasm. I'd love to look at our final poll and have a quick chat. The next poll asks how do you grow and celebrate the strengths of your whole learning community. Lisa, you've linked that to some of the Be You tools that can really support this, but we have a few other options here including through collaborations and partnerships, with good communication, providing feedback and appreciation, building relationships to know you're whole learning community and a shared goal or vision.

While the audience reflects on and completes this poll, I'm curious about what is one key takeaway from each of us on the panel today. Maree, let's start with you.

**Maree Kirkwood:**

I really like the idea of the whole learning community and the collective strengths, and seeing strengths as a resource. I think Lisa mentioned earlier the notion of strengths as a resource to support the whole learning community.

**Renee Wright:**

Fantastic, thanks Maree. Lisa, did you have one key takeaway.

**Lisa Watson:**

Yeah, just to reiterate what Maree said earlier, through self-reflection and using external feedback, it's really important to identify your strengths so then you can build on them and grow for the benefit of each other as educators, for the children, for the families and for the whole learning community.

**Renee Wright:**

Beautiful, thanks Lisa. And Margaret, do you have one key takeaway?

**Margaret Ross:**

I was just thinking that, like Maree, the early childhood profession as a collective has so many strengths and those ones around reflective practice, relationship building, inclusion, working from a strengths base, makes us different to other professions, like education and the health professions. It's a great difference and it's something that's unique about us. It's something that holds us in good stead.

**Renee Wright:**

Beautifully put, Margaret. Again, I was really inspired by your reference to the Early Learning Framework, but particularly how a strength based approach is about actually being present, noticing and valuing people for who they are, and how they are at this very given moment.

Before we finish up today we would love to hear from you, so let's look at the poll results. So how do you grow and celebrate the strengths of your whole community? 83 per cent said through collaboration and partnerships. 80 per cent said through feedback and appreciation, and just over 50 per cent said by having a shared goal or vision.

That's definitely food for thought. I'd like to thank our fantastic panel members, Maree, Lisa and Margaret. I've thoroughly enjoyed our conversation today and I hope our audience has as well. I think we could talk for another hour, and thankfully we do have a 30 minute Q&A coming up in a few moments. Sit tight if you can stay with us, we would love to see you there. Thanks, everyone.

**END TRANSCRIPT**