

# Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

## Staff wellbeing

**Presented by Kristen Douglas (of headspace Schools) and Dr Addie Wootten (of Smiling Mind). Introduced by Jeannette James (of headspace Schools).**

### Jeannette James:

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's webinar: staff wellbeing: recharge, recalibrate and rejuvenate. It is December and it's the end of the year. I'm sure you are all looking forward to the break to do just that: recharge, recalibrate and rejuvenate. We are very passionate about the wellbeing of staff and we're so pleased to collaborate with Smiling Mind to bring you this professional learning opportunity today. Thanks for joining us. I'm sure that staff wellbeing is a passion for you as well and resonates with all of you.

My name is Jeannette James and I'm the National Service Development Advisor for the Be You initiative. I work in the headspace team and we work on the Be You initiative alongside Early Childhood Australia, with the lead contractors Beyond Blue.

I'd like to introduce the main facilitators Kristen Douglas and Addie Wootten very soon, but before we do that, a few minutes of housekeeping and webinar introductions. Today we have our support tech crew joining us, Hugh and Lucy on tech support, Helen our National Education Advisor, and David Wild our National Clinical Advisor. The recording of this webinar will be posted online on the Be You website shortly, in a couple of weeks, along with the transcript and any other resources and strategies that we share with you today.

For those of you that don't know too much about Be You it is a national mental health initiative. It's fully funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health to provide educators with the knowledge, the resources, and strategies to help children, young people, and school communities to achieve their best possible mental health. Be You is unique in that it encompasses a support service for critical incidents for secondary schools students that pass away from death by suicide.

Just changing to the next slide...A little bit of housekeeping now. While we're waiting for others to join us today, a few tips for getting the most out of your webinar experience with us. We've taken a screenshot of an example of the attendee interface. You can see on the left-hand side of your screen there, the slide deck example that we will use today, and on the extreme right what's circled in blue is to, I guess, enlarge your control panels. So what you see in the middle is the control panel, but often it's minimised and you can't see it. So if you click on that circle there on the top panel to expand it, you can drag the control panel to anywhere on your screen. And once you expand this, you can hold the grey headings like the chat box, the Q&A box and then you'll be able to see some responses, some strategies, and some other questions and answers that the audience are partaking in.

So if you'd like to today, and you are joining from an area where the network is not so great, you can join by phone audio. You are in listen audio mode today. If you'd like to join in over the phone, Hugh will post phone numbers for you in the moderator box.

Other features of the control panel include a question and answer box. You will have the opportunity to submit some text questions to today's presenters Addie and Kristen by typing your questions into the questions pane of the control panel, which is highlighted in red here. You may send in your questions at any time. We can answer these in real time, just be aware that not everyone will see the questions you submit, sometimes we will respond to those privately, and other times we will choose to share that with the entire audience.

Tomorrow you will receive in your inboxes a certificate of participation. This doesn't come in from Be You team, it actually comes in from a "customer care" email address, from the platform that we are using today, which is GoToWebinar. So the title will be 'In Focus certificate and thank you', and note that the certificate can be downloaded by selecting that blue 'My Certificate' highlighted button, which is at the end of that email.

To the next screen. Got a few windows open here, so it's not allowing me to click to the next screen. There we go. Today I'd like to acknowledge the Aboriginal people on which we meet today: the people of the Kulin nation. I'd like to express my respects to both Elders past present and future, but particularly the educational Elders of sharing these waters and lands with us today. We recognise the importance of the continued connection to culture and to Country and Community, to the health and the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and young people and their families.

Here on the screen, you will see our two wonderful hosts today Kristen Douglas and Addie Wootten, and we will share their webcams with you in a moment. Kristen, on the left there is a highly-respected and sought-after presenter both nationally and internationally on the topics of youth mental health, suicide, and wellbeing, suicide prevention, school improvement strategies, principal, staff and whole-school wellbeing. Kristen has significantly contributed to the synergy between education and youth mental health, combining her experience as an educator and a principal with her passion and experience and education and mental health and wellbeing. From government policy to leading national mental health initiatives. And Dr Addie Wootten there on the right of your screen is the CEO of Smiling Mind and a clinical psychologist by background. Addie joined Smiling Mind four years ago and has led a brand new platform, new technology platform, new research, and is evaluating the impact of the Smiling Mind program. We're really excited to hear from Addie and Kristen and more from Addie in about 10 minutes. But now I'll pass over to Kristen to lead the staff wellbeing webinar. So thanks again for joining and enjoy this time.

We're just unmuting KD's microphone and she'll be ready to go now. Can everyone hear Kristen now? She just introduced herself, yet no-one was able to hear. Take two...

### **Kristen Douglas:**

I just said something exceptionally funny and sophisticated, you all missed it! No, I did actually say the irony is that I'm doing a self-care webinar and I have a terrible cold. So forgive me if I do cough and sneeze and carry on. I am taking my self-care seriously, but it's always a reminder that at the end of the year, anything can happen in terms of health and wellbeing.

So a little bit about today's webinar is certainly around the importance of your self-care, as a functional performance mechanism, but also about an enjoyment and connection space for you in your schools. It is really important that we always start these sorts of talks or webinars with the fact that being safe in this space is important. I'm under no illusion that when we're broadcasting across the country, particularly to educators, not only have you all had busy and potentially challenging years, but you may have experienced your own mental health concerns or been caring for a family member. So I just want to acknowledge that if there's something that I'm saying that's triggering or we're talking about a topic that feels particularly raw, then it's okay to check out of the webinar and certainly look after yourself and self-care from the outset.

I guess some of the points we want to touch on today is positive self-reflection. I never underestimate the fact that educators often don't get spaces for reflection. So today not only in exchanging and engaging with myself and Addie, it's also a chance to stop and reflect and to ask yourself how you've been going in 2019, but the next critical question is how might you set yourself up for 2020 and what can you do to get yourself back to a recharged, recalibrated, and balanced space to start the coming year.

We're going to look at practical wellbeing strategies and, of course, Addie's going to talk from Smiling Mind about mindfulness and some of the professional learning programs that's on offer, but also just some general concepts around self-care. Jeannette's already mentioned Be You and certainly from my perspective, and in partnership with Beyond Blue and Early Childhood Australia, is that we are trying to absolutely support the health, the wellbeing, the mental health of every educator across Australia because it actually transacts then that you as an educator will then pass that on to young people. So rather than just focus our health and wellbeing strategies directly to students, we're certainly putting investment and time into staff because then you exchange that information and the skills and knowledge on to the young people that you care for.

So this is all about your mental health and wellbeing and certainly we're going to talk about a range of analogies, like an oxygen mask, but also understanding that the dialogue in the Australian education in the last 10 years has certainly changed. There's a groundswell and interest of staff mental health and wellbeing not only in education but across global sectors and we are now seeing the benefits of good self-care and certainly privileged time for teams and individuals to take care of themselves and how that flows on to positive performance.

Be You has some exceptional modules and domains and certainly a lot of resources. This is nothing about you creating the wheel or reinventing the wheel because it's all there for you, whether you're visiting the Be You website and looking at the range of resources throughout the modules. There's a great flow that goes through in terms of engaging parents, engaging your peers and staff, but also looking at staff and student mental health and wellbeing and there's some other great resources that we partner with. Certainly Smiling Mind and some other partners around RUOK?, clearly Beyond blue, and a range of other national brands that we connect with that are great for staff wellbeing.

Defining wellbeing for me is really simple. It's the sense or the state of feeling happy and well and balanced and that you're absolutely functioning in a good space. And I think, historically, we talked about resilience that in Australia education educators would weather the storm and be resilient and you would show up to work with a smile on your face and get on with the job. I think we now have a much more sophisticated approach to wellbeing and we understand that there's little behaviours and certainly little actions that we can do as individuals, as teams, and as schools to improve a general sense of wellbeing of the whole team, but also yourself. I think as we also get older we start to realise that there's certain strategies that work for you and there's things that will balance and recalibrate me that might be clearly different to what's going on with Addie or Jeannette or you sitting out there. So I think by the time you become an adult you've probably got a cache of strategies that you call upon. Certainly I'll be reflecting on things like sleep and exercise but there's a whole range of things like walking, surfing, things that fit you and your sense of wellbeing.

We've got a video now about staff wellbeing. This can be accessed on the Be You website.

### **Video: Staff wellbeing (The next section is a transcript of the video)**

*Staff wellbeing. To look after others, it's first important to look after yourself. Just like we're instructed to put on our own oxygen mask before helping others during an emergency plane landing, staff wellbeing is essential for effective teaching and learning and looking after the wellbeing of others. Stress is a part of everyday life. In small amounts, it can help us do more in less time. But prolonged stress can create a real risk of mental health issues. So while you're putting your energy into creating a mentally healthy environment for your children and young people, it's also important to focus on the wellbeing of yourself and your colleagues. Time pressures and workload, conflicts with colleagues, difficulty adapting to change, or low self-esteem are a few things that can affect staff wellbeing.*

*Sometimes it isn't always easy to recognise negative effects, especially when they've slowly built up over time or gone unaddressed for too long, but there's always a way to move in a positive direction. Schools and early learning services can implement strategies to foster a culture of wellbeing, one that promotes help-seeking, creates opportunities for career growth and personal development, acknowledges a job well done, and offers resources for staff to build a sense of self-efficacy. Staff can also increase their own wellbeing through changes in diet, getting enough sleep and exercise, and reducing alcohol and drug use. Even maintaining positive social interactions and asking for help where needed create lasting positive impacts.*

*In fact, you can start now. Take a few moments to reflect on how you're doing. You might also like to think about and identify colleagues you can talk to and share experiences with. What plans, actions, and strategies could be implemented? Also think about the frameworks your school or service has in place to improve staff wellbeing. What plans, actions, and strategies could be implemented to ensure staff have the resources, knowledge, and environment to perform at their best? Through following small but continued positive steps, a culture of staff wellbeing can be fostered that reduces turnover, inspires positivity and productivity, and benefits staff and children and young people alike.*

*Be You. Growing a mentally healthy generation. (End of video presentation)*

### **Kristen Douglas:**

Certainly, you can see that's a really good video to share with your staff and certainly if you're a principal or a school leader. It's a great way to start the year and have a conversation around staff wellbeing. So resources like videos like that or some of the fact sheets are certainly really good to get the conversation started.

There's two concepts that I often refer to, and in working around mental health and wellbeing, these are the simplest two concepts. And some of you may consider the mental health continuum, you know prevention, early intervention, intervention, and postvention, but I really like these two simple things. What we're trying to do across the country, and certainly Be You is one of the main vehicles, is lift and improve everyone's mental health literacy, self-care, and resilience, up by a couple of degrees. Now what flows on after that as a result is people become more aware, more knowledgeable, and more skilled in terms of wellbeing and understanding their self and others and then they go on to support seek or seek help. In order to encourage someone to seek help, we actually need to have a good baseline of mental health literacy. So it's really important that these two concepts are things that you're thinking about, and I know a lot of departments, diocese, independent education systems offer staff things like EAP and services, but we certainly need to reflect on our level of mental health literacy and understanding but also our level of self-care and how much we lean into that.

Across Australia the education sector's huge, we've got about 6,500 primary schools and about 3,000 secondary schools across all sectors. We're all doing this really differently. And I think the reason that we've put this continuum up is to allow you to reflect as an individual in your school community. There's probably great things you're doing up to prevention/health promotion end, there might be things that you're doing at early intervention, and there might be things that you're doing at intervention and postvention, but there's always area for improvement or spaces for improvement. So maybe commencing into 2020, it's sitting down and have an articulated conversation with your team about staff self-care and wellbeing and where is a space that we'd like to improve? Is early intervention and how we all support and seek each other out, do we have the right communication strategies? Do we have services, do we have an EAP? Through to do we actually promote mental health and wellbeing? Are we doing mindfulness at the beginning of a staff meeting? So we like to think about this as whole-school community response.

I really love the little graphic down in the corner, which is of a battery. I mean, it makes sense to adults, it makes sense to kids, because we've all got an iPhone at this point. We all know that when your battery is running low, you start to get in the red light, there's certain things that you need to do, change behaviour in order to get back to the green. So being able to recognise the signs and symptomatic things that you might see in yourself, internalised stress, but the early signs

so rather than waiting that you're a one to nine - nine being severe and ten when you're feeling really wobbly and not okay, doing things in a proactive way when you're about the four or five mark, and knowing what strategies that will reduce the stress or distress, but also increase your energy and get you back to the green battery.

For every educator you get to the end of the year and, you know what, I could sit you down and do some reflection and reflective practice with you and I have no doubt that you've all had different experiences. You've had little acute incidences at school that might have thrown you, it might be a big issue that you've had to manage, relationship conflict, or even critical incidents. I want to acknowledge that a typical year for any educator actually has quite a few ups and downs. Now we can't protect all of you in a bubble, but we can give you lots of strategies.

One of the best frameworks that we've come up with, it's really simple and it's probably a very complex mental health framework in a simple way, is notice, inquire, plan, and provide. And we call it 'NIP it in the bud' because it's great, it's a simple way to remember this. But NIP it in the bud is about noticing early, inquiring early, and planning and providing support. So we love to apply NIP it in the bud whether you're talking about your colleagues, whether you working with parents, or whether you're actually thinking about working with students. The skills to notice are really important, but the skills about inquiring are fundamental and that's about how to start a conversation.

We all know that self-care is really important and one of the things that we've certainly become attuned to, and having relationships with the Australian Sleep Foundation, is that sleep is one of the most fundamental things to do to stabilise your self-care, but it's also one of the things that can be most detrimental to your mood. So if you've had disturbed sleep or impacted sleep it is often the first step to actually returning you to a healthy and balanced space. We know that sleep, exercise, diet, they're all really important, but for me sleep is a foundational thing we need to really pay attention to.

We heard the great analogy about the oxygen mask, and everyone's been on a flight and done the safety briefing where it puts down. There is, I guess, in the last couple of years a little bit of: should I be taking care of myself? I should be putting other people first, and there's a beautiful nature about educators that you do care about others. But this is really important that for you to be at your peak performance and the best educator you want to be, is to make sure that you're putting things in place. And I always say to teachers and principals: put things in your diary that are absolutely locked away, privileged, and protected that you know are going to keep you in a stable healthy space. And as a school leader, I used to be a school principal, I absolutely would make sure that we're doing this in the time of school. This shouldn't just be after school hours, this should be during your daily routine. There are little pockets for improvement and self-care and looking after self. It just makes a difference to showing up to work.

I love the analogy and I love the little activity of getting people to hold her hands out. So do me a favour. I can't see you on screen, but hold your hand out and pretend that you're holding a bucket and it's beginning of 2019. So a general educator, you know, gets things poured into their bucket, there's stress, and it fills up and I know that you're all really resilient but no matter how resilient you are eventually that becomes unmanageable to hold.

So what we're trying to give educators is some basic skills about offsetting that bucket and coming back to an empty space. And there's some great kid's books, but also some great articles around offsetting that stress. One of the fundamental ways to offset stress and to process through stress is conversation, talking it through, and certainly counselling is a big thing, and rather than wait until we're at the acute space where we're really in dire straits, getting counselling early, or having helpful reflective conversations early, and of course mindfulness is something we're going to explore.

We've got some great partners at RUOK and there's certainly some great strategies. Some of my favourites about inviting people into a sharing and vulnerable space because it really takes quite some courageousness for people to step into this space, is to having some great conversation starters. Some of the best and some of the favourites that I like is: on a scale of one to ten, right



now, how are you feeling? And people will generally say look I'm a five or six, you know, and you think well what would improve your health and wellbeing right now? What can I do to help and improve your wellbeing right now? There's some others. I always joke that I say to my staff: what's the thing that's keeping you up at night? Even though sometimes I don't want to know the answer. But there's some really beautiful ones that you can do with your colleagues or with young people about having a magic wand. If you had a magic wand right now, or about this week, what would you touch on and improve things? It allows people to step in and have a conversation about what's going on internally for them, and what's actually causing them stress and distress. So getting a couple of those favourites under your belt is really important.

Everyone's got a role to play and I think everyone should be able to step in and have good mental health literacy, you know, understanding but also role modelling help-seeking. It's one thing to say to Tom your student: Why didn't you tell me, Tommy, you're feeling so bad? You know what, as adults we're not particularly great, so practicing help-seeking, role-modelling help-seeking, and actually making it okay. We talk a lot in the mental health sector about reducing stigma, and I actually think rather than be deficit around that, let's be strengths-based. Let's talk about help-seeking and how brave it takes, or how brave it is for someone to put their hand up early and say I'm not feeling okay and allowing other people to see that no one was ostracised about that and that's actually pretty good. And I think there's a changing culture for our young people around this and the adults need to lean into this space as well.

I'm really happy that we've got one of our favourite partners, Smiling Mind, who have been incredible, and I've got two little girls and they're regularly listening to the sleep and meditation app. So is their mum. Addie, I'm going to welcome you now to talk about why meditation and mindfulness is really important and about the great work that Smiling Mind is doing.

### **Dr Addie Wootten:**

Thanks, Kristen. Hopefully everyone can see my screen, oh one more second. Share my screen. I think it's working. Okay, hi everyone. Thanks for having me here today. I'm going to talk about mindfulness and the role that mindfulness can play in supporting your own wellbeing.

So before we get started, I thought I'd introduce Smiling Mind to you. For those of you who don't know Smiling Mind, we are a not-for-profit. We have a national reach, in fact, a global reach primarily through our mindfulness app. Many of you may have dabbled in mindfulness and potentially have heard about Smiling Mind through our app. We've now got about four and a half million people using the app, which is really great to see and we have programs for different age groups. In fact, the majority or quite a large group of people that use our app are teachers and another big group is parents. So we're seeing that more and more teachers and parents are using our programs to support mindfulness within the school and within the home and that's one of our priority areas or our focus areas is around reaching young people. So we've set ourselves a lofty goal of reaching five million young people and children by 2021, primarily through our app and our school-based programs and at the moment we're building out a family program as well. So you'll see more of us hopefully in the coming years. I've got about a hundred and thirty eight thousand teachers using our programs as well. So if you haven't heard of us, please have a look at our resources. They're all freely accessible and we hope that we can give you some tools and resources to not only support your mental health and wellbeing but also to support your students' wellbeing.

What is mindfulness? It's a word that's used pretty commonly. We say things like I'm mindful of, and we're seeing mindfulness grow and grow, but lots of us use this word potentially without really understanding what mindfulness is and so today I'm going to break it down into, I suppose, an easy concept for you to grasp and hopefully give you some tools and ideas for you to take away and consider for yourself and your own wellbeing.

Before we get started with what mindfulness is, I thought I'd start with the opposite of mindfulness because sometimes this actually helps people understand what mindfulness is. So I suppose this

is a bit of a reflection time for you guys. Have you ever eaten lunch at your desk? Just stop for a minute and have a think about your normal routine day. Either have you eaten lunch at your desk or eating it on the run, you know rushing between meetings or between classes. Are you on yard duty and had to scoff down your lunch? Have you ever driven home after a busy day at school and gotten home and thought: Oh God, I don't remember any of those traffic lights that I just drove through. You pulled up into your driveway and thought: I don't remember anything.

Or have you ever been introduced to somebody and immediately forgotten their name? Now these are all signs of a very busy mind and a mindless mind. So these are the opposite of what mindfulness is. This is when we're distracted, our thoughts might be on automatic pilot, and we're focused on something whilst we're doing something else. Now if you stop and pause for a moment, have a think about those examples and maybe take lunch for example, you're eating lunch on the go. Do you actually pay attention to what you're eating? Do you enjoy what you're eating or do you scoff it down and not even notice? I often talk to people and they talk about getting to the bottom of the Tim Tam packet whilst they're sitting on the couch at the end of a busy day and they haven't even realized that they've eaten all the Tim Tams.

Now that's a sign of just mindless living I suppose, and the problem with that is that we miss out on opportunities to enjoy things, and it's a sign that our mind is very busy. So mindfulness is the opposite of this. It's a practice that is a training tool in some way to keep our mind focused on the present moment so that we can enjoy things and hopefully reduce our stress levels. I'll talk to you about why mindfulness reduces our stress. So the simple definition that we like to use is this one: Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and without judgement.

Now it sounds pretty simple, right, that's paying attention to the present moment, but it's doing it in a way that brings a particular attitude to what we're doing. So it's bringing openness, curiosity, and trying to reduce our judgement. Now if you think about things that you might be engaged with at school, for example, they might be pressures from parents, there might be report writing, etc., particularly at this end-of-year period. Often we navigate the world with a particular mindset, and for some of us, we might hold a mindset that actually is traditionally quite negative. So we might be thinking well, you know, my workload is too high, you know, why do these parents keep asking me these ridiculous questions, whatever it is that might be going through your mind.

Sometimes if we catch ourselves in that pattern of thinking we can actually learn how to stop making judgements or thinking in a particular way and that actually changes the way that we react or respond to things. In fact, mindfulness practice is teaching ourselves to respond rather than react. So if you think about that often when we react we're reacting with an emotion and that's often triggered by our thoughts and our approach to a situation. When we're being more mindful, we're actually paying attention to the present moment, and we're trying to respond with curiosity and openness. So imagine if you're a young child, you've never seen something before, have a think about how they interact with the world. They're very curious. They're very open. They don't have fixed ideas about things yet. And so I suppose mindfulness is a practice that helps us cultivate that sense of curiosity again and learn how to see things through new eyes. And in that way we can avoid those potential negative patterns of thought that can crop up for us from time to time.

Now the other aspect of mindfulness is learning to stay in the present moment. Now I've got an illustration on the screen of a cross-legged person meditating now that is part of learning how to be mindful, but you don't have to be practicing meditation all the time to cultivate a sense of mindfulness. Mindfulness is learning how to be here in the moment now, so if I paused again and said how many of you are listening to this webinar, but potentially thinking about the things you have to do after the webinar or potentially multi-tasking, listening with one ear and checking emails with another eye, we know that we spend a lot of time outside of our present moment. We're here with our body in the present moment, but our mind is somewhere else. In fact, Harvard University did a big study to understand how much of the time we think about something else and about 47% of our waking hours are spent thinking about something other than what we're doing now. So about half of you, at least, will right now be thinking about something completely different to what

I'm talking about, so your challenge is to bring your attention back to what we're here today to talk about and that's your wellbeing.

If you think about thinking about the future or thinking about the past, we know that if our mind is distracted about half of the time we're often spending the rest of that time, the other half of the time, either thinking about the future or thinking about the past and the challenge with this is that we have an innate negativity bias. It's actually a protective mechanism built into our brain and that means that when we think about the future or the past, we actually start to think about negative things. So a lot of us will spend time thinking about the future and think of what if this might happen, and we start to predict the negative things that might potentially happen in our imagination. Or we spend our time thinking about the past and worrying about the things that didn't go so well.

One challenge for you after today when you go home is to have a think about the things that you reflect on when you get home. And it's often, you know, that period of time just before you go to sleep that you reflect on all the things that happened in the day. Often we spend that time thinking about the things that didn't go so well. Our brain has this innate capability of rehashing all of the things that didn't go so well and so what we challenge people to do is to start to cultivate a sense of gratitude for the things that did go well for you today. And it might be a simple thing. It might be getting home on time, or it might be a really pleasant conversation that you had with a colleague or one of your students. But if you start to cultivate that recognition of the things that go well, we can actually change our brain and our innate focus on negative things. And so mindfulness practice is an attention training activity where we're trying to teach ourselves to focus more on the present moment and less time on the future or the past, and in that way it actually changes and rewires our brain so we're more likely and it's easier for us to focus on the present moment.

So the science behind mindfulness. Actually, I'm going to play a video now. We'll just go back one and I'll play a quick video that illustrates why mindfulness is an important tool for us if I can remember how to do it. I can.

#### **Video: How mindfulness can improve awareness and attention (Video transcript below)**

*What happens when you shake a snow globe? Snowflakes swirl everywhere and it's hard to see what's happening inside. Sometimes we feel like this inside too, when we feel strong emotions, like worry, frustration, or sadness. Thoughts and feelings swirl around inside our minds and bodies. It's hard to feel calm and think clearly when there's a snowstorm going on inside us. When we stop shaking the snow globe, the snowflakes begin to settle and were able to see what's happening more clearly. When we practice mindfulness, the same thing happens inside us. Mindfulness helps us calm down and see things clearly. It also helps us focus so it's easier to learn new things. Just as we can build our muscles through exercise, we can build our mindfulness muscle through regular practice known as meditation. All it takes is a few minutes a day to see the benefits. (End of video transcript)*

#### **Dr Addie Wootten:**

All right, I'm back. Hopefully you can hear me again. So that was just a little snippet of an introduction to mindfulness. It's actually developed for kids so you can use that YouTube video in your classrooms if you want to, but it illustrates how when our mind is busy, we're full of thinking, mindfulness practice is the tool that can help settle our thinking and help us, I suppose, calm in order to be able to learn, to be able to connect with other people.

I'll talk you through a little bit more information around the science behind mindfulness. There's been an enormous amount of research looking at mindfulness and the way in which mindfulness impacts on our wellbeing, our mental health, and our brain function. So we know that mindfulness practice strengthens areas of the brain that control executive function and these are the skills that help us get things done. So things like problem solving, critical thinking. It's the part of the brain that filters our emotional reactions so we don't say things that might offend other people. It gives us that emotional, I suppose, intelligence. So it's in a really important part of our brain. We know that when people practice mindfulness regularly, that part of the brain actually gets stronger and so



these types of mental processing actually become easier. It's easier to make decisions and it's easier to regulate our emotions.

We also know that mindfulness practice has an impact on the activity in our brain that is associated with the stress response. So there's a part of our brain that's called the amygdala, which is the stress centre. So when we start to feel stress, you've probably all heard of the fight or flight response when we see a threat or we perceive a threat, we think about a threat, our body will actually physically respond to that threat and our amygdala is the part of the brain that signals that that threat is there and produces all of the hormones and the stress response, so our heart beating faster etc. When people practice mindfulness, what we find is that that area of the brain actually changes in function, it gets less reactive to things and so we're less likely to have that overactivity of stress responses and the hormones in our body, which has a flow-on effect from an emotional point of view, from a wellbeing point of view, but also from a physical point of view. We know that when people have chronic overload of stress that they actually are more likely to get coughs and colds. They're more likely to have other complex illnesses and potentially Kristen needs to practice a bit more mindfulness to get rid of her cold.

So when we practice mindfulness, we can see lots of different benefits. The key benefits are listed here on the screen and we've clustered them into different areas. So calm is the first area. So if you have been finding that you're feeling stressed, anxious, and tense, which I'm sure many of you are, we all feel those types of symptoms, practicing mindfulness regularly can actually help us to get that stress response under control. It can help us reduce the stress or the physical activation in our body. It has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation as I said, so it helps us manage emotions a little bit more effortlessly. Sleep, it has a really big impact on sleep, so we can see that when people practice mindfulness, they report improvements in being able to get to sleep and staying asleep. And, in fact, one of the pieces of research that we've done with our program is to look at what impact teaching mindfulness has on teachers and the number one area that it helped or improved was sleep. So if you're having trouble sleeping, I strongly encourage you to consider how you can integrate mindfulness into your day or just before you go to bed. It also helps to improve our immune functions so we know that when we're less stressed, I suppose we have a bigger buffer in terms of our immune functioning.

Clarity is the next area that we've grouped the impacts or the benefits of mindfulness into and that's things like improved concentration, attention, and focus. We know that there's some work around the increased productivity and performance, enhanced creativity, and improved decision making. Obviously all really important factors to help us navigate busy workloads or complex working environments, particularly a school environment.

And then connection is the other area that we see impacts from mindfulness where people who practice mindfulness find that they can form better relationships with people, they have more collaborative behaviour, more compassion and empathy, and greater self-awareness, which is really important obviously in the organisations that we work in and particularly schools where there are lots of different people to connect with.

Now mindfulness in school is a really important area to consider. So if you think about mindfulness for your own wellbeing, all of those benefits, I think we would all agree, we would love to see them. Obviously mindfulness is not the miracle cure and it's not going to fix everything but practicing or starting a regular practice of mindfulness can be a gateway to some of those improvements and benefits, but it can also be an opportunity to bring mindfulness into your classroom. So whilst you're practicing with your students, you can both be experiencing those benefits. So we see the same benefits for students. So mindfulness can reduce distress, it can calm classrooms, and settle behavioural problems. But we also are starting to see some research around the role of mindfulness in helping kids learn. So that readiness for learning is really important. How can we cultivate a sense of mindful awareness? So when children are starting to engage with learning, they're actually paying attention, they're concentrating and they're not distracted by their own thinking. So there are two clear areas where mindfulness can play a really important role for student wellbeing and learning as well. And hopefully that will have a flow-on effect to your own wellbeing if you have calmer, more engaged students.

So how do you cultivate mindfulness? Mindfulness is an umbrella term and it's the state of mind that we're trying to cultivate. So I suppose it could also be a, you know, a sense of calm or a sense of clarity, but mindfulness encapsulates all of those areas. And the way we cultivate mindfulness can be in two different ways. We can practice meditation which is a formal mindfulness practice where we sit down for between two and 45 minutes depending on how long you want to commit to your meditation practice, but it can be as short as two minutes if you want to practice meditation for that length of time and that's where the formal brain training happens. So if you think about meditation as kind of like going to the gym for your mind, you're committing to a period of time where you're practicing that attention training. And then mindfulness is the healthy living, for example, if you align it to sort of going to the gym and living healthily, mindfulness can be practiced whenever you do anything. So if you're sitting down at a staff meeting, for example, you're actually reminding yourself to be present and focus on what you're there for, rather than thinking about all of the other things we have to do after the staff meeting or trying to multitask and checking emails whilst talking to your colleagues. Mindfulness is about being present. And if you remember back to that definition, it's paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and without judgement. So if you can bring that into everything that you do, with your conversations with colleagues, your conversations with students, the way you eat your food, the way you drive your car, if you're fully there and present in the present moment, that's practicing mindfulness.

There are two ways of practicing mindfulness: meditation or what we would call informal mindfulness, where we're just trying to cultivate that sense of awareness. We don't have time for a meditation today, so we're going to skip over this but we'll include some links in the mail-out and you can practice some mindfulness meditation yourself.

We're running out of time. I wanted to bust some myths before we wrap it up. So this is important to understand that mindfulness is not spiritual. It's not a religious practice, but it can be integrated into a spiritual practice if you want it to be. Some people might give up because they don't feel better straight away and, like anything else, it takes practice to repeat over time before you start to notice the benefits. So it's really important to try and form a habit around practicing mindfulness. Time is the biggest barrier for most people and I think if you can find two minutes to practice this, at the start of a staff meeting as a group could be a really great place to start. And the other thing that stops people from practicing mindfulness is that they can't stop thinking and that's just human nature. Everyone will think when they practice a meditation, it's not you doing it wrong, that's what your brain is designed to do. So keep persevering and as you practice and practice you'll get better and better. Now I'm going to hand back over to Kristen and Jeannette to finish up the session.

### **Kristen Douglas:**

Thanks everyone. Thanks Addie, that was great. Before we answer some of the questions that have been coming up, which are great, I do want to just give a quick shout-out to Warner's Bay Primary School. They're at the staff meeting. It's Tuesday afternoon. I'm sending you some virtual link chocolate, it's dark so it's healthier, but congratulations, that's great dedication to talk about staff self-care into your leadership group, good on you for privileging this.

Some of the questions that we've got coming through the chat box and certainly a consistent one that I hear from staff and from our Consultants across the country is someone or a team is really passionate about the staff self-care and wellbeing, but they can't quite get the leadership or the principal on board. A couple of things I think you need to take into consideration is you can get this started and you can do this as a small team or you can try and encourage the principal to get on it. I think, talk about the fact that it's free, it's accessible, but also make it around the fact that this will improve performance, retention, certainly motivation of people coming to work, and it's really easy and I love that Addie also talked about starting a staff meeting, starting your day in the classroom with the Smiling Mind app is perfect way to separate that crazy busyness of home, potentially, into the learning space. And in the staff meeting, I think if you have a principal that says self-care is really important to me, I'm going to privilege the first three or four minutes of this meeting, it actually builds a lot of relationship and credibility for that leadership to the team because you do

feel cared about, you do feel like somebody's wrapping some support around you. It's really important that I think you make it small, achievable, you show that it doesn't take a lot of time and effort and certainly you can lead this from any space in the team. You can you can start suggesting ideas. It's great to do it at the beginning of the year. And even, you know, during months like self-care September but one or two or three things in a term to promote self-care and wellbeing is fabulous.

There's some other questions potentially. Addie's got one.

**Dr Addie Wootten:**

I've just been asked to say a little bit about the Smiling Mind school program, which I didn't cover off in my presentation. So, it feeds in on, I suppose, getting leadership buy-in as well. I think sometimes engaging a program like Be You to help set up that framework is a really important step and then sometimes having the resources to run programs can be really useful as a guide to who to engage in and how do we engage them. So the Smiling Mind program can be used in lots of different ways. We have tools and resources through the app and our website that are freely accessible, but then we also offer a whole range of programs that are tailored to either staff wellbeing or leadership engagement. But the most commonly accessed program is probably our mindfulness curriculum, which is a social and emotional learning program that's designed to map into the Australian curriculum and it spans a whole range of topics, about 20 different topics. And it provides structure for teachers to follow to introduce mindfulness into the classroom, particularly focused on primary school years, and we do have some resources for secondary schools, but the bulk of our resources are available for the primary school years. It provides teachers with structured lesson plans for them to follow and if you're trying to explore how you would start a mindfulness approach in your school, I think looking through the app and then looking at our curriculum might be a really good place to start because it might give you some ideas around what topics resonate with you and other initiatives that you might be running, or what particular strategic direction you're taking in your school around student wellbeing and staff wellbeing. And the beauty of our program is that it's a flexible framework so it can map into other programs that you're running or it can be a standalone social and emotional learning program and it maps into the Be You program really well.

Alright. Any other questions?

**Kristen Douglas:**

I can't believe you gave me grief about my self-care strategies. That's cute.

**Dr Addie Wootten:**

Sorry. We all have to practice what we preach, I suppose, don't we. And sometimes we do need to take a day off if we're sick, but I suppose if you're running a webinar to 500 people, you probably can't even take the day off.

**Kristen Douglas:**

Just a reminder too, we're going to answer a whole range of questions that you might put in the chat box either now or in the future that we'll be able to send links or answer those after the webinar, which is great. So just a couple of final things from me, workplace and wellbeing, there's some great additional resources and you can visit the Beyond Blue website. If you Google 'Beyond Blue Heads Up', you get a whole range of strategies for employers and employees, but we also know that things like EAP – Employee Assistance Program – are really important for schools to lean into, for staff to lean into. You can talk to them about professional issues, you can also talk about your family, you can talk about relationships, personal issues, so make sure that you access the services and supports that are available through your school. In addition, it's always really important to remind people that one of the first port of calls for mental health and wellbeing is your GP and you can go to your local practitioner, your doctor, get a mental health care plan and then

go and access with Medicare rebated access through to private practitioners, psychologists, social workers.

A couple of final things: the culture of help-seeking in your school's really important. Not only living that practice but role modelling it for the kids because they will take those skills through into their adulthood. Thinking about the positive physical environment of your school and setting up spaces where you're thinking about prevention, health promotion, that you're also encouraging parents. I've seen some great school ideas lately where they've got coffee carts on Thursday mornings. They turn an empty mod three or four into a wellbeing space. So be creative with this stuff and it really does filter through into the culture of positivity. I think recognise behaviours, acknowledge when people are doing things that really promote mental health and wellbeing in your workplace, and take lots of opportunities to connect socially and build a culture of trust. Psychological safety is a really important factor around stable mental health and wellbeing.

Finally, there's some great Be You staff wellbeing resources. We're going to send a great number of links to you after this webcast, but there's the Educator Toolkit around staff wellbeing, tools for you, tools for principals and leaders, staff wellbeing fact sheets, and regular news items that you can get via our direct messaging.

We're going to do a poll right now, and it's certainly a chance for you to reflect and think about your wellbeing, so Jeannette? We're just waiting on the poll to upload.

## Poll

**After attending this webinar, I think the next step for me is to (you can choose multiple responses):**

- Explore the Be You Staff Wellbeing resources
- Review Smiling Mind resources
- Share wellbeing strategies with my team
- Contact a Be You consultant to discuss this topic further
- Develop my own wellbeing plan using shared strategies

There's some poll results here. So exploring the staff wellbeing resources, 54% of you said you're going to do that. Review Smiling Mind resources, 69%, well done Addie, you've sparked interest! Share wellbeing strategies with my team, 43%. Contact a Be You consultant to discuss the topic further, 17%. And develop my own wellbeing strategies almost 50% at 43, so that's great.

And certainly it's about gently reminding each other around this space and how important it is. Just to finish off and we'll get to the last slide, I want to acknowledge Addie for coming in. We are absolutely wrapped that Smiling Mind is great partner of ours, but also it's easy, it's accessible and it's something you can do right now in your team around staff self-care and wellbeing and encourage parents and kids to use as well.

Can I reiterate that this isn't a luxury space? This is a really important space for you to retain your interest as being an educator, to continue to perform at your best, and certainly to role model for the children that you're educating. It is fundamental that we show these behaviours in a positive light and that we encourage them to adopt the same behaviours. Think about that oxygen mask analogy and the next time you think I don't have time to do this for me, remember that a couple of minutes can make a really big difference. And I think the thing that I've learned the most around self-care and working in mental health, it's the little behaviour changes that actually build big behaviour change. I encourage you to do that.

I want to acknowledge the support team who have been in the back of your screen making sure that you're able to access this webinar. It's our final one for the year, which is great. Can I thank the participants out in the states and territories? I have the utmost gratitude as an ex-educator and now working in mental health about the work that you do, the powerful work that you do, but also your ability to connect and build relationships in a positive way and improve whole community mental health.

Thanks again to Addie.

**Dr Addie Wootten:**

Thanks for having me.

**Kristen Douglas:**

You get some chocolate as well. But to all of you, have a safe Christmas and a great New Year, and I really encourage you to make this a space that you think about for next year, and you lean in and grab some of the resources because they're great. Thanks everyone!

**End of webinar presentation.**