

# Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

## In conversation with Be You: Sustaining care for yourself and others

**Presented by Geri Sumpter, Dr Stephen Carbone and Michael Hines**

### Geri Sumpter

Good afternoon, everybody. To those that joined us for the earlier sessions today, and to those that are joined in the Be You virtual conference now, then welcome. We've enjoyed learning with you across the last two days. My name is Geri Sumpter and I'm the head of Be You delivery at Beyond Blue. I'm absolutely delighted to host this conversation today, and I'm really looking forward to spending the next 50 minutes with you. I understand that we have participants to the virtual conference from all over the world. There's been people from Mongolia, from Canada, from Bali, and obviously the people that are here with us from Australia today.

So, thank you for joining us and welcome to you all. We're conscious that we continue to work in complex and sometimes uncertain times, and that now more than ever supporting well being is integral. The discussion today will focus on how Be You can support you to sustain mental health and wellbeing practices in your learning communities. But as we get started, I would like to acknowledge the Boon Wurrung and the Wurundjeri Woiworong peoples of the Eastern Kulin nation as the Traditional Owners of this area, and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I would also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of countries throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waterways and community. We pay our respects to the people, cultures and Elders past, present, and emerging. And if you'd like to, you can acknowledge the country that you are in, on the chat.

For those of you who don't know about Be You or haven't been in one of our virtual conferences before, Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators, and the organiser of this conference. It's led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace, and it's completely free. It is available to every educator and every early learning service and school in Australia. Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional well being and their own mental health. It offers educators online professional learning fact sheets, interactive sessions, events, such as this one and other resources. And it offers learning communities tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and well being, including support from a Be You consultant.

The discussions throughout the conference highlight Be You resources, tools, and professional learning to show you how Be You can really support a whole of school and whole service approach to mental wellbeing. Yesterday you heard from a range of experts on our day one theme, educator well being, which is a strategic priority area for Be You. We hope you've taken away some practical strategies to help support

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your own well being and that of your own learning community, as well as enjoying hearing from our wonderful presentation teams here discussing the two day theme, inclusion. Personal highlight for me across the past two days has really been hearing from yourselves directly as our audiences, hearing about how educators really engage with our materials, hearing the questions that you need to understand and know to help you really embed well being as practices within your schools and services.

We've captured some of those questions from these sessions, and we're gonna be discussing some of those questions in this panel session. We recognise that you're coming to us to this conversation with lots of experience and knowledge, that we'd really encourage you to share this knowledge in our chat today. So, use the chat box, we'll pick up on those messages and we'll communicate some of those back to you as we can during this panel. The conference is being recorded. So, you can watch it again and share it with your colleagues. And all of the recordings, including this session, will be available on our Be You website in around four weeks' time. You'll also receive a certificate of participation for joining us today, and that will be emailed out to you.

So, I'd really now like to take the time to introduce my fellow panellists today. And first up is Dr Steven Carbone. Steve is a founder and executive director of Prevention United. Steve worked as a medical officer in Victorian specialist mental health services, and as a general practitioner in Melbourne for many years before moving into the area of mental health promotion and founding Prevention United. Prevention United is really focused on promoting mental well being and preventing mental health conditions. Steve has held public health positions in the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, and non-governmental organisations such as Origin, Headspace, Vic Health, and thankfully for us, Beyond Blue. Steve has a passion for promoting people's mental health and well being, and he has also experienced firsthand the impact of mental health conditions on people's lives through his support to those close to him and through his professional life as a GP and public health practitioner. So, really delighted to welcome you, Steve.

### Dr Stephen Carbone

Thanks very much, Geri.

### Geri Sumpter

I also have the honour of introducing Michael Hines. Michael is a psychologist and lead mindfulness expert at Smiling Mind. He has a passion for helping people function at their best. His expertise lies in the related fields of mindfulness and well being science. And he has worked with individuals, schools, and businesses in the areas of engagement, resilience, strengths, high-performance, and well being throughout his career. His passion for mindfulness stems from a personal meditation practice and professional develop spanning two decades. Mike has taught mindfulness at Monash University, the University of New South Wales and in schools and organisations across Australia.

At Smiling Mind he is responsible for the design and delivery of workshops and training across all schools, workplaces, and general community programs, which will also include app content and program development and providing oversight and guidance in the strategic direction of Smiling Mind projects and programs. And we're really lucky today because Mike will be providing us with an introduction to mindfulness and closing the session today with a mindfulness activity for us all to take part in. And after a big two days on the conference, we're definitely looking forward to that session. And together Steve, Michael and I will be reflecting on key themes raised throughout the conference and answering questions which have come up. So, Steve, let's get ourselves started.

### Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, absolutely, Geri. So, I think before we started, look, we've heard some feedback already, but it'd be great to just do a quick check in with everyone and look, just let us know on the chat function, you know, how are you feeling about the virtual conference sessions? You know, have you been inspired to make change or take action? You know, has it helped you to consolidate the knowledge you have? I mean, we'd just love to hear from you, so please feel free to interact with the panel and just post your questions in the chat function.

### Geri Sumpter

Fantastic. Thanks, Steve. And as people are having that opportunity to pop a few things in the chat, I just want to pull out a few pieces from the conference so far. So, some of the comments that have come through from the audience really resonated with me as I was reading them. One of them says that children are attuned to mimic adult emotions. So, educator well being is a high priority. So, we've got a role model for the people that are in our care and for those that are around us. And happy educators means healthy teams and quality outcomes for children.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Absolutely. I got to fully agree with that one.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah. Fantastic. So, we'll look forward to seeing your reflections in the chat and we'll have a bit of a conversation around those later in the session. So, Steve, can you tell us about your thoughts about why educator well being is so important? So, that was obviously the theme of day one of the conference.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Yeah, look, I think a good place to start is probably to reflect back on the discussion about the mental health continuum, and to, you know, help people to understand that, you know, mental well being or mental health and well being, you know, is relevant to all of us. It can fluctuate depending on how we're feeling, the circumstances in our life, the stresses that we were encountering. And so at one end, you know, when we're flourishing or when we're feeling at optimal mental well being, we feel good emotionally. And we function well socially and psychologically. Whereas when we're more at the struggling end of the continuum, of course, we start to feel emotionally stressed or distressed. And we find it harder to interact with others and to function at work. So, that can have an impact both on ourselves and the people around us. And so that's why it's really important to pay attention to your own mental health and well being and implement some of the self-care strategies that we're gonna be talking about in a little while. Because at the end of the day, as we've just heard, you know, your mental well being matters both for you, but it also puts you in a good position to then be your best as an educator and to support the children. So, it's an asset for life.

**Geri Sumpter**

Fantastic. That's really great reflection. And Michael, have you got any reflections on this also?

**Michael Hines**

Yeah, I mean, I agree exactly with what Steve was saying. I think educator well being's important in and of itself. You know, it's an end in of itself in that, you know, when someone's well being is high, they're obviously gonna have a much, a richer and more rewarding and more enjoyable experience of their day and their work. But, as you're saying, you know, it also has a big impact on people that you come in contact with. So, in the case of mindfulness, a lot of research has shown that teachers who practice mindfulness tend to be less stressed, they sleep better, they report fewer bad moods. And they tend to enjoy, you know, feel more satisfied both at work and outside of work. So, it can have a big benefit within the classroom and also for them and everyone they come into contact with within the school community.

**Geri Sumpter**

Fantastic, that sounds great. And Steve, can you give us a few examples of self-care strategies?

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Yeah. And look, just to reiterate what Michael said. I mean, you know, some people dismiss self-care as sort of self-indulgence, well, it's not. It's really essential for all of us, and it's how we stay mentally well. We wouldn't talk about not doing it for our physical well being. So, we also have to start thinking about it for our mental well being. So, for me, self care is using, you know, proven strategies that come from, you know, three broad branches of psychology. Health psychology, clinical, and positive psychology. And there are ways to help you to maintain your well being at the flourishing end of the spectrum and to be able to manage stress or difficulties that inevitably will come our way. So, for example, healthy behaviours.

We know that staying physically active, exercise is really good for our mind as well as for our body. Maintaining a good quality diet. Again, there's a strong link between certain types of diet. High in processed foods tend to lower your mood, Mediterranean and Japanese style diets tend to increase your well being. Sleep, sometimes people forget, you know, you can't burn the candle at both ends. We can't burn on empty all the time. It really, you know, is important to have a regular and good sleep routine. You know, and it's also important that, you know, we do some of the fun stuff, you know, in life. I mean, COVID last year restricted what we had to do. And I think for some people that lowered their mood because they weren't able to do the things that were enjoyable and satisfying for them. Relaxation techniques, and Michael's gonna talk us through mindfulness, which is a particularly powerful technique, not just relaxation, but also for the mind.

Things like deep breathing are also useful. You know, people relax in different ways, connecting with nature, listening to music, reading a good book. It's all about trying to dial down the body's fight or flight response. It's the stress hormones that can really surge and then make you feel unwell and tense. And look, we need to check in with our feelings, and try to monitor our moods. And if we're not feeling well, that's OK, it's reasonable. You can't function on optimum all the time, so it's good to share your feelings, talk it through with others. And then, you know, there's a lot of evidence around, you know, the way our thoughts affect our feelings.

And so, it's good to learn some of the strategies around fostering a positive and helpful and mindset. But, you know, we're social creatures. And so, possibly one of the biggest things that helps us all is to have that support network. People that we can turn to, people that we can share good times with, but also get support from when things aren't going so well. So, maintaining our connections with others is really, really important as well.

### Gerri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And I think that really resonates with me, and at Beyond Blue we've just done a return to the city into our new hub and really just being around people again, for me has been absolutely fantastic. I think I've definitely got the extrovert kind of a nature, so that reenergizing from being around people and the benefits I've seen just coming into the city and into the office has been, you know, quite astounding within a very short period of time, just for me personally.

### Dr Stephen Carbone

Absolutely. And I think for children and young people, that's been one of the things they miss most particularly here in Melbourne, in Victoria with extended lockdown. I mean, loss of contact with peers and friends and family, you know, really impacted a lot of young people, I think, as well as adults. So, it just goes to show the power of social connections.

### Gerri Sumpter

Yeah, absolutely. So, across day one, we also heard about well being for school leadership and practical strategies that leaders can use to foster a culture of value in their own well being and that of others. And, obviously, those in services as well. So, in terms of leaders making their own well being and the well being of their staff a priority through leading by example, what are your thoughts here?

### Dr Stephen Carbone

Well, I think it's, you know, important to look at early learning services, schools, as, you know, as a community of people. And of course, you know, it's made up of many different people with many different roles. And while self care is important for you, that's what you can control and implement yourself day to day. We also have to look at the collective, at the big picture. And what that's about is really trying to understand that we need to make sure our school environment is a positive school environment. Not just for our children, but also for staff and others working in the school. And that's now termed, creating a mentally healthy workplace, and that's received a lot of prominence. And actually, it's talked about a lot in the productivity commission inquiry and the recent Royal Commission inquiry in Victoria, because, you know, it is one of the places where we can experience stress. But it's within our control.

We need to tackle the workplace risk factors, so things that can impact any of us. You know, high job demands, not enough support, you know, managing those stresses. And so, leaders, you know, have got

an important role, both to look after themselves and to create that culture where we accept and that it is important for everyone to look after their mental well being. The tone starts from the top and, look, there's a lot of great resources nowadays. Beyond Blue, you know, the Heads Up program is a fantastic set of resources for leaders who want to look at how to create a mentally healthy work place. You've got Work Safe and other groups as well also, and the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance has also got a lot of good stuff. So, it's not just what you do for yourself, it's what we do together.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, fantastic. And along those lines as well, we mentioned on day one that within Be You we're currently undertaking a bit of research into educator well-being to make sure that we can really support the educators in schools and services. And we're looking at that with those two lenses. So, what about the whole learning community approach. And we're getting some insights into the kind of risk factors that educators are telling them exist for them, as well as, then, looking at supports for educators as individuals. And it's definitely that shared response and responsibility.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

And I think that's exactly it. It's a shared responsibility. We do have, you know, control and have a responsibility to look after our mental well-being, but it's a collective effort as well. And in fact, it's a legal obligation to create a mentally healthy workplace as well.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, fantastic.

**Michael Hines**

I was just going to add that it's interesting, we've done some work with school leaders over the last couple of years with a big sort of principal well-being project, and one of the things I found the most interesting about that is how difficult it is, initially, to get that buy-in from the leader. Once you put the principal and their well-being sort of front and centre, and they have to sort of, Hang on a second, you're saying this program is for me? You know what, this is my well-being?" So, I think they're so used to looking after school leaders, so used to looking after the needs of educators or families or the students. It can be quite challenging for them to actually go, OK, yeah, I've really got to look at my own well-being as well."

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, and it is. We've been talking a lot as well about, you know, you've got to put your own, you know...

**Michael Hines**

Put your own oxygen mask first.

**Geri Sumpter**

Oxygen mask for you first to help you then support others along those lines, too.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

And it's about establishing, you know, a culture that we all believe that mental health and wellbeing is important and then we take the steps that we need to take to make it happen.

**Geri Sumpter**

That's right. And really foster that climate where it's safe to do so as well. Now, we've got a few comments back through from the initial messaging in the chat, which are just beautiful. So, thank you to everybody that's been responding. And we've got one for you, Mike, around the Smiling Mind website and app, saying thank you so much. I'm using the app with students from preschool to year 6, including students with diverse needs and with the teachers. So, a fantastic resource. So, if people haven't explored that, then I'd encourage you to do so. And people saying that it's been around thinking about the educators and the

holistic approach to wellbeing being all of us. So it's the educators, it's the families, it's the children, and the community.

So, definitely that whole of learning community approach into this. So, we're going to just have a look at one of the questions that's come through from the chat. And it's really thinking about in terms of the school and our well-being, Steve, and we'll go to you for this one, is how can we look after our well-being when we are working at pace. So, we're recognising that we want to look after our well-being, we're talking about how beneficial it is to us, but we know that we're all working at pace. So, what is it we can do in our days to help us with our well-being?

### Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, thanks, Geri. Look, I think it's important to think of self-care or those sort of strategies that you're gonna try to do each day so that they're a habit. And it's also important to not rely on one strategy but sort of have a repertoire or a toolkit of different things you do. Look, sometimes you're busy, you're not going to be able to sort of apply all those skills. But there's always gonna be something that you can do, even if it's sort of just taking a five-minute break or doing some sort of deep breathing exercises. I think Michael is going to be able to tell us a little bit about meditation techniques. You know, don't take very long and they can try to calm you down fairly quickly. But then, also, at the end of the day, understand that you've been running on empty. You need to relax, you need to unwind, you need to recharge. And so, it is difficult. You've got to fit your work in. But don't neglect it at the end of the day and keep going and keep going, you know. Take that time out.

### Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And we've talked a lot about one of the ways of talking about your energy levels in terms of how charged is your own battery. And when you're seeing that your battery is depleting, how are you then going to get back up to that 100% charge again? So, thanks, Steve. We're gonna move on to talking to Michael here about mindfulness. So, we're hoping you're going to be really able to really expand on that category of relaxation that Steve spoke to us about, and, in particular, around mindfulness. So, what exactly is mindfulness? And if I'm new to mindfulness, where do I start?

### Michael Hines

Where do I start? So, yeah, it's interesting. You're right. Like, mindfulness is often considered sort of a relaxation or a calming technique and it certainly can be, you know, as a lot of research shows, it can really help to regulate the nervous system. But I just want to point out, you know, it's so much more than that. It's really great to be able to use it for that end. One of the beauties of mindfulness, it really gives us the ability to notice whatever's showing up and sit with that, you know, make a little bit of room for the discomfort sometimes, it's inevitable, and not be as pushed around by what shows up.

So, as opposed to always trying to get into this calm, sort of idyllic state, sometimes mindfulness is really about how do I sit with a little bit of distress that might be showing up and how do I still do the things that matter to me when that's happening. So, there's lots of definitions out there for mindfulness. The one that we tend to use at Smiling Mind is that mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and without judgement. And there's a couple of parts to that definition. Most people get this idea of being present. Whenever you ask someone, what do you think mindfulness is? They often say to you, oh, it's about being in the here and now, being aware, etc, etc. But what's often overlooked is that second part of the definition.

So, this idea of the attitudes that we want to bring to the present moment. So, in the case of the definition there, you've got three of these attitudes, openness, curiosity, and non-judgment. But there's a whole suite of them. Acceptance, letting go, non-striving, all sorts of really lovely qualities that we want to bring to the present moment. It's not just about being present. If I was present but very closed off and judgmental and disinterested, that wouldn't particularly serve us. Yeah. Lots and lots of benefits, lots of research. This slide is probably, and these dot points, probably aren't gonna do... well, certainly, aren't going to do justice to the breadth and depth of the research into mindfulness and meditation, but I just wanted to flag a few of these so that people get a sense of how broad those benefits are in terms of some of the psychological benefits. Reduced stress and anxiety, impact on mood, compassion, which has been a theme of this conference. Cognitive benefits in terms of performance, being able to really attend to what we want to attend to, being

able focus, have our mind and our memory work well. But also often underappreciated is the physical health benefits of getting, as Steve was saying, again, out of that fight or flight response which, you know, is such wear and tear on the body to be in that sort of red zone all the time.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, that constantly on pace that you just can't relax and, yeah. And does take its toll.

**Michael Hines**

Did you want to add anything?

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

No. Go for it. Yeah.

**Michael Hines**

Yeah. So there's a couple of ways, in terms of how we cultivate mindfulness, there's a couple of sort of key ways. One is meditation, which most people will have heard of and be familiar with and probably lots of you out there have had a dabble with. We refer to meditation as a formal mindfulness practice, in that we're putting aside time. We're not doing anything else. We're specifically sat there in service of cultivating those attitudes and that present moment awareness that we're talking about. So, that's your formal practice.

**Geri Sumpter**

I guess that's good, because you actually are taking note of prioritising that for yourself.

**Michael Hines**

You are, yeah. I mean it's like synonymous with exercise. We exercise in service of a whole lot of other benefits, health, fitness, etc, etc. So, we meditate. That's the act, that's the practice that we do to generate that awareness and those attitudes that we were just looking at in that definition. That's our formal practice. Informal practice is really just about bringing the same attitudes that we might bring to our seated formal meditation practice, to everyday activities, and that could be anything. So, that idea of really being able to be present, hold our attention on what we want to hold it on, being open, you know, interested, non-judgmental, etc, etc.

It doesn't matter what it is, be it unpacking a dishwasher, you know, it could be walking from the car to the office, it could be your morning coffee. It doesn't matter what it is, but our mind is so good at running off into the past, ruminating and worrying about stuff. And it's so good at running into the future and thinking about stuff that hasn't happened. This is just about being, you know, connecting mind and body where we are.

**Geri Sumpter**

And I can certainly think about those benefits and think about how you can use that. So, looking forward to sort of seeing your session in practice.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Yeah. I mean, Michael, it sounds like it's almost like spending the time, making the effort. It can change the way you think about yourself and the world around you. It sort of can lead to quite deep change by the sound of it.

**Michael Hines**

You know, all those benefits you saw, some people are attracted to mindfulness because they want to be able to perform better and they want to be able to pay attention in class, they want their students to be able to pay attention, perhaps. But, as you say, you know, there's a whole other sort of layer to meditation and mindfulness for those that are wanting to explore more of that self-knowledge and that broader awareness.

## Geri Sumpter

And I think that's great, because I think people aren't necessarily aware of that breadth of benefits. They can sit there, yeah, sort of thinking about the... You tend to pick up on something that resonates with you. I could use it for this, but then understanding the breadth of it will show the benefits of actually taking the time to practice.

## Michael Hines

The informal practice that we're talking about, Steve, to the point you made earlier about your question, Geri, around what do we do during the day when we're working at pace, you know, a lot of people say I'm too busy to meditate, for example. And often, we do. We feel like we haven't got 10 minutes with no distractions to really sit down and do that formal practice. But bringing our awareness just into where we are and what we're doing and just being able to tackle, even though there might be 100 things to do, just being able to tackle one at a time and sort of bring those attitudes to that moment, that, within itself, even when you're moving at pace can be really valuable.

## Geri Sumpter

And I like that, because one of the other questions that are kind of related to the first, but I like the wording in this one, says about, how can we recharge on the go? And it sounds like that mindfulness can be used for that recharge on the go. It's just about how you actually take that on board and manage it for yourself.

## Michael Hines

Most people are surprised if they put aside 60 seconds and just really checked in with how they're feeling, just notice the movement of the breath, you know, just connect to a couple of physical points of contact, really ground themselves like... We could do that in 60 seconds. It sounds too simple but you'd be surprised at the benefit you can get just from a really short intervention like that.

## Dr Stephen Carbone

And I think it's, you know, when we talk about mentally healthy workplaces, one of the things we often tell leaders is that there's a payoff. There's actually an increase in productivity. From a student perspective, happy teachers, happy students, better academic results, better, I guess, life progression. But it's about seeing the benefit and it's worth the investment of time. Yes, we can all say we're too busy. You know, I don't know how to fit this in. But the payoff, if you spend the time to learn how to do it, not just mindfulness but any sort of self-care technique, the return on investment personally is also pretty phenomenal.

## Geri Sumpter

And I think that's it, but I think it's that return on investment for yourself and for the others around you as well from the way that you then approach circumstances and situations and respond to those around you, whether it's your peers or the children, the young people in your care from the education perspective.

## Dr Stephen Carbone

We've not really talked about that... Look, I presume, in undergraduate sort of education, it doesn't come up a lot. Your focus is on learning how to support children and young people. You're not necessarily taught the importance of also looking after yourself as an educator. And it's great to be you and, you know, the resources that you have. Give back to educators and tell them, well, it's OK, you know. It's reasonable for you to be paying attention to your own mental health and well-being, yourself and your colleagues as well.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And one of the things that we're doing in Be You, as well, over this next period is really having that focus on what we're calling pre-service educators, so educators that are either in training or they're getting classroom-ready, to upskill their mental health literacy so that by the time they're in the classroom, they understand more about the benefits of looking after themselves and can understand how to recognise signs and symptoms of declining mental health in those in their care.



## Dr Stephen Carbone

And that's fantastic, because we know that there's a high degree of sort of attrition and burnout. And it's probably because we haven't taught people what to expect and how to approach it and how to look after themselves, and relatively simple but effective techniques like mindfulness. So, I think we've talked a lot about mental health conditions but not necessarily how to avoid them, and this stuff is really important.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah, and remembering that prevention is better than cure in all these circumstances. So, one of the things that came through in a chat yesterday actually was around how a service has incorporated mindfulness at transition times or whenever they feel their children need it. And I think that's a lovely way of thinking about this, how can you use it within your school or service, too, to help yourself and the children and young people to move calmly through their days as well.

## Michael Hines

I really love that point you sort of called a minute ago, though, Geri, that mindfulness, most people think of it as a fairly self-orientated practice. And in some ways, it is, and we benefit from it through the practice. But also, again, it's often overlooked those benefits for the people in our lives. It might be the young people in our lives that we work with, you know, that we're teaching.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah.

## Michael Hines

It might be our partners, it might be our kids at home, whatever it is, like that ability to really attend and be present and be open and curious and interested and non-judgmental, all these lovely sort of qualities of mindfulness, the value of them for others, it goes far beyond just yourself.

## Geri Sumpter

Yes, fantastic, that's excellent. And we're just getting a bit of comments in the chat that not getting overwhelmed, for example, is sometimes tricky and they're really appreciating the strategies that are sort of being introduced to our conversation. So, thank you for that, whoever that was. We're going to move on now to just remember that we've got some great resources within Be You, and really thinking about what we have within Be You to think about self care. And those concepts around sustaining care for yourself. I know that's really what we have been talking about shining through. So, in terms of our resources, I just want to point you back and you may have heard about these across the conference. But this is a consolidated list for you.

So, within the wellbeing tools for you page on the Be You website, you'll find a number of resources. We've got a wellbeing plan for educators and that really is a template to help individual educators support the mental health and well being in the workplace for themselves and address the unique challenges of being an educator. So, it sort of guides you through where to go in terms of prioritising your own mental well being. And we've got another document called planning for wellbeing, mine, yours, ours. And this really describes ways to manage stress and includes a template for planning for well being at your early learning service.

So, it can guide you through from that perspective. You'll also find access to a number of resources and apps to help you learn more about mental health, reflect on your well being, and find the best strategies for you. So, like you said, Steve, it's not one size fits all. We need multiple strategies to really draw on for those different circumstances and what's gonna work for us at the time. And there's links also to other resources and apps, such as the Smiling Mind app, that can help you practice the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of good mental health. The mental health continuum has been talked a lot about over the two days, where we've got the green end which is all around that flourishing end, and we've got the red end and everything in between. And the red end being the more pointy end, that point of crisis with mental health. And recognising that everybody is on that continuum somewhere, and it's dynamic, it's not static and

understanding that concept can, again, be a language piece to really embed across your school or service. And I want to also take you back to the professional learning modules.

Remember, we've got those 13 modules across the five domains and they really are a good way to learn more about mental health in general, and then how it can be supported. And coupled along with those, we've got our Be You factsheets, which you may like to check out. So, moving on to day two of the conference, which is obviously today, we've covered a number of topics related to inclusive practices for mentally healthy communities. And our keynote presentation really covered what is meant by inclusion, and how it's a protective factor for mental health. It talks about the range of environmental factors which influence and shape our understanding and practice of inclusion. And it talks about practical strategies and approaches to support everyone's inclusion. So, inclusion matters, it's so people can belong. And this supports their mental health so people are seen and they're valued and that they can participate, and that's a really important piece to actually be able to get in there and make sure they feel part of everything that they are doing. And that really supports that richness of your learning community. And those inclusive practices, they really do support people's identity, so people feel, I am contributing. What I've got to say is important, and I do belong here. So, I just want to reflect here with you, Michael, from a mindfulness perspective, sort of what does it mean for you in terms of inclusivity and mindfulness?

**Michael Hines**

Yeah, I mean, it's interesting, something we've been doing some work on recently across a couple of projects. Really staying aware of the fact that the way mindfulness tends to be taught and communicated in the West, which is often as a secular practice, but, you know, grounded in sort of Buddhist sort of ideas and origins, may be inaccessible to people who don't see themselves or their cultural language in the ways that you might be presenting or pitching or introducing mindfulness in any sort of setting.

So, we always encourage when in bringing mindfulness in your classroom or it might be an early learning setting, to really be invitational, but also have, you know, this is really just about awareness and going, right, you know, can I be aware of the cohort and what, you know, and be interested, you know, and ask questions, and if someone seems resistant or reluctant, explore that, you know, be curious about it. And be adaptable, you know, mindfulness doesn't have to be sort of taught as really rigid. You know, these qualities are very generalizable and most sort of cultures and religious backgrounds share in lots of the same fundamental ideas, they just might be phrased in a different way.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, I really like that point there that you said around it being invitational and that it is open to everybody and anybody.

**Michael Hines**

And if someone doesn't want to do it, that's fine, too.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah.

**Michael Hines**

Yeah.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

And I think as we heard, you know, in the session, I mean, inclusion is a human right. You know, so it's very important that schools, you know, don't discriminate. And I think, as we said before, you know, at the top of the discussion, I mean, social connectedness is a big protective factor. Feeling left out, you know, feeling excluded, feeling that you're not valued, or you don't belong, or that you're being rejected, that can have incredibly negative impacts on your self-esteem and that will have negative impacts on your mental health and well being. So, as you've said, you know, being included and feeling that, regardless of who you are, and what you look like, or what your abilities or otherwise are, that's really, you know, gives you that strong

sense of value, identity, belonging, which are all very important, you know, for good mental health and well being. But, you know, it should be something that we do routinely.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, fantastic. And there was a comment that really resonated with me from one of the former sessions where it was around educators sort of meeting the children at the gate of a school, that was a particular example that was given and sort of making them feel welcome. And like, so it's the invitation is, come in, you know, whoever you are, you're very welcome in our setting. And it's sort of a small act that makes a big difference.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

That's right, people, regardless of background, and you know, treating them as important and, you know, that can be busy, that can be hard in a busy day in a busy school, etc. But that personal touch is important. But also just providing opportunities and spaces for people to contribute and to be part of the fabric of the community and the school or early learning service is really important.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, fantastic. Now, that sounds really good. Now, we've got some questions coming through on the chat. So, one of them is, how do we tackle the conversation around balancing and maintaining your energy levels with meeting expectations of work? So, I think we've covered off a little bit on that.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Yeah, look, I mean, it fluctuates over the course of the day, over the course of the week. I think it's about the overall picture, rather than, you know, any particular moment or particular day. And so, look, there's gonna be days where you probably do need to work a little bit harder, or there's more happening, and then hopefully that you can balance that out, you know, with some downtime, you know. So, I think, as Michael said too, we can't get to this sort of Nirvana where we're always happy and there's never any frustration or negative emotion, you know. There are times when we're just gonna have to accept that's life, and we sit with those, and learning how to sit with those negative emotions is very, very helpful, and regulating that. So, you know, it's an overall balance that you're trying to achieve, not necessarily at any one point.

**Geri Sumpter**

At any point in the day.

**Michael Hines**

I agree, and I would add that what we do outside of work is just as important for that recovery. You know, we might be really stressed and have a whole lot on and feel pretty overwhelmed in particular moments during the work day. But a lot of it is, OK, what do we do when we're not at work that helps us recover? What are the leisure activities or the exercise, all that stuff we've already talked about, that helps us actually get ready again from an emotional, psychological, nervous system point of view, to go again the next day or the next week. You know, we've really got to make sure we recover.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

There used to be this old-fashioned, right. You know, eight hours of work, eight hours of play, eight hours of sleep. You know, maybe we just need to get back to that.

**Geri Sumpter**

That's it, we see the imbalance in the way that thing operates these days, don't we? So, we've got another question that's come through and it's around what advice would you give in terms of how you can put support staff members who may be declining on that mental health continuum? So, their battery's depleting, whichever way we want to talk about it. It is the language that suits your school or service. But how do we cope with someone and how do we support someone that isn't aware that they need help, or we're noticing things about them that might indicate to us that they might be struggling a little bit, but how do we, you

know, talk to them or get the message across that we want to be there to support them, what sort of things can we do from that perspective?

Michael Hines

I mean, it's tricky and it's delicate, you know. Some people don't wanna be asked, you know, how are you, you know. Other people are probably screaming out inside for someone to check in with them.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah.

Michael Hines

So there's probably no hard and fast rule but I think showing that interest, you know, and making that bid for connection. We've talked a lot about social connection, but also being respectful of boundaries if it appears obvious that someone doesn't wanna speak, and hopefully they'd be looking for that to have that conversation perhaps in another forum. Maybe it's not you that they wanna speak to about it, maybe it needs to be a psychologist or a friend in their private life that's more appropriate for that conversation than you are.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, look, I agree. I think it's almost like a balance of the individual but also the culture. I mean, as we said, one of the hallmarks of a mentally healthy workplace is that it makes it clear that it's OK to not be OK. That it's OK to be struggling and that it's not you, you're not to blame, you don't need to feel ashamed or embarrassed, and that can help people then, you know. It tackles the stigma side of things, which is often what, you know, does prevent people acknowledging or wanting to talk about things. You know, that embarrassment, that shame.

So, if you can allay that stigma, often you then get more likely that people are gonna open up, but that's not always the case. You know, I think as Michael says, you know, you need to approach it sensitively, privately, you know, talk about your concern about someone, what you notice. Some of the great resources, R U OK, have a look at their website, have a look at how they advise people to approach conversations. Beyond Blue has also got something similar. So, there's a lot of tips now about how to broach these topics. But, you know, you have to create that culture where it's just understood, it's given, that if someone appears to be struggling it's reasonable to ask that question and there's no need for someone to be embarrassed about saying, actually, you know what, I'm not doing too well at the moment. And you don't have to be their counsellor, you just have to start the conversation and help them access the...

Geri Sumpter

Help them progress on.

Dr Stephen Carbone

.. appropriate supports.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, no, that's fantastic, and we talk in Be You, we've got a conversational piece where we talk about the NIP process. So, notice, inquire and provide. And we can have nip it in the bud conversations, and there's professional learning modules in Be You that relate to each of those, notice, inquire, provide pieces as well.

Dr Stephen Carbone

You know, the one thing I would say is, don't think that all the stuff on Be You is about what you're gonna do for your children and young people as students. Apply it for yourself, it's really important, you know. There's a lot of great tips there that will help you improve your mental health and well being. And as we said before, when you're in a better place, and when you're in a better space, you know, you're a better educator. But also allows you to role model what you've learned with the children and young people. So, the

more you learn these tips and techniques, the better you're gonna be able to explain them and role model them to your children.

**Geri Sumpter**

Yeah, fantastic, and like I said at the start in one of the comments from another day, is children are tuned to mimic those adults emotions. And so, the more we can do in that space, the better it is for all of us.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

You don't have to be perfect, calm and zen all the time. But, you know, the more we practice those things, the better we become.

**Michael Hines**

And I think, within reason, vulnerability is really important as well, you know. So, if you, let's say, as a leader or manager, you know, are able to share, you know, within, you know, the parameters that are appropriate in a professional setting, you know, challenges that you might be having, I think that can also open the door and create that psychological safety that you're talking about, Steve.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Absolutely. I recall, you know, Geri and I did a session last year during the height of COVID, and, you know, we asked a question, how are people travelling? And, no surprise, you know, 80% of people said they felt, you know, that they were stressed and that, you know, things we're getting on top of them. So, you're not alone. I mean, we all feel some of the things that are happening.

**Geri Sumpter**

Absolutely.

**Dr Stephen Carbone**

Because of COVID or just because, you know, being an educator is not always an easy sort of job.

**Geri Sumpter**

It can be challenging. Fantastic, so we're going to go into a poll. We're approaching the end of our conference, and we just wanna do a bit of a poll around what are your takeaway questions from the conference? So, if we can get the poll up, you'll have a little bit of time to answer and then we'll start thinking about, what are those takeaways? And as you're answering those questions, what's your top tip for well being?

**Michael Hines**

Top tip. Surely it's got to be mindfulness. (LAUGHTER)

**Geri Sumpter**

Absolutely.

**Michael Hines**

Particularly the formal practice though. Like, we talked about informal, and it's really great, and it's beautiful that the qualities and the skills that we develop through meditation can be applied outside of that practice, but really that's where you develop the skills in the meditation. You don't suddenly just go, OK, I'm just going to miraculously become more present and more open and curious and all the rest of it. You know, we develop them within the practice. So, the formal practice of meditation would be...

**Geri Sumpter**

So, we need to keep going with making sure that we are dedicated to that practice as well and sort of making a commitment to ourselves to prioritise.

## Michael Hines

It's kind of like wanting to be fit but not willing to go for a run.

## Geri Sumpter

Go to the gym.

## Michael Hines

Or go to the gym. You know, you've got to do the exercise.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. So, we're getting some answers through the poll. So, the self care strategies are certainly being embraced. The whole community approach for educator wellbeing, that everyone can play a role, is certainly shining through as well. And we've got some spread across the rest of those polls. So, thank you for your answers and I hope everybody still goes away and does that reflective practice around what are your takeaways, where can we go with this? So, Steve, just to summarise as well. When we're thinking about self care, what are some of those commitments? We're saying commitments would be helpful, but what would some of those commitments be that people could follow?

## Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, look, I think it's about, as we said, considering what we can do for ourselves, what we can do for others, what we can do for the community. And I think it ties back to your conference theme, which is about wellbeing, you, me and us. And I think it is, as we've said, quite reasonable and very important to make that commitment and to look after yourself. And sometimes making that commitment, but also making that a public commitment, can really make sure that you follow through. So, maybe commit to spend time in nature or practice gratitude, or get back to the basics and keep your routines simplified or just practice some of those self-care skills that we've been talking about. But also, again, going back to your early learning service or school and thinking about, well, what can we do collectively and how do we get together to plan out how we're each going to contribute to making this a more mentally healthy workplace.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. Thank you. And just as we wrap up, I just want to recognise that there is support available out there, and you can look at the particular slide that is on there and see those supports available to us. So, please make sure that those supports are available, whether for yourself or for others, and do that check-in as we're moving through. So, thank you for this, and we are heading towards the end of our session now. So, what I want to do is to hand over to Michael to just give us a little bit of a mindfulness session as we are wrapping up. So, take it away, Michael.

## Michael Hines

Thank you, Geri. So, I've talked up mindfulness and meditation, so now I better deliver. So, I invite all of you at home or in the office, wherever you're tuning in from, to... Yeah, join in for this. We're going to do a short sort of formal practice, so we're going to do a meditation. I'll be guiding it through. So, if you're new to meditation, that's fine. You don't need to know what to do. I'll be sort of stepping you through the ways to go about it. As I said earlier, this is invitational. If you don't feel like doing it, obviously there's no expectation to.

If you do it, and at any stage during the practice you decide that, you know, you're not feeling comfortable for any reason, feel free to stop at any point. If you close your eyes and then decide you want to open them, that's fine as well. There's no hard and fast rules around this. But I invite you to get into a comfortable seated position, ideally with your back nice and upright, but without being too rigid. If it's comfortable, feet flat on the floor. Arms and legs uncrossed. And just resting your hands wherever they're most comfortable, either in your lap or perhaps on your knees. And if you're comfortable, I invite you to gently close your eyes over lightly. Or if you prefer, you can just allow your gaze to soften on a spot in front of you. And in your own time, take three long, slow, deep breaths.

See if you can let go of any tension in your body, a little more with each out breath. And then when you're ready, just allow your breathing to return to its natural rhythm. You might be able to notice your chest and belly expanding. The gentle rise and fall of your shoulders. All the air moving in and out of your nostrils. Whatever sensations alert you to the fact that you are breathing. And as we move through this practice, you'll inevitably be distracted by thoughts about other things. So, each time you notice that your mind's run off with something else, just gently bring your attention back to the breath or back to whatever it is that we're trying to hold our attention on.

And I invite you to turn your attention to any sounds that you can hear. Just simply listening. What do you notice? There might be some sounds off in the distance. Or more immediate sounds. Perhaps you're noticing a little bit of both and your attention might move from one sound to another. It doesn't have to be silent to meditate. The sounds can become the object of our focus. Just for a few moments, enjoying that experience of listening. Now gently bring your awareness to your body. Are you drawn to one particular part of the body? Or you're perhaps holding your whole body in awareness? Just being curious. Not trying to change any sensations. We're just noticing. Perhaps you'll find some areas of tension. Perhaps some pleasant sensations. There's no right or wrong. Simply tuning into the sensations in the body. Really noticing how your body feels in this moment.

And with each exhalation... see if you can just release and let go a little more. I invite you now to bring your attention to your breath. Noticing that rise and fall. You don't need to breathe in a particular way. Just observing your natural breath. You might even be able to notice that slight pause between the breaths. And again, whenever you get distracted, which is completely normal and natural, just gently bringing your attention back to your breathing. It's quite common to worry during meditation that you're not doing it properly. These are typical thoughts. You don't have to buy into them. Just noticing what the mind has to say. And just bringing yourself back to the next breath.

And then the last few moments, I invite you to let your awareness tune into whatever it's drawn to. It might be sounds. It might be the body. Or that movement of the breath. As we start to come out of the practice, I invite you to start to externalise your awareness just by tuning into the sounds that you can hear. Noticing the feeling of your feet, perhaps, against the floor, your back against the chair. Might want to wriggle your toes and fingers a little. And then when you're ready, if you had them closed, you can gently open your eyes.

And you might want to just have a little stretch just to... bring yourself back. Hopefully, no one fell asleep in that. It's important to note that lot of people will say, you know, it was good, but I felt like I was going to nod off at some point there. You know, with meditation, the goal is really to fall awake as opposed to fall asleep. So, probably should have said that at the start, but it's nice to bring that intention to the practice. We're trying to become more aware, more conscious, as opposed to sort of drifting off into some sort of relaxed state.

### Geri Sumpter

Yeah, that's a really good point, actually, and I like the thought of that. I think that's a bit of a focus for me moving forward as well, yeah.

### Dr Stephen Carbone

It's just amazing how rare it is that we would spend just ten minutes doing what we've just done. I mean, think about it, you know, keep doing it, and how much we just keep going and going as if that's the best way to live life. I think we need to relax and stand back and sometimes slow down.

### Michael Hines

And just allow ourselves to be, you know? Not to want to make a pun on Be You, but we are in this doing mode, as you said, Steve, all the time, and ten minutes isn't a lot of... even if you put five minutes aside and do that, it's still going to be beneficial.

### Geri Sumpter

Yeah. And even just doing that, you feel your heart rate...

## Michael Hines

Everything. It's not only psychological but the physiological benefits, as you were talking about, are significant.

## Geri Sumpter

Yeah, very nice. And yeah, so will definitely be great to sort of explore the app, explore that for yourself and think about those, you know, the commentary around this as beneficial not just for you, but for the others around you as well. So, thank you. That was fantastic. Thanks very much. So, moving on to think about Be You, and we do encourage you to keep learning through Be You. If your early learning service or school isn't taking a whole learning community approach to wellbeing, yeah, we encourage you to register.

And the benefit of registering with us is that, as we said, it's all for free. You can only benefit, but it means that when you register, you do get the benefits of a whole learning community getting supported by a Be You consultant from either Early Childhood Australia or Headspace, depending whether you're in a school or in an early learning service. And they're a great source of advice around implementation of Be You within your settings as well, so please register if possible. And if you're looking for resources on something specific, the fact sheets on Be You are also a great place to start. And finally, just encourage you to keep up to date with what we're doing, about our resources, they're ever-evolving, our events around things such as educator wellbeing and around how to implement Be You, tools and tips. They're all on our social channels of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. And we've also got a YouTube channel.

So, I'd personally like to say that we've really loved learning with you all today. Thank you for your time. And we do recognise that it is precious, but we do need to make time for this, as it is a priority. And on behalf of the Be You team, I would like to acknowledge the collective efforts of everyone that has played a role in Be You virtual conference. It's been massive. It's been a massive two days for us, as well as for yourselves. And that's from Beyond Blue, Headspace, and Early Childhood Australia, as well as the Redback webinar team and we're honoured to support learning communities across Australia to build mentally healthy communities. So, and on behalf of myself, I'd just like to extend my thanks to our panel today. To Steve and to Mike, thank you very much for joining us. Enjoy your evening, everybody, and enjoy your mindfulness practice cause I certainly shall be moving forwards. Thank you.