Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Practical strategies for promoting wellbeing in secondary school communities

Presented by Nicole Flatley (headspace) and Joanne Homsi (headspace)

Nicole Flatley

Thanks for joining us today - everyone out there - and as we explore practical strategies for promoting wellbeing in secondary school communities.

My name is Nicole Flatley, and I'm a Be You education consultant with the New South Wales headspace schools team. And I'm delighted to be joined by my colleague and friend Jo, Senior Clinical Consultant on our team.

It's really complex and uncertain times, particularly for schools, and so now more than ever, we know that supporting wellbeing is a real core priority for us all. It's a privilege for Jo and I to be sharing this time with you today as we explore practical strategies for supporting mentally healthy communities. We really hope that these strategies will affirm the actions that you are already undertaking and prompt some new ideas and sparks and fresh ways forward for promoting wellbeing in secondary schools. So, grab a cuppa, get comfy and let's get going.

I'd like to acknowledge the land that Jo and I are meeting on today the Gadigal people of the Eora nation here in Sydney, and I'd like to also acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging, and in particular, I'd like to welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are joining in with us today.

First, just to get going, we're going to do a bit of a chat box throughout the whole session today, for the next 50 minutes. So, in the chat box, I'd love for you to put in the land where you're joining us from.

And while we wait for that to come into the chat box, what we're finding here in Sydney is it's pretty wet and windy here - hate it today. It's really not a nice day, but everything is going pretty good. Yeah. Oh, one thing I will add, just while we're waiting also for people to pop their things into the chat box: 'Always Be You' resources. These are a series of resources that are on the Be You website. And they are Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal consideration. So, I really encourage you to have a look at those and check those out. OK, we got anyone coming through yet?

Joanne Homsi

It's such a great reach. We've got some diverse places, and we know people have joined us from around the country. So that's really exciting.

Nicole Flatley

Great! Welcome to everyone.

About Be You, so Be You is offers educators online professional learning, fact sheets, resources, you can register as an individual or as a whole school. And as a whole learning community, there's loads of resources that will really support you to be able to implement wellbeing in a really meaningful way across your school community. For those who don't know about the Be You, or haven't attended a conference, like this one, it's a national Mental Health Initiative. And it's led by Be You who are the organisers of this conference that we're here today.

And it's in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and also headspace. It's completely free and available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia. So really the discussions that we will have today, but also across the whole conference, will highlight some of the Be You resources and professional learning so I encourage you to check out the website.

OK, so the conference that you're joining us for today is called 'Responding together - Managing wellbeing in times of change and uncertainty'. It's hugely relevant for right now. And if we're covering three key themes in the 10 sessions over two days, and the three themes are 'Mental health and wellbeing: A whole community approach', we're looking at 'Prepare and take care', so critical incidents in uncertain times, and also 'the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships'. Really, most of the sessions, over the two-day conferences, are aimed at different learning stages. So, it might be early learning, might be primary school, or like today, it's relevant for the secondary school communities out there.

OK, so let's get going. So really practical strategies for promoting wellbeing in secondary schools. What we will go through today will be: Why are partnerships important? And we'll just dig in a little bit into that, and also who we should be partnering with our schools, what community needs can we identify, what risk and protective factors might we consider, and also some practical strategies and ideas that will enrich and sustain mentally healthy communities.

Your input is invaluable in today's session. So, I really encourage you to use the chat box that we will be using throughout today. And it's really encouraging because really, we can present content, but once...when the chat box comes through and people can see that, it really brings the content to life. So, we'll also be sharing relevant links as well into the chat box throughout the presentation.

OK, we've also got a couple of polls. This first poll is just giving us a bit of an idea of where people are joining us from. So, on your screen, just click on the area where you're joining us from, and then we will just have a little look and...so we get a bit of a feel for where everyone is coming from.

Joanne Homsi

Nicky, while we wait, we've actually got some beautiful parts of country that people have acknowledged. And while you pop it into the poll, acknowledging what state you've come, I'd like to just quickly acknowledge we've got people joining us from Grafton, Gundagai. We had the Yuin people being acknowledged in the chat box as well. So that's great. And just waiting to see what other states and territories people have joined us from today. So...wonderful to have you all join us on such diverse lands and states and territories.

Nicole Flatley

Nice. Thank you. Yeah, so it's great.

As we said before, Be You is a national initiative. So, I guess it's unique that we can run these sorts of conferences that reach nationally. And it's really wonderful to have you all joining with us today. And maybe what we might do is, while we're waiting for the polls to come through, we might just push on and then come back to that, once they've come through.

OK, so just moving on to the first part, so we'll be basically split into two parts. This first part will be looking at: Why are partnerships important? And then we'll be looking at some practical strategies in the second half.

You know, when I was at school, in year nine and 10, in New South Wales, we need to choose an elective, and the elective that I chose in year nine and 10 was an Italian elective. When I went into the class, I knew no one. I had no previous friendships or relationships, and I didn't know the teacher either. Teacher's name was Mr Linkavich and he had a really big, bushy beard and he was very engaging as a teacher. What happened over those next two years in the class was quite amazing, now I look back in the context of thinking about partnerships. And Mr Linkavich really encouraged us to bond together in a way and connect together in a way where we all felt safe. Share...we were able to explore language.

And really, he did this in a context of fun as well. And by the end of that two years together, what the students...what we all were, were really great friends. So, we really created strong partnerships. What Mr Linkavich did in that class is he facilitated connections, and he facilitated an environment that really created a sense of belonging. And we know that belonging and connectedness is critical for mental health and wellbeing for all members of the community. And really, effective partnerships work on two levels. They work on the level of the broader mental health and wellbeing of your school communities. So, it's like a ripple effect. I think when partnerships are strong, it really ripples out to the wider school community. It also enables wonderful interactions as well between...for young people to experience inclusive and respectful and honest relationships. It gives them an opportunity to practise those skills that they will need later in life.

You know, there's three key aspects, I guess, with partnerships are good to know about. Partnerships are really key to strengthening the protective factors available for each young person. So, what this does is this can really offset some risk factors which we'll talk about a little bit later on. They support the wellbeing and learning outcomes as well. And really, what is amazing is young people benefit hugely when the important adults in their life have good relationships and are working together. So, people like your school and students - when they're connected and working together, and when they're working with families, it is a protective factor.

You know, lastly, partnerships also facilitate trust, but when partnerships are strong, we know that when times of crisis and critical incidents occur, the partnerships really form a strong foundation. If partnerships aren't strong during that time, they will be put under strain. And really, it's like a ligament. You know, if you think about a ligament, the purpose of a ligament is to keep two bones stable. When the ligament's really strong, the bones will be strong, and the whole body will be stable and well-structured. When the ligament is under strain, the whole body then is also under strain. And connections and partnerships is like that. The stronger the partnerships, the more stable an environment will be.

And really in terms of wellbeing, it will strengthen and help to structure wellbeing across your school community. And really well-being outcomes in the end are life outcomes. You know, for the young people we support, they're really linked to improve relationships, learning, creativity, social skills - such a range of things. So really partnering with our school community is really key to promoting positive mental health.

Jo, have you got any further information on the polls yet, or we're still waiting for it to come through?

Joanne Homsi

It's come through, we've got people joining us from New South Wales, Queensland. We've had ACT, Queensland...sorry, Tasmania, we've got reach and coverage in every single state and territory all over the

country. So, it's so incredible that we've had so many of you joining us from your beautiful parts of Australia.

Nicole Flatley

Cool. Great. OK.

So positive relationships. What you'll see on your screen is taken from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. So, Bronfenbrenner believed that children and young people affected by their surrounding environments. And as you can see there's a bunch of layers. And each layer will influence on a young person's well-being. So, in the closest layer, it's called the Microsystem, ad this is the young person's immediate environment. So, it's things like their friends, their school, their parents. These are the primary influences in that young person's life. If we go out a layer, that group is called the Mesosystem, and this is where extended family, sporting groups, family friends also have an influence on young people's lives.

And then you move out to the Exosystem which is the larger social system. So, this is one where the young people aren't directly involved in, although they are greatly impacted by this group of people. So, it's things like community connections, family employment, housing, all that sort of thing. So, in the recent COVID time, I know a lot of families have lost work. So, what we know from that is that will directly impact on a young person's well-being. And then we move out to the Macrosystem which is the broader culture, context, all of the urban and rural influences, values, media, those sorts of things.

So, the purpose of this type of model really highlights the many influential aspects of well-being that are on young people, and really, I guess, it also highlights that families are the first and most important influences in young people's development. I guess, how can you use this sort of model in well-being? And as we're talking about partnerships, how do we use this sort of model?

Really, I guess, what it highlights to me is that the individual is at the centre. So, remembering that the importance of partnering with young people and really acknowledging their agency and their capacity to come up with these solutions for well-being challenges within your schools, and also how to build a mentally healthy community, cause they're the generation that are the next leaders of our society. This model also highlights the importance of strong family connections. Now this is particularly important between school and families. When these connections are strong, it is a protective factor for young people, and it also really supports their well-being.

And it also helps, I guess, having a look at this model, as you look at the different groups, it helps to map out existing stakeholders in your community. So, I guess you would know who your key people are in your community, and that's great, but it's always good to pause and reflect and have a think about, "Who are the key people in our community? Are my assumptions accurate? And who are the less immediate, visible people in our groups who we might need to consider forming partnerships with?"

Really, I guess, what this is about is coming back to designing a multi-layered well-being plan. To do that we really need to be hearing from the voices of a whole community and all key stakeholders. So, who that is is students, staff or educators, the teachers, and then that's also families, and then to a lesser extent, it's also community organisations, but really the three key stakeholders in schools are those three groups. And really to design a really well-layered well-being plan, they need to be taken into consideration.

OK, so there's another poll that will be coming up on your screen. And as we know, some groups... I was in the education system for a long time, and some groups are easier to connect with, with others. Can you pop into the poll - Who you find is the most easiest group to connect with?

And Jo, just while we wait for the poll to come up, while you were in the school system, as a school counsellor, who did you find it easiest to partner with?

Joanne Homsi

That's a great question.

I've been reflecting on this, and I think being visible in the school meant that I had accessibility physically to students, and they're able to pop down, and self-referral, I had referrals from teachers, but I think the strongest partnership that was formed were with the students. And as a positive impact from that, I was able to develop further partnerships with the students that I had never met, through their friends and word-of-mouth, and building relationships and partnerships with students via the couple of students that I first started seeing.

And then that had ripple effect and allowed me to meet with their teachers more regularly and build a partnership within the school. And it was just so effective in that way, and I think young people were so positive to help me build partnerships as well and referred their friends, if they're worried about their friends.

So, one positive relationship seemed to have a ripple effect, which was really, really, really amazing to be part of such an experience like that. But it would be great to hear from the others about what's also come through.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, I guess, wellbeing's a bit it like that, isn't it?

It can really... One partnership can transform the well-being landscape across a whole school community, and that's really what you're talking about is that one relationship that you had, with a student, then rippled out to other relationships with students and partnerships, and then rippled out to connections with teachers about how to support that student in the class, and then rippled out to the family relationships, and then even rippled probably out to community connections as well. So, you can see that one tiny partnership can really have such a broad effect on a wider school community and in terms of well-being.

Have we got any coming through?

Joanne Homsi

Yeah, we've got a huge percentage coming through for students and staff. So really highlighting the elements that we talked about on that partnership, and the ease that can happen while you're on site all together, I guess, and working together every day. So, you know, it's quite telling that families and community organisations, perhaps take a little bit more time to develop those partnerships, and they can be formed from the existing ones, but it doesn't probably come with the same amount of ease as the people on site with us.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, nice. And I think Jo raises a really good point there is that some partnerships are easier to connect with - we all know that - and there's groups and people and individuals that are harder to connect with. And I guess, as we go through today's session, it's good to hold those two, be aware of those two, and hold the ones that of the partnerships that you know are strong, but also be considering those partnerships that maybe aren't so easy to connect with, and what might be a way forward to connecting with those groups.

So, identifying your community's well-beings needs. Early in my career as a teacher, I worked in a residential facility for young boys aged 12 to 16. And during this time there, after a few years, we used to get boys that used to come in and out of the unit. And for a time there, the culture really started to change, and the behaviour really started to escalate and become quite violent. So, we were noticing, as the staff, that the culture of this group of young men was really moving in a direction where we didn't want it to go in.

So, we did some research, and we found positive peer culture which some of you may be aware of, by Larry Brendtro, and we wanted to implement something around positive peer culture. And before we did that, we could have just gone ahead and implement and said, "OK boys, this is what we are doing. This is the way forward, you know, you need to toe the line, and this is how it's going to work." But we took a different response because we knew that we needed to hear their voice and we needed... They had some solutions that we didn't have.

So, we partnered with the boys and gathered their information and that include hearing their ideas, their solutions, their problems. They challenged a lot of our assumptions and confirmed other things, and what ended up happening with this young group of boys is we ended up coming up with a plan, a well-being plan, actually of how to move forward and keep everyone safe. And the solutions were partly, yes, some of what staff had come up with, but it was also really what the students had come up with and what they had identified. And the beautiful thing that ended up happening with this group is they also had ownership over this process.

So, culture started to change over time which was really amazing and enriching to see. And I guess I choose that story because I think about... You might feel as well that you've got a good sense of your community's needs which I'm sure in terms of wellbeing you probably do. I guess you may be like me and also not have a big picture of everyone's needs in the community. So, I guess, when we are identifying our community's needs, it's important to hear the community's voice. And that might be the voice of students, it might be the voice of staff, or it might be the voice of the families.

And really drawing on their wisdom, because in the end, like in the example that I used, we had a better plan and a more sustainable longer-term plan for wellbeing than if I had just come up with the plan myself or a group of teachers had done that. I guess we also know that community's needs change, and that's more evident than before - like right now - because of physical distancing, and working from home, and the amazing transitions that you have all had to manage within your classrooms.

So I guess it's really important to always be identifying your community's needs, but also reviewing them and working out, Is this still relevant? because the plans that you might have had in place, I guess, at the end of 2020, might need to be reviewed and updated. And it's a really smart move this, because teachers and families and students will see that wellbeing is hugely a priority and is on the agenda of the school, if your wellbeing plans are changed. So really, I guess, and you will see this on the screen is there's three important considerations for identifying your community's needs. Really be clear on why you want to gather that information and be transparent in that. Be open and creative as well about how to capture everybody's voices.

I guess, Be You has some great tools to help you do this in a formal way, in terms of Be You surveys and also reflection and implementation tool, that really help you capture the community's voice. But there's also some informal ways that you can be creative about. So, it might be like a white board in the office. When parents come in and they complete a slip, there is a question on the whiteboard, and you might put your question on the slip and it goes on a question box, a suggestion box. Or it might be at events, there might be questions that are put out on the table around wellbeing. Or it might be young people who do a survey of their peers.

But there's lots of ways that you can be creative about how to capture the voice of the whole community and without being necessarily too formal about it. This is really...What we're really talking about in terms of community's needs and identifying them is taking a broad approach, means really using a strengths-based approach in addition. And what this will do is this will uncover the needs of a community; it will uncover opportunities and also the interests.

Now I know keynote speakers spoke about risk and protective factors, so I will just give you a little bit more information around that. And then we are going to have a question in the chat box in the next minute or two. So right now...risk and protective factors, so what are they? They are positive and negative

experiences in life that we all experience. And what happens is these influences and events are known as risk and protective factors.

So, for young people, risk factors can decrease the likelihood of a mental health issue developing. Protective factors, on the other hand, can decrease the likelihood of a mental health issue developing. And in addition to, they can build reliance, and also at times address some of the risk factors. Now this isn't prescriptive, this list isn't prescriptive, it's not going to determine the outcomes for any young person, and it won't predict whether a mental health issue will or won't develop because it's often a combination of factors that can really contribute to a mental health issue. Sometimes, risk factors, I guess, result from isolated events, but really more often their... several risk factors are related to one another. And it's their combined effect that can lead to issues.

So, for example, a student might have a difficult transition to high school, coupled with poor connections, maybe there has been some sort of family breakdown, and this would mean that that young person is more vulnerable to developing a mental health issue. So really, I think the strength of this diagram is then being able to go, OK, what can we do within our school, within the scope of our role? What can we control here?

And really, for young people, like Mr Linkovich's class, like what we did in the residential setting that I used, it's about partnering with young people, and it's about creating environments where they are...feel connected and they feel that they belong. So over to you guys now. What risk and protective factors are relevant for your school community? So just have a look down that list and see if there's any that stand out to you that you think you could implement at your school or you're already implementing I'm sure. And just pop that into the chat box.

Jo, have you got... Being clinical, a senior clinical consultant with the Be You team, have you had any experience around risk and protective factors or any reflections on that?

Joanne Homsi

Yeah. I like to think of risk and protective factors sometimes sitting on an emotional scale in our mind, in our body and I think what my experience has been is when the risk factors are piled up for a young person, the school have been able to introduce and buffer out some of those risks with additional protective factors. So, looking in school community about what we can offer that child or that young person together to build resilience, to build recovery for whatever they're going through.

And I think so many protective factors live within the school community, so many social, emotional relationships can be formed, we can build those partnerships externally. I think one of the best examples I can think of is when a young person is feeling isolated and with the school counsellor, you can build therapeutic strategies for social connection but outside that therapy room, a young person can work with educators, and the social groups that exists within the school, to build connection with programs and initiatives that are already existing within the school. And I think that can be used at any point of the continuum.

With risk factors, what I've seen is that they're out of their control. We've seen that the natural disasters, the pandemic, it's been out of our control. But what we have seen, and Nicky and I have been really privileged to hear some incredible stories of schools building protective factors in their community, in such uncertain and unnerving time, the schools have built protection, have built resilience and built social capital in a school by using, using strategies, by using their existing relationships, by building further rapport with their young people. So that's just one example of how the whole school is a protective factor - for not just one person but for the whole school. So, we know that our school in fact is a whole protective factor.

The example that you gave is incredible - that one positive relationship, one positive educator can be another individual protective factor for students as well. I'll have a look at some of the answers that have popped in the chat box. We've got some participants who have highlighted that a strengths-based approach can be used to build strength for that young person. So, in relation to that, building a holistic

approach for the whole school can also buffer out those risks that we were mentioning as well.

Nicole Flatley

Great, OK. Thanks, everyone, for sharing your views in there. OK.

So, I guess, as we take all of what we've spoken about for the last thirty minutes and thinking about what to do with all of that, and we know that ad hoc work is brilliant. It's not sustainable, generally, and really using a planning cycle is a smart way to plan for school community wellbeing. And wellbeing needs to be proactive, right? Because it doesn't just happen. I think it's something that we need to be proactive about, and this planning cycle that you see can be found in the Be You action team handbook.

Basically, there's four key areas. There's identifying community needs which we've already discussed - so identifying the needs and hearing the voices of the whole community. Then there's plans. So, planning out your wellbeing and being proactive, and considering all the key stakeholders: students, staff and families. They need to be part of your wellbeing plan. And responding to changing circumstances - like we mentioned before - and adapting to the changing circumstances like COVID, be important in your plan, and reviewing your plan, taking action. So, this is all about really providing structures for team members and also introducing... this will really help you to introduce the plan and get buy-in from the rest of the school community as well.

And finally, reflection: This is the thing that always is... sometimes falls off my list but it's really the key for implementing a really effective program. If we don't take that time to pause and reflect, and see what worked, what didn't work, and what we need to do next, and get the community's voice in that, the plan won't be as effective as it will be, as if you had done a really thorough review. So, encourage that review process as well. OK.

For the next part of... or the next half of the session, we got another 20 minutes together, what we've really been looking at is, "why are partnerships important? The importance of positive partnerships. The impact of risk and protective factors and considering a well-being plan." And now, we're going to look at some practical strategies to build on how we engage in the community. And I guess, as we look at this next part, I encourage you to think about it in the context of partnerships.

So, think about partnerships that are currently strong, like that strong ligament, that really strong connection that you have. Think about partnerships that maybe were strong by actually after COVID, there's been some strain put on those relationships. And then also think about some partnerships that you might be considering, that could be new partnerships that are starting to sprout. OK.

So, building parental engagement through family-centred practice. There was an excellent report that was put out by ARACY, that was an evidence-based summary around family, school and community partnerships, and it really looked at the idea of parental involvement in school. So, parents coming to meetings and events versus parental engagement in learning. What we found was: when parents were engaged, partnerships between families and schools, and communities were strengthened.

So, really, I guess, the role, one of the roles that schools do so well is really supporting parents and carers to be actively engaged and not just involved in a young person's development. And this has been really evident - right? - with COVID, where there has had to be those connections made with parents. Family-centred practice occurs when information is shared about a young person in a really respectful and collaborative way. It will help families to feel confident that their needs are being heard and really that you're drawing from their wisdom as well. And really evidence suggested, from this report, that when parents are engaged in learning, there were better social, emotional learning development, there was better pro-social behaviour and there were academic outcomes.

So, the plan... I guess what this is highlighting is really having a look at the plan for engagement with parents. Again, thinking about those partnerships that are strong, thinking of those partnerships that aren't

so strong, and the ones that maybe have become a bit wobbly with the recent events. And I guess, we know that you've worked tremendously hard and are still working hard to foster the connections in supporting families, and it's not been easy.

So, this might be something in terms of a well-being plan that you might consider doing a few small steps this term, but really you may not be considering these types of things till next term, till everyone's had a rest and there's a level of normality that has occurred again. But over to you in the chat box: How's your school community supported families to engage with learning at this time? So, Jo, have you got any examples around how families have been supported at this time - either your own example or actually on there. (CROSSTALK)

Joanne Homsi

We've actually had some great chat box contributions from the protective factors, and some participants highlighted that their school run parent education sessions. And I think that's such a great tool to use as dialogue to your parent community and to your family community. We know that we've seen, in our work at Be You we've seen, conversational blogs between staff, the school, and the family. We've seen educators send links and professional learning opportunities for parent and family resources, things like emails, and really creative ways of communicating with the family cohort has been really interesting.

And I know I've learnt a lot from the schools and the creative ways that they've used. We know that that dialogue is really positive to kind of engage with, when there aren't so many risk factors present. And then we can kind of use that strength - to use that - the same kind of protocol, when we are concerned about a young person. We also had some really great contributions around at-risk young people, and that there was a participant that highlighted that every young person that's vulnerable has their own well-being plan that's revisited with the educator and the family together.

So, a really great way of nurturing the relationship in a proactive and preventative way, and then using it when we are really worried about a young person. But when we aren't responding to a critical incident, or managing really uncertain challenging times, we know that keeping the dialogue is really, really important, and they're the type of things that we've seen in schools.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah, great. Thanks, everyone, for participating, that's great feedback. OK. So, our next group is student engagement. So, student engagement is a construct that we often use, but really, what is it? And there's three key interconnecting aspects to student engagement, and that is behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. So, there's a behavioural level associated with engagement, and that's around student involvement, participation in learning, extracurricular activities, those sorts of things.

When students are engaged emotionally, it's around their sense of belonging and connectedness - like Mr Linkovich's class, there was a real sense of belonging, connectedness that we had in that class. And thirdly, cognitively, that students' really investment in their learning. So, they're really aware of the importance of learning. So, those three interconnected dimensions, if they're all present, that means that the student is engaged.

So, I guess, what strategies, to engage students in your schools, have you been using to foster belonging and connection? And if you just pop that into the chat box now, that would be great to hear what your feedback is. And I also know that a lot of schools have said that some students have really become super connected, over this time, while others have really been disconnected and disengaged. And I know that is a new challenge that many schools are facing.

So, any ideas or strategies that you might have around that, I encourage you to pop that into the chat box for us all. While we wait, for a few responses, we got any responses in there yet?

Joanne Homsi

They're just coming through, but there's a couple that kind of interrelate with this one. And you're right, it sounds like the frequency of connection of... has definitely increased some of our communication portals, and some participants have highlighted that the online assemblies were a really great way to invite parents in but also keep a lot of connection up with students as well - the student well-being portals, and we've got staff and family portals.

So, just waiting on some student strategies to come up. But that contact seems to be really, really nourishing the way that we're connecting with our young people and our students.

Nicole Flatley

Great. And that's a really good point, Jo, 'cause I think there was an example that was... that I heard about when I was chatting with a school, and they had - it's a Greater Sydney School - and they normally hold an event, a massive music and singing performance at the end of term one, and it's led by students and students will work with the whole student cohort to organise it. It's a really big deal because families will go to Sydney, they'll stay overnight, it's held at a venue in Sydney. This had to be cancelled and... the students were quite devastated about.

However, they decided to go ahead with it and do it all online. And so, they've worked out the logistics, which we all know online can be tricky, and they're also connecting with the younger students, and they've rehearsed over Zoom. And what we really see with that example is the real cross-fertilisation of partnerships. So, we see partnerships between students that maybe were friends, but also there's new partnerships that were developed in that time as well. Is there anything else there that suggests other ways that schools have been engaging with students?

Joanne Homsi

I think the...in relation to the climate that we have been in, a lot of digital contact, using the emails and the portals and the blogs, have come through quite a bit. We've got a great question here that it would be great to spend some time unpacking. And someone's asked, "How would you set up a well-being plan with a student?" And I think that fits in really nicely with the partnerships in developing a well-being plan. And just wanted to highlight that by developing a well-being plan, you can create a roadmap to the external people you need to get involved for that young person.

So, we would encourage you to access some resources, which we can send post-this conference, around developing a well-being plan with a young person. And the protective factor in that is: Working with the young person, letting them know you're developing this plan together, and inviting other people to contribute and to be part of it, and to call on those people when you need to work together, is really important. We have had some great contributions come through in terms of the Zoom classes and scavenger hunt and playing trivia, and using Zoom for academic learning, but also to use Zoom for that social and engaging, fun interaction as well.

We've had some other strategies come through, like hosting a whole day dedicated to wellbeing, even if it is online. Sending the young people links and apps and things that they can enjoy while promoting wellbeing in remote learning.

Nicole Flatley

Lovely! Sounds great. Doing amazing job out there with a really tricky time.

The next section that we're looking at is community-sector partnership and collaboration. So, we know that communities play a really important role in delivering services and programs to the community. And we know when schools partner with community organisation, it's two-fold. Students and families and even schools can access services. And it's like a softer entry point for families to be able to access services in

their community. But it's also two-fold. On the flip side when students get involved in community organisations, it then really...it affects their... it helps them to contribute to their community, and it will really benefit all the partners involved.

So, I think really, is there any community organisations that you are involved with, that your school collaborates with, that is worth a mention to share with the chat box? And while we're waiting for that there's a great one that I'll mention: It's by Women's Community Shelters. It's in Sydney, and it's a community organisation that focus on domestic violence and homelessness with women. And it's called the Walk the Talk program.

And really, they're currently working with 15 schools at the moment, and they work over a 12-month period with students from those schools. And the focus is to build awareness, is to raise funds, and really, it's about a shared aim to bring together community engagement. And what we see with that example, like I mentioned before, we see that cross-fertilisation of partnerships happening.

o, we see students with students going to the community shelter together, building relationships. We see students developing relationships with the community workers. And then we also see students coming back to the school and sharing what they have learned and building new partnerships with possibly new teachers around that. And then they also then go home don't they and share what they learnt in the community.

So, you can see again: One simple program can really develop partnerships in a really meaningful way. Jo, is there one that you'd like to highlight there for this or...

Joanne Homsi

Yeah. We've got some contributions about partnering up with the local youth clubs...

Nicole Flatley

Oh, great.

Joanne Homsi

...and the youth organisations where students can drop in and visit, and after school, they can go and do social, extra activities as well. And it's been really lovely and really positive to hear so many contributions in the chat box about partnering with health organisations to remind young people to look after their sleep hygiene, their interpersonal relationships, their wellbeing, their physical health during this time as well. And that educators have been able to do this, by using other organisations' resources, links. Some schools have put together wellbeing videos that they send, that are already pre-created with local organisations. So, really wonderful and creative contributions from our school communities.

Nicole Flatley

Great.

OK, so the next group of key stakeholders is yourselves: so, it's staff support. So, really, staff wellbeing in schools is always important and now more than ever, as we all know. It's a top priority, and really stress is a normal part of life's changes and challenges, and, really, probably what we've seen and experienced in recent times, it's been a prolonged cumulative stress that's really been slow and pervasive, that can wear us all down. And I guess these change and challenge can really impact our physical and our mental health. It can impact our ability to do our jobs, relationships, and different things.

So, I guess it's more than ever time to have... I think we're really good at putting student wellbeing in our wellbeing plans, but we're not so good at putting staff wellbeing in our wellbeing plans, and drawing from staff in terms of what that might look like, and identifying the needs of staff, and then really having a

concentrated focus on that for staff, I think, is something that a lot of schools are doing and would like to do more of.

We know that Be You have some excellent resources. They're really proactive in the area of staff wellbeing. So, encourage you to check out the fact sheets and wellbeing resources - that you can also actually share with other teachers, if that might be something of interest. How does your school support staff in wellbeing? What are your favourite ways? And they might be the really simple ways.

I heard one...just before we go to that, I heard this great example recently, that one staff, the PNF, had put together some money and funded the canteen, and one of the cooks in the canteen, and every day for this term, the cook has been making soup for all the teachers for lunch. And I think it's such a simple action, but it brings that partnership together with the families, but it also brings together parents - the night before, don't have to work out what they're going to take for school for lunch. Lunch is covered, and soup's really nice especially in winter.

Have we got anything else in there that staff... that people are popping into the chat box around staff wellbeing that's worth highlighting?

Joanne Homsi

Yeah, we've got, after-school, wellbeing structured activity. So, we know some schools have organised yoga sessions for just the staff, and some meditation groups for just staff, and it seems like the theme is coming together while perhaps the schools shut down. There's no students around, but we're still promoting wellbeing as well. Lunch and connections also come through as well.

So, I'm really keen to see what else comes through and how, how your schools are looking after each other and yourselves.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah. And really, again, I just mentioned that intentionally making this part of your school wellbeing plan is crucial. OK. So, we're just...as we wait for a few more coming in, we're just towards the end of our session now. And we're just in the last couple of minutes, and I guess we've covered a lot in a short amount of time, and I really hope that you've been able to take something away with you today.

And I guess really... partnership with communities really key to promoting mental health and wellbeing. It's a protective factor for young people. It can offset risk factors. It can encourage young people to have a say and feel belonging and connected. And really young people really benefit, when the important adults in their lives are working well together. And this is another protective factor. So, these are simple things that you would already be doing.

And I guess, I encourage you, as you leave here, and you think about your wellbeing plan, and you think about those key partnerships, think about what you might... where you might go from here. Are you going to focus on those partnerships that are strong and have actually weathered this season really well, and you're going keep connecting with those partnerships? Or are you going to focus on those partnerships that have become a bit wobbly, over this time, and under a bit of strain? Or are you going to focus on maybe some new partnerships that you might be able to develop within your school community, with other staff, with students, with community organisations, with families?

And you might also decide, "You know what? I'm just going to focus on one of those and one family, for now, for the rest of the term, and then next term, I might consider how I might focus on those other three areas."

Jo, did you want to finish with anything, about what we've spoken about today or any comments?

Joanne Homsi

Sure, there's a great example on staff wellbeing here in the chat box, with a local school, and they've explained that they have a staff wellbeing team, and I think that is so great and it kind of highlights everything that we've covered today, that staff wellbeing culture needs to be planned for and strategized in a way, and it's not something that happens accidentally. So, having a team dedicated to staff wellbeing... Thank you for sharing that. That is an excellent thing that we could all take away.

No matter what organisation we work in - whether that's early learnings, primary schools or secondary schools - having a coordinated, a really planned approach. And then when we are managing uncertain and unnerving times, we can use that wellbeing team to really start activating strategies in the local community that we need. So, fantastic answers have come through, so thank you.

Nicole Flatley

Thanks, Jo.

And I guess if you'd like to know more about Be You, I encourage you to register as a whole learning community and access those resources and also a Be You consultant. You can visit Be You, and the address is on your page there. And also, you can follow Be You on social media, and subscribe to the Be You YouTube channel which will give you updates on videos and news from Be You.

So, I guess, from Jo and I, thank you so much for your participation. Thank you for your time, and, I guess, yeah, anything else Jo?

Joanne Homsi

Just a hear huge "thank you", and we acknowledge the incredible work that you are doing on a daily basis, and we stand in awe and admiration of each educator across Australia.

Nicole Flatley

Yeah. So, go and grab a cuppa.

There's another session coming up in 10 minutes, and we hope to see you tomorrow as well.

End of webinar.