



How Be You helped Active Kids Homebush create a space where diversity is celebrated

Here's how Active Kids Homebush, an early learning service in Sydney's inner west, has worked with Be You to create a comprehensive strategy for mental health and wellbeing, benefiting children, families and educators.



With delivery partners



Funded by



Established in 2009, Active Kids Homebush is vibrantly diverse. The early learning service caters to 116 children aged from eight weeks to six years old, with children, their families and educators holding distinct cultural values.

Over the past two years, since the service began working with Be You, there are two things that have brought everyone together – first, a desire to recognise and celebrate diversity, and second, to remove the stigma associated with talking about mental health from a young age.

Denise Mendonca, the centre’s service coordinator and Be You Action Team Leader (ATL), says that while mental health has always been a priority, the events of 2020 added impetus to the need for identifying and managing the challenges Active Kids Homebush was facing. These ranged



Denise Mendonca Active Kids Homebush Service Coordinator.



French teacher Grace Phillips using emotion flashcards.

from increased stress and anxiety levels among educators and parents to resulting distractions this presented for the children, whether in their home life or an inability to attend the centre in person.

“I could see that having a mental health initiative in place would benefit not only me but would have flow-on effects to families, my staff and the wider community,” Denise says.



Denise and Be You Action Team Member Jigna Mehta in one of their Be You planning sessions.

As the centre's service coordinator, Denise is constantly busy. When looking for a wellbeing support, she needed something easy to comprehend and implement, and which used simple mental health language that everyone could understand.

She registered with Be You and was connected with a Be You Consultant, Carmen Huser. In the early stages of their relationship, while Denise was taking in the scope of what

Be You offers, Carmen would recommend modules, resources and tools that fitted with the centre's needs, following up regularly through online discussions.

“Because I had this connection with Beyond Blue, and with Carmen, I was able to cope with so many challenges.”

- Denise Mendonca



Find out more at:
beyou.edu.au

Find us on



YouTube



Facebook



Twitter

“Having someone there to see how you’re doing and what’s happening – that is a great push to keep you going,” continued Denise.

Denise quickly became more confident with Be You, and today uses a range of mental health and wellbeing resources at Active Kids Homebush. She is now proactive in identifying opportunities that will help Active Kids advance and is always on the lookout for novel ways to get involved with Be You to enhance mental health offerings.

“Denise took advantage of any new information or advice,” says Carmen.

“At the start, she was coming for support; now, she’s coming to tell me what she’s done.”

Be You in action

From the outset, Denise’s aim was to create a



Jigna in conversation with Denise.

safe space that acknowledged and celebrated different cultures through a Reconciliation Action Plan. Carmen suggested a range of Be You resources, starting with [Fact Sheets](#) that acted as a gateway for Denise and educators to get answers to some of the common questions they were being asked and were asking.

This transitioned into the centre’s wellbeing program and relaxation sessions, which use the Smiling Mind program through the Smiling



The children illustrating emotions with collage.



Jigna reading books with children from the centre's street library.

Mind app. These have become just as popular with educators as they have with the children.

Denise also became aware of the [BETLS](#) (Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social Relationships) tool, designed to help educators structure their observations around mental health and recognise risk factors, then develop strategies to support children and build resilience.

BETLS makes you focus on where you are, and helps you make an informed decision rather than going into a situation blindly.

“This really helped with challenging behaviours,” Denise says.

“We were able to talk with families to see what was going on at home and where we could support with that particular child. BETLS makes you focus on where you are, and helps you make an informed decision rather than going into a situation blindly.”



Involving everyone

A large part of the success of Active Kids Homebush's Be You partnership was Denise's determination to make talking about mental health normal among educators.

Find out more at:
beyou.edu.au

The first step was to ensure the wellbeing of all her staff. She used Be You information to create a team culture where everyone is valued and heard, often through simple actions such as having meaningful one-on-one conversations over coffee or on a lunchtime walk.

The second step was involving all educators in the Be You implementation.

“I made it exciting for them,” Denise says.

“We had regular meetings [online check-ins] with Carmen. During one video call, we passed Carmen – in iPad form – to all staff members so they could discuss Be You and ask questions.”

These conversations and reflections have been ongoing, with policies and procedures



Drama teacher Sara Moad.

amended and implemented as a result, and educators learning to upskill together.

The result has been a noticeable increase in educator morale, says Denise, which has also helped create an environment where children and families feel confident talking about mental health and cultural differences.

“The expertise of the educators is really important to keep things going and to sustain momentum,” adds Carmen.





Active Kids Homebush is vibrantly diverse. The early learning service caters to 116 children aged from eight weeks to six years old.

“While there’s Consultant support, we hope Be You becomes a really good platform for participants to learn from each other and be really independent in their journeys.”

Seeing great outcomes in a short period of time gives Denise high hopes that Be You will be adopted at other Active Kids centres around Sydney.

“I think if others see what we’re doing here, they’ll say, ‘I want my service to look like that.’ I want everybody to see the benefits.” Denise says.

If you’d like to connect with a Be You Consultant and begin your Be You journey like Denise and Active Kids Homebush, register as a [Be You Learning Community](#) and join a [Be You Essentials](#) event to discover what Be You has to offer.

“*The expertise of the educators is really important to keep things going and to sustain momentum.*”



Meditation time at Active Kids Homebush.

Find out more at:
beyou.edu.au

Find us on



YouTube



Facebook



Twitter