Caroline Thain

Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to our In Focus, Building capacity in learning communities to promote recovery. I want to just begin with an Acknowledgment of Country. I'd like to acknowledge that I'm on the lands of the Stony Creek Nation here in Lutrawita, Tasmania and I pay my respects to those Elders, both past, present and future leaders. And I also want to acknowledge the lands that you're all coming to this In Focus from today across our big, broad country. We value our First Nations and traditional custodians. We value their cultures, their identities and their continuing connection to our Country, waters, kin and community. I know when we talk about this topic today, I often think about the importance of land and country and how, how much healing our country can provide when we're talking about difficult adversities and topics that we have and work through together. I would like to now, also, please feel free to put in what Country you're, you're on in the chat as well. And it's always nice to, to hear where we've got people coming from.

And this is our panel today. So myself, obviously, my name's Caroline, and I'm the National Clinical Manager of headspace Schools and I have Greg Cameron here who's an Education Consultant with Townsville Catholic Education. And I'm also very lucky to be joined by Mat Grining, who's the President of the Tasmanian Principals Assocation.

One of the really lovely things about Be You is, is we get these really nice connection points to amazing educators across the country, and we're very, very grateful to have Mat and Greg, who are going to share some of their insights and learnings with us today.

First of all, though, of course, we, we start all of our webinars like this, but, but really, this is probably the most important thing that I'm going to be saying to you, which is actually about looking after yourself and caring for yourself as you hear some of this content. So remember that your own wellbeing needs to be a priority, and we continue to reference this throughout the presentation. So this is a model that some of you will be really familiar with. So we look at the three parts of our model, which are self-awareness, so recognising when you're not travelling so well and, and actually, just having that understanding about what's happening for you is actually the first point of taking care of yourself, of course. The second part is about self-care and those activities that can be helpful for you to actually move through and process some of those things. And, of course, the third part is about knowing how to access support. So when we think about self-care, we think about those three things combined and how they can support you.

Of course, Be You have an amazing set of wellbeing resources as well, and we'll pop those in the chat if we haven't already. So those wellbeing resources were developed and reviewed quite, quite recently, and so we'll pop those in there for you to, to refer to. But of course, I guess we understand that, as educators in your learning communities, it's really hard to look after your students and your staff unless you're looking after yourself first.

Of course, many of you will be familiar with Be You, but for those of you who aren't, Be You of course, is the federally funded national mental health in education initiative, and it's, of course, available to no cost for every educator, early learning service, primary and secondary school in Australia. Be You is delivered by Beyond Blue, in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, which provide learning communities with a national framework of Be You consultants to support the implementation of Be You. And of course, our Be You vision is that every Australian learning community is positive, inclusive, responsive and resilient, where every child, young person, staff member, parent and carer can achieve their best possible mental health.

We have, as you can see on that slide, a range of materials that we offer, and sometimes that can be really tricky to navigate. It can be really hard to know where to start. And the short answer is: you can start anywhere. So you can actually start by looking at some of the fact sheets, or you can actually call your Consultant who can actually help you, guide you through these resources. But they are, just so you know, they are housed within five domains. So there's students, staff and family wellbeing surveys. There's planning and implementation tools, fact sheets, handbooks and guides. And if you haven't already, we really encourage you to, as a team or as an individual, have a little look around and really get to know some of these resources. Next slide, please.

I should say that, of course, this webinar today is focused on the Responding Together part of those five domains, which is what was circled in that last slide. So we often work these bits of content out around each of those domains. And when we talk about this particular topic today, we are thinking about that domain of Responding Together as a community. So, thinking about the webinar today, this is an overview of what we are going to be working on and talking about. So we're going to be talking about developing a shared language and understanding. We're going to be talking and hearing from Greg about offence is the best defence. So he's going to be talking about a specific example in his career, and how those things have helped him think about this topic. And there's always a chance for question-and-answer time after Greg and also after Mat's presentation today, And Mat will be talking about leaders' wellbeing specifically and driving change, and what his perspective has been. And then we're going to do a bit of a wrap-up and next steps for your community.

I want to begin by talking about, as I said before, making sure that we're on the right page and on the same page around what a critical incident is. And I'm sure if you've done any looking yourself, you, you might find several different, different definitions. And the one that we find that is most helpful is that a critical incident is a sudden and unexpected event outside the range of normal experience, which can make us feel like we're losing control. And I would say that unfortunately, many of us working in schools and learning institutions understand that what it's like to actually be involved in a critical incident, which is why we're actually covering this topic today, to actually pull together some learnings. So that's the definition that we work from.

And when you look at that in a little bit more detail, you can see the critical incidents can include a number of things. So we think of them as things such as, but this is not an exhaustive list, but things like, when we think about it occurring in a learning setting or situation: a serious injury, illness or death of a student or staff member, we think about severe verbal, physical or psychological aggression. And you can see other things on that list such as student or staff witnessing a serious accident or acts of violence, natural disasters, which Greg will be talking a little bit about, fire, bomb threat, hazard, sexual assault or serious harm caused by drug or alcohol abuse.

And what do we mean by recovery? I really, this is one of my favorite Be You diagrams, because it actually talks about the stages of recovery, recovery, and preparedness, and actually your Be You Consultant and Be You work with schools and learning communities in a number of these different areas, or in all of these areas. So we talk about preparedness first, so actually helping your school prepare for a critical incident and what, what are the steps and what are the things that your school needs? We then talk and work alongside, and provide consultation to, schools in that response. So after a critical incident and then through to recovery and prevention. So they are the, the areas that we talk about when we're

thinking about a critical incident and how to prepare, respond and recover and moving back to business as usual in a school.

Now it's time for me to hand over to someone who's far more interesting. I'm going to hand over to Greg Cameron. So Greg is the Education Consultant from Townsville Catholic Education, and he's going to be talking about our next topics. He's an experienced leader with Catholic schools across Townsville Diocese, having led senior leadership and held leadership positions in three schools, including two principalships, and he's also, his current role involves supporting the leadership teams of 15 schools and colleges across the Townsville Diocese in strategic renewal, continual improvement and day-to-day challenges experiencing in those contexts. Greg has experience in secondary P-12 settings, as well as systemic operation within Townsville Catholic Education. Over to you, Greg.

Greg Cameron

Thanks Caz and afternoon, everyone. So as Caz said, today I'm aiming to cover three main things and it's hopefully a bit of a journey where one thing will build from the previous. First thing I'm looking to cover is the importance of being prepared for a critical incident and, and then planning for future activating events. And I'll explain a little bit about what that is when we get to it. And then just touching on practical, systemic support for learning communities, which hopefully then Mat will then lead off into his presentation from.

So, like I said, for the purposes of today, I'm not referencing suicide as that's widely addressed in other areas. I'm more aiming towards other critical incidents such as severe weather events like a flood or a cyclone or a bushfire or a serious accident like a school bus crash. So we'll jump on in. So being prepared and preparation is the key to success with managing critical incidents. So having a well-thought-out process and strategies to provide support and direction is essential to effectively managing critical incidents, and it will minimise the ongoing impact of, of that critical incident on your community. So the flip side of that is poor or inadequate preparation will result in a potential increase in psychological distress within the community, and it can also erode trust with families and students and staff and in the school and in the leadership team. And you don't want to be left scrambling to remember where to go or what to do. So having a written plan specific to a particular but possible critical incident, which is resourced with things like the immediate response steps that you will take, scripts and email communication templates for informing groups like the staff, the students, the families, neighbouring schools and for parish, parishes, for faith-based schools, having duties or positions or roles within the school, and it's important that they're the roles within the school and not the people, because people change roles and they move schools, but the positions within the school will remain constant. And the last important part is having an updated contact list for things like other local schools and local emergency services and local councils so you can get up-to-date information when you need it.

Revisiting plans frequently, and I'd say at least once a year, to ensure the contact lists, for example, are up to date and the people with responsibilities are aware of how to find the plan when they need it, and what they need to do, are the, the main steps that you need to be prepared for in managing critical incidents.

So I suppose my first key message of the three that I'll talk about is: be prepared. Have that critical incident plan that includes an immediate response, short-term communication strategies and templates and duties for roles within the school in the event of a critical

incident, and that will decrease the psychosocial impacts and enhance recovery after the event.

So the second part that we'll move into is planning for future activating events. So an activating event is an event that reminds members of the community of the original critical incident and it can have one of three impacts. It can elicit trauma response related to the original critical incident. It can remind an individual or group of the original incident that caused, caused dysregulation and anxiety and then recreate these reactions for them. Or it can elicit a significant emotional response. So once a critical incident has occurred, and the school is returning to their normal routine and recovery's underway, that's the time to plan towards future activating events, and I'll lead into how systems can support schools in that, in a moment.

But to put that into context, if a school or a community is situated in an area where there is severe weather events like floods or cyclones or in a bushfire-prone area, they will have a critical incident of that nature at some time. And the chances are, because of where they're situated, there will be future activating events that occur, that remind people of that same trauma that they went through, that same critical incident.

So an example of this, I'm based in Townsville, and Townsville was impacted by a significant flooding event in 2019 and a number of schools that were situated on the south and central areas of the town were inundated. And this included the schools, but also the residents of many staff and students who attended those schools and the rebuild took nearly two years for all the damage to be repaired, and families were living in hotel and rental accommodation that didn't really meet their needs. So think a six-person family living in a one bedroom, one bathroom unit. So think about two adults and four teenagers getting ready for work after sleeping in the one room and getting ready for school in that one bathroom. Obviously there wouldn't be too much emotional regulation happening there, and that's going on for two years. So that is real trauma that that family has felt for an extended period of time as a, as a result of that flooding event.

And what we saw was any rain event following that flood had an interesting impact on some of the people and the students. So there was widespread irrational response to any rain - so that could be actual rain or forecast rain - and it presented in the behavior of some within the community as anxiety and dysregulation and meltdowns. So when a forecast shower rain commenced, some of our staff felt the need, they needed to leave work to go and check on their house and pets. Some students would begin to act inappropriately, defiantly, and some of them would abscond from their classrooms, so leave the classroom, and that was all due to the anxiety they felt that was activated by that rain event, even if it was just a passing shower.

So what we did as a leadership team, we identified that we needed to manage this response to ensure the continuity of learning, because obviously, teachers feeling the need to leave their classroom and go check on their, their own property doesn't, isn't conducive to good teaching, and students being disrupted in the classroom isn't conducive to good learning. So we came up with a proactive duty statement to monitor. And we didn't ovethink it. That was just through the news and the Bureau of Meteorology, any forecast rain events, and then we had an internal school communication strategy ahead of this. And again, we didn't overthink it. It was just through our usual staff briefing on a Monday morning, if there was rain that was going to be coming that week, we would let people know, and let people know about how we're going to communicate any changes to that. And for the students, through the student daily notices. And we pre-identified those who were most impacted by the activating

event – so the rain – and offered support and help-seeking pathways for them or for their parents to manage their anxiety. Because remember, we're all trained education professionals. We're not health or mental health professionals. Our responsibility is to ensure the quality of learning for the students, and it's not to provide health support to adults. We provide the avenues to access the support. We don't provide the support itself.

So, over time, the impact lessened, but it was really intense for over a year following the initial flood, and it was probably at a peak just before the beginning of the next wet season. So that was our experience, but thinking about that, it could be extrapolated into other situations. And I was thinking about a community that might be impacted by bushfires. So an activating event for that could be a hot, windy day when people can smell smoke in the air. The same process could be implemented in a context like that. So having a proactive duty statement organised, ensuring the phone contact list for emergency services such as the Rural Fire Brigade or Fire and Rescue or the SES are current ,so factual information can be obtained and then shared. So which way was there a fire? Which way was it moving? How severe was it? And then a clear communication strategy around that. And obviously the pre-identified lists of those most affected by the initial bushfire, so they could be checked-in on.

So my second key message is, once the critical incident has occurred, there will be people affected in ongoing ways as a result of that critical incident. And activating events to the trauma caused by the incident will present through their behaviour in ways that you're not expecting. So once you get things back to routine after critical incident, that's the time to start planning for an activating event for that critical incident.

And this is where systems can jump in to support schools and school leadership team, school leadership teams, in trauma response planning. So for those that work at a system level, like myself, my job is to facilitate this activating event planning. Do you reckon you could just jump onto the next slide for me? Keep going. That's the one.

So those on the ground after a critical incident, so school leaders and school staff, they'll be exhausted, and they'll be suffering from things like compassion fatigue and decision fatigue and most probably ill-health due to continuously high cortisol and adrenal levels after the incident. So principals and senior leaders need to have the support of system structures and resources and personnel to plan towards managing the trauma experienced by the school as it presents when incidents and activating events occur. So, having things like a system-based critical incident management team to support schools is one way, having pre-constructed resources for schools to use in critical incidents is another. So in my context, currently, we've got a suite of faith critical incident management procedures for specific events for schools to access and contextualise to their own situation, as well as a critical incident management guideline which outlines the actions of system-based staff and school leadership staff to make sure there's that open communication and transparency into who does what in each situation.

So I suppose my final key message is principals and principal groups should advocate through their respective representative bodies for system-based action to pre-plan and support them as they try to navigate these most difficult times. And doing this will decrease the impacts felt by the community and increase the continuity of learning within the school. So Caz, I suppose they're my three main things that I wanted to talk about today.

Caroline Thain

Thanks, Greg. I have a question for you, Greg, one I've just prepared earlier for you. So I'm really interested in hearing from other people on the call today whether they've got some questions for Greg. I think the challenge for us is that you could speak to so many things in this area, and we really appreciate you keeping it quite condensed, and I really love those three sort of summary points. But when we think about those things that you've talked about, I'm wondering about how, how do the processes and documentation you've outlined help to ensure the psychological safety of educators? And I guess what we're saying when we refer, what we understand psychological safety to be, is that really we know that, that, that feeling of safety is important in terms of educators leaning in, seeking help when they need it, and so I'm really, and obviously for longer-term recovery. So I'm just really interested in what you think about that question, and what you think improves those things.

Greg Cameron

Yes. So I think, in terms of, when you're prepared and have the resources and process clearly outlined, you as the leader are less likely to become overwhelmed. So presenting to your community as calm and organised with a clear plan that you can clearly communicate and articulate will go a long way to building trust in, in them, and particularly those people that might be experiencing anxiety and distress, and this will reduce it for them. So if they're, if they're less anxious, and they've got confidence in you as the leader because you're prepared and presenting as such, that will decrease the distress for them at the time, which will mean that they've got less of an impact moving forward on their, I suppose, in terms of moving forward into activating events, that will be less of an impact for them.

I also think that if you can engage staff in the formulation of critical incident management plans and plans towards activating events, they'll be much more comfortable and, and have less impact on their psychological safety than they would, would have if they, if it's just a totally new experience for them. So if you think about a fire or a lockdown, we all do evacuation drills and we do lockdown drills. Staff are aware of that procedure and they know what they need to do ahead of time. Things are calm and they go smoothly. And the same could be said for critical incident management.

Caroline Thain

Yes. And I think, I think the point you made earlier as well, Greg, is actually communication is key in terms of hearing what the concerns are on the ground, but then continuing to also filter that communication through to your staff all the time, and then you can work together in more collaborative ways from what you're saying.

Greg Cameron

Absolutely.

Caroline Thain

And I, in my experience working alongside schools, like you, I think things have fallen down where even there's just a tiny little gap in communication where people aren't heard around their anxieties or worries, and then the school can't respond to support, or the leadership team can't respond to support because they don't know that it's happening. So yes, it sounds like those, those communication strategies, is what I'm, I'm probably, I was thinking about them when you were sort of saying that really, really important.

Greg, we've also got another question that's come through. Mary has asked about compassion fatigue and thinking about compassion fatigue with staff in the context of responding to critical incidents. And I guess I'm just wondering, what are your thoughts about that, and how do you mitigate that? I know that's probably a bit of a curly one. That's a, that's a big, big question. I think it's something that not just educators, but a lot of us think about in our, in our professions.

Greg Cameron

Absolutely, and thanks Mary for putting that one forward. Yes, compassion fatigue is certainly a thing just in education in general, you're providing support to everyone all the time, but what are you doing to look after yourself and to, to rebuild your own energy levels? So for introverted people like myself, we like quiet time. We like getting away and doing our own thing away from people. For extroverted people, they love to jump into a, a community environment, maybe go to the pub and do those sort of things, if that's what you're into, or part of a running club or something like that. So I think in terms of managing your own compassion fatigue, you need to look after yourself and take healthy steps to, to manage your own resilience at any time as an educator in our schools, because it is a hectic job.

Caroline Thain

Thanks, Greg. I think it's some of those, in answering Mary's question, she was also talking about the context of an increase in aggressive behaviors she's seeing in schools displayed by students. And I think, yes, I think sometimes when we're really fatigued in any profession, we can resort to those really quick behaviour management type approaches which aren't always helpful. And I think, yes, when I think about, compassion fatigue, I come back to that wheel that we looked at, at the start of this session, where it is just having that self-awareness before you hit that point, I would say, and then understanding what your warning signs are to know what are the things that you need to put in place? And it's tricky, isn't it? And I think sometimes we wait till it gets so bad to put those things in place, but actually we need to put them, them in earlier. And I think sometimes we think self-care's, you know, cups of tea and bubble baths. And they might be, they might be for some people, but it's actually little things like stepping away from your computer if you can, and they can be micro-minutes in a day that actually sustain you. So I talk about sort of, small bits of self-care that you could do through the day. Taking those small moments can actually add up to a better wellbeing at the end of the day, but it's easier said than done, isn't it?

Greg Cameron
Yes, it certainly is in the context, particularly if you're looking after little people.

Caroline Thain

Yes.

Greg Cameron

Just knowing your own triggers and your own signs and taking that time away so you're not reactive, and just knowing that you're the adult in the situation. A lot of the times, little people and teenagers, their brain isn't fully formed, so they will react in reactive ways. But it's our jobs educators to notice our own warning signs and then put strategies around ourselves to protect ourselves and, and the people we're working with.

Caroline Thain

Yes. Thanks Greg. I think we could probably, I mean, compassion fatigue is a whole topic we could probably spend many hours talking about. I think a good place to start as an educator or any professional is ask yourself: what, what do you do? What, what, what do you do to help yourself cope in day-to-day stresses and make sure those things are in place before things get to the tipping point. That's really, really important. And yes, I think we can all sometimes be helpful to thinking about, do I have that self-awareness? How do I know when I need more support? And what are the, those practical strategies I have in place? Do we have any other questions? I don't know that we do now. We might, I'll take the spotlight off you, Greg, and we'll move on to Mat.

So our next speaker is Mat Grining. Mat has taught from kinder through to year 10 in public education across 20 years in northwestern Tasmania. His leadership experiences in Tasmanian education include time in curriculum and assessment support and substantive principalships in primary K-12 dual campuses, schools during times of school infrastructure projects. During the principalship, Mat has represented and advocated for his colleagues through principal advisory groups and curriculum working groups with state and federal departments. Given Tasmania's unique geography, Mat has a particular interest in ensuring that, irrespective of the context of schools around the state, all school leaders feel connected and supported through collegial networks like the Tasmanian Principals Association. Other professional interests include growing the capacity of aspiring leaders, contemporary educational design, continuing to prioritise the wellbeing of our school leaders and raising the profile of principalship across the broader community by capitalising on school and community partnerships. Over to you, Mat.

Mat Grining

Thanks Caz and I guess, thanks for providing the opportunity to be able to, to link up and contribute to today's webinar as well. So just like to highlight some things from Greg's presentation and, and some links I guess we'll be able to make with the notion of activating events. And there'll be part of my presentation where, I guess, we'll talk a bit about trying to reduce that variability as part of, as Greg said, that trauma response planning. So I took some fabulous learnings from that, Greg. So I'll certainly go back and listen to the first half of the session. Not so sure about the second half of the session where I pop in, but thanks for those really great learnings.

I'll be talking about critical incidents and the impact on school leaders. And I guess what we were seeing here and experiencing from the perspective of our Tasmanian colleagues. Also just talking about the reality of the impact and what is then led into a research project that we're currently underway with the Australian Catholic University. And also, just talk about some early reflections and a few practical suggestions that have come out as part of stage one, two and three of the research project at the moment. Just shift slides, please.

So I guess, coming into this role with, so just over 12 years as a school-based principal across the primary K-12 sites. I just want to express my gratitude to the schooling system-based staff that have supported myself and my colleagues when there have been responses to critical incidents. Without the support from our allied health professionals and other NGOs like, like headspace Be You, as well as those people that we work closely with and alongside on a daily basis, certainly the, the recovery and, and postvention experiences of principals and colleagues would not be as, as positive as they could be without those really critical on-the-ground relationships from those partners during moments like these. I just want to also

say, I'm just grateful for the permission from the Tasmanian Department of Education, Children and Young People, to be able to make reference to some of the catalysts that have been in the public domain. I guess I've got just a couple of images there, particularly for those that, I guess, have, have captured the public's attention through, through media as well, which I've just got on that slide.

I guess we found that the conversations opened up because psychological safety exists amongst colleagues, and with, with some of those prominent critical incidents, like the Hillcrest and Dunalley tragedies, that just naturally opened up discussions about the personal experiences for principals. Probably finding that some of those 'aha' moments from, from principals that if they hadn't been through a critical incident, probably was a matter of, of 'when', not 'if'. And for those that were talking with their colleagues and sort of just naturally taking that, that positive bent on, on, on lived experiences, as educators generally do. We talk about, okay, well, how did this shape my, my leadership framework? How did it shape how I then prepared myself stepping into the next situation? Or how to support me in guiding the leadership of my larger leadership team and the schools and community, communities I was leading? So, that then led us to have some thoughts around, as a system, how can we ensure that we're reducing the variability so that the experiences of school leaders shouldn't differ irrespective of where you might be in the state, whether you're a primary, secondary or a district school. We should have that same level of quality assurance so that everyone is equally as prepared. Because we're all sitting in the principal's chair and, and wear the same hats and walk in the shoes, because ultimately, there is just one principal in a school. The one common qualification we've got is a teaching qualification. We might have some colleagues that may have had further accreditation or certification, but essentially that is that one common denominator, and we need to be able to close that gap so that we're best prepared to walk our communities through these situations and that we can also walk out of this ourselves.

We also found this overwhelming desire to improve the processes from the perspectives of school leaders. And this was something that we could collectively contribute to as well. So I've just got a slide there from the Australian Catholic Uni. So the principal occupational health and wellbeing research of the ACUs has been in place for over 12 years, and it's the longest study of its kind, nationwide. And the 2023 results largely reflect a continuation of the same patterns. Whilst they do, they can be cut down to looking at states and territory perspectives, primary, secondary sectors and different elements of wellbeing and different levels of recovery, what you can see in this slide here, particularly around the emotional demands for hiding emotions, it's pretty stark. There's a huge disparity between school principals and the general population in the demands of work. And certainly, if we're considering the perspective of principals leading their school communities through a critical incident, they will be the two areas that will weigh very heavily on them. The whole notion of wearing a mask. And what we've found with the 2023 results, and these are in the public domain, that there was close to 40 per cent of participating principals that received a red flag email, and we were actually the only jurisdiction to see an increase for participants in the surveys that received a red flag email based on the responses to the survey. Now the survey is completed by government, non-government, Catholic and independent principals and school leaders nationwide. So it certainly isn't just a reflection on the experiences of, of government or non-government principals. This really was that final prompt for us to step into the research space as a Principals Association.

So the Principals Association, we represent our primary, secondary and senior secondary colleagues and system-level educational leaders. And what we found is that there was an overwhelmingly under-researched area around principals' experiences and the impact on

principals in relation to critical incidents. So we found that, it aligned with the actions in our strategic plan. It was a great opportunity to be able to activate principal voice and engagement and a way of helping when things felt helpless as well.

So we then step into our research, just on the next slide. So the project that we've, that we landed with, is understanding the psychosocial impacts on principals leading their school communities through critical incidents. So essentially, that's the focus of the research. Now, the way we're going about that through three stages – the ACU research team conducting a broader lit review and also looking at the 12 years of qualitative data from their national surveys. That was the first stage. The second stage was a nationwide survey and that was completed last, last month. And that was to understand the nature of critical incidents, the categorisation of those, the experiences of principals and actually having some metrics to be able to quantify the experiences and recovery of principals, and some open-text responses where they could also detail the types of experiences or preparation that may have supported their, their recovery or preparation going into a critical incident. The third stage of the research that was conducted last week and that involved some individual interviews and focus group interviews and that is going to be continuing for another few weeks with some online interviews with the research team and principal participants to best understand the perspectives of, of principals, and the, largely the impact of, of principals.

So the three research questions that we put to Principals Association Australia Research Fund, so that's a research fund that allows principal groups to undertake research that is purely in this space around supporting the work of educational leaders. And this is available for, for government and non-government principals' associations. So the first one there around, what's the nature of critical incidents experienced by Australian school leaders? I know Caz had on that initial slide at the start of the presentation, so I guess, to look at the, the definition of a critical incident. And then the second question there around what internal supports effectively enhance school leaders' management of critical incidents, and, and that understanding that there was real variability around that. And the third part really is, what advice, direction can we provide policymakers and systems to help inform their policy and procedure design at a school or system level as well?

Thanks, next slide.

So, some early reflections from the research so far, and thanks to the headspace team for putting a penguin slide in there. So Penguin was the school that I was the last principal of, so Penguin District School on the northwest coast, and I was actually on the beach like these penguins on the day when we had the, the first notification that the Hillcrest tragedy had taken place. And that was, that was a significant point of reflection for all of us, and, and that, "this could've been us" moment quite easily. So looking at an opportunity around, how do we actually bring our profession together and learn from the experiences that our colleagues have been through? And that first one there, it is around being able to have a space to be able to connect and there are lots of different ways that, that can occur. Whether it be through a simple text messaging way of, of creating a sense of community, coffee catch-ups, some Teams' drop-in sessions which we've started as a Principals Association, having group chats and even finding that the groups of colleagues that have been connecting up to provide blood donations through Red Cross's Lifeblood, and you can actually register as a, as a group or an association and we've got some colleagues that have been doing that as well just as a way of being able to connect.

Now the role of collegial support and care. When we reviewed our strategic plan last year, we had a considerable conversation about whether care is in the remit of a professional

association and whether it was an expectation of principals. So when people spoke about their experiences, many times over, they referenced that effort of others to show a genuine interest in them specifically. Not only was this included as a key practice for us in our strategic plans, symbolically it sits really central to our plan as well. So we've just really solidified for us how important care for colleagues and care for the profession is, and care from the profession. Now, I guess, during sensitive situations the importance to communicate with positive assumption was, was really clear from principals that have walked this journey, without people needing to know or ask for details, or asking or expecting a response. So when you reach out to someone, it's not about you getting a response back from them. It's just knowing that someone is in their corner. Certainly the principals have said that's what they need during times like this. And I guess when their colleagues are communicating more formally with a larger group or on behalf of others, how important it is just to check in with the Department or Directorate to ensure that your comms are coordinated.

Professionally, I leaned into headspace and Be You leadership for support with this, and certainly having that content matter expert at a really critical time that was a few steps removed from the incident as well, that was a really pivotal learning for me. Even in the bigger schools or colleges it can be an isolating or a lonely time when, when generally no one else will have the community responsibilities that will sit with a principal, that you'll feel at that time. And knowing that you have a community in your corner can be really reassuring to principals during those moments as well. And the last one there around creating time. How important, that principals said, that I'll put something in my calendar, that a colleague might send an invite out and just ask people to accept it as a tentative, respecting that other, other things might crop up. But if you create some time to, to get together as colleagues, and no one turns up, it's still the right thing to do, because you've demonstrated care as well. So they were some of the early reflections that have come from the profession through this research so far.

Now, as far as learnings for the systems, certainly, a number of these things really lean into, to what Greg has said as well around processes. Now, the processes in a school shouldn't be unique from one set to the next. The strength of the system is that we are a system, and we should be able to apply best processes in a systematic way. The opportunities to, to practice how we respond, for instance, like with an emergency phone tree, as Greg has said, that can also service a range of things if we're actually having the time to practice this beforehand. Like poor phone coverage or even finding that incidents that may be triggering for, for others, and what happens if leadership staff are involved in the critical incident and can't fulfill their responsibilities within an emergency phone tree? So being able to practice things, when at a time, when things are calm and predictable is really important. And certainly, just like a lockdown or an evaluation, preparation is really important - for instance, around where will key information or contact information be stored And who has some of those delegated responsibilities? And certainly, in times of uncertainty, when emotions are really high, staff will look to the system for support and predictability, whether this is knowing what supports are available or how comms will be disseminated. So that predictability as being part of a system is really important.

Now as far as professional care, and it's interesting that that overlaps with the reflections from the profession as well. How do we match up with the expectations of the employee with the response from the employer? And one of those certainly could be with that investment into professional care through things like professional supervision. So it's around knowing what is there for me to access at a time when I need it or may not need to tap into it or access it on a regular basis. But just by knowing that there, there are caring structures

that are in place from our system is enough, and I'll lean into those when I need to. So they've been some of our early reflections from principals and school leaders as part of the research to date. Thanks Caz.

Caroline Thain

Thanks so much, Mat. Before I go to some of the questions in the chat box – we've got a couple there – can you answer this question for us? I know, going back to that slide with the penguins when you were sort of standing on the, on the beach there, it got us thinking about and I know you're very passionate about supporting neighboring schools and that collegial support. So how can educators provide support to a neighbouring school that's been impacted by a critical incident? What do you think are some of the practical things that we could do or think about?

Mat Grining

I guess context really matters, Caz.

Caroline Thain

Yes, sure.

Mat Grining

And probably the first one is that you respect the boundaries as well.

Caroline Thain

Sure.

Mat Grining

And I guess being able to make a determination on, on what is going to be the best way of, of demonstrating care? So if, if, if what you're trying to achieve is to let people know, or a community know, that you are expressing care, just make a determination on whether the best way to do that is either individually or collectively, and that will come down to what your relationship is like with that community, whether you've worked there previously, whether you've got a pre-existing connection. But probably during those particular moments, you're probably having a collective response from your school community would be one of the best approaches to take, because ultimately, if there's a critical incident that a community is experiencing, having a response from a community that is demonstrating care may be the best way to do that.

There are some great resources that have only been shared with me this week, and some of them are from, from the US as well, and they've been provided by principals associations in a Principal Recovery Network Guide to Recovery, and I know I hadn't shared that previously Caz, but I might just share that through, sort of, post this session, so that they can be made available too. But largely, it just talks about the opportunity to be able to, not only demonstrate and feel care from other learning communities, but to also be able to tap into some of those, might be a tangible way of demonstrating care that people can lean into later on. So things like, like coffee vans. I'll just give some examples of what have happened in communities. So it might be putting, putting on a morning tea, putting on a coffee van for

staff, but it's often not the, the days, the weeks, the months after, it can just be those, those, those really simple moments well after the date, just to let people know that, we're a community and you're still in our thoughts as well. But always be really respectful of the boundaries and the best way to coordinate support as well, and typically that will be through the leadership in another school.

Caroline Thain

Yes, thanks, Mat. I think, I think you raise some good points, one of them being around sometimes it can be easier to support a school if you've already got existing relationships, I imagine. And then I know that, that can be difficult sometimes for our Be You consultants if they're reaching in following a critical incident, if they, if they sort of don't have well-established relationships, because schools, of course, can bunker down in that protectiveness, in that "just let us try and work this out on our own first". We sometimes get a bit of that response, and that's about protecting their, their staff and their community. So, I think, you know, that can sometimes be a challenge, I imagine, for schools leaning into each other even, if those relationships aren't well-established. I think that's why I, I love so much, that those communities you've created in Tassie, around, you know, the, the collegial support, it's almost fits that preparedness part in that if we're communicating and have that psychological safety before events occur, it will also help us continue to communicate after an event occurs. I think they're really, really important. Yes, thank you for sharing that.

Mat Grining

And, and, and you're right, and that's been able to open the, the discussion around accessing individualised supports as well, and being able to, to, just to, to start those conversations, because those, those safe networks already exist. Yes.

Caroline Thain

Yes. Mat, the other question, which you might have seen, was about, there was a question about drawing on other countries, around their research in other countries. I know you mentioned the US then, but we had a question about, were there other learnings in other countries that you've drawn from, or you think, you know, ACU will draw from?

Mat Grining

Probably not as part of the research that I've seen as yet. So I probably also should have stated too, Caz, that being part of the project team means that we're not part of the research team there as well, as far as anonymity and, and working and, and being in the same context there as well. So, we're not involved in, so myself and my other principal colleague that's one of the project partners, we're certainly not involved in the detail around the, the research understandably around anonymity. But as far as around what we've learnt from other, other networks as well, we've, we've had some, some of our system leaders that have been on some fellowships to the US and have come back and shared some, some learnings around security and emergency management protocols as well. And certainly at times, they do overlap with what can be a critical incident as well. And certainly some of the resources from Ontario and from, from US Secondary Principals Association have been something really helpful for us to, to reflect on. And of course, context and cultural context can make a really big difference as well, Caz, when we're looking at the experiences from other, other networks as well, from, from other, other countries and jurisdictions.

Thanks, Mat. One final question for you: How important do you think leadership modelling help-seeking, so, so leaders sort of being transparent in modeling their own help-seeking is in terms of supporting other educators and people in the school community? So, sort of role modeling that yourself?

Mat Grining

Oh, that is, I didn't see that question, but that is, that is pivotal. The moment, the moment that you're prepared to be vulnerable yourself and sometimes that only occurs from actually having the, the emotional language of literacy to put to what you're experiencing yourself and then to have the confidence to be vulnerable. And, and that just really opens up the door for people to understand that the principal or school or, or team leader, whilst we may, they may do some fairly superhuman things, they're not a superhero. We all have different supports that we need to lean into, so that we are, so that we are well and thriving in the roles that we, that we're undertaking. But I think just being able to support people to develop some language around, and self-awareness around, that is really important.

Caroline Thain

Yes, thanks, Mat. I, I, I hear sometimes from principals, is that worry, that if I show too much vulnerability that all my leaders around supporting me will then feel like they can't think about themselves. They'll be busy worrying about me. What do you think about that idea of, "I have to be…", you know, that kind of stereotypical response that "I need to show that I'm, that I'm okay by not showing emotion". What do you, what do you think about that?

Mat Grining

It's an interesting one too, and I guess we know. Probably the parallel I could draw would be around distributed leadership models. So in schools and education systems, we know that, that the most impactful leadership models isn't when we've got the, the, the principal as the leader and manager of all. It's the distributed leadership models where there's shared responsibility, shared accountability, shared learnings and, and models of inquiry where we learn together as a leadership team. So really, I guess flattening out that whole notion of educational hierarchy. I think when we've got leaders that are, that are comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities, that only further feeds into that strength of distributed leadership.

Caroline Thain

Thanks, Mat. That's a beautiful, I like, that's a nice analogy thinking about that sharing. We all share the risk and yes, sharing that, that is really, really important. That brings us to an end. We did have one other little question about sort of preparing young people for traumatic events, and more specifically, there's an educator in the NT who is asking about, you know, how do you prepare young people in the context of escalating violence in schools? I think that's a really challenging question to ask, more importantly, in a short period of time. But what I would say is any information sharing, of course, in this context with children can be really important, but it's so important that it's age and stage delivered and also delivered in a way that always includes parents and carers, particularly in our primary schools. And we also think about, of course, those cultural implications and the lens and the language that we use. I'll just kind of and, of course, trauma-informed principles and practices. So I think I can't, unfortunately, I'm not going to unpack that anymore, because I'm going to run out of time and I'll get in trouble. But I'd really encourage that person who put that in the chat to reach out to your Be You Consultant and they can unpack that a little bit more. But certainly, I think

it's important that we're talking to our children about traumatic and critical incidents, but in a way that's, of course safe and appropriate.

So, thank you so much to Mat and Greg and to our panellists here today. We of course, really value your feedback, and in terms of next steps, can I have the next slide please? I want you to think about, I guess, these are like our call to actions for you. But what are the three new strategies you've learnt in today's session? I know that Greg and Mat, we had a, sort of a short snippet of time with both of them, but I'm hoping that maybe there are a few things that, that really sparked your attention or made you think, "Oh my gosh, I'm not quite sure how we do that in our school community." Or, "I think maybe we could be doing that a little bit better." So have a, I want you to have a little bit of a think about that. That can be really useful way, we're really keen in Be You to actually embed learning, rather than sort of coming into these events, and then that information sitting there and percolating and you're not quite sure what to do with it. So we've, I guess, we've put these questions forward for you to think about ways of embedding. And, of course, contacting your Be You Consultant to discuss how you could implement those things in your learning community. And we would love to hear your feedback. And of course, we've got two further sessions that you can register for here, so 'Strengthening educator wellbeing' and 'Supporting young people to recover and thrive.' And you can click on those QR codes, or, I think, scan those QR codes to register.

And, I guess, I would just say sometimes when you listen to this content, you can feel like you're okay in the moment, and then afterwards you can feel not so great. And there might be things that have popped up for you in the last, you know, hour or so that you need to kind of work through. Please remember that self-care model that I put up at the start and, and guide yourself through that and remind yourself of what are the things you need to look after your wellbeing? And we always put this up at the end of our presentations which is, of course, about more formal mental health services and supports that you can access if you need to.

Thank you again for joining us. I feel like I'm nearly finished right on time, which is probably a first for me because I can talk a lot. And a huge thank you to Greg and Mat again, and for you all coming today. I know your time is very precious and take care of yourselves. Thank you so much for joining us today.