

# Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

## In conversation with Be You: A whole learning community approach to wellbeing

**Presented by Johanna Griggs, Debbie Yates and Jeannette James**

### Johanna Griggs

Hello to those of you who joined us for the earlier sessions today and those that are joining the Be You virtual conference for the first time now, a very big welcome. My name is Johanna Griggs. So, I'm a Beyond Blue Board Director, have been for seven years. I've had the honour of being involved with Be You since its inception in 2017. And I have seen this initiative just go from strength to strength. I also chair the National Advisory Council where we bring together just the best minds in the country from implementation and framework and strategy and marketing.

And we have representatives from every state and territory and, of course, government level of (INAUDIBLE) for education and health. It's just one of the great thrills in my life. As is today, I'm so delighted to host this conversation with you. And I'm really looking forward to spending the next 50 minutes with you.

First up though, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. And as an initiative with national reach, we also extend our respect to the Elders and of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right across Australia.

Now, if you would like to acknowledge the traditional owners on the land where you sit today, we really encourage you to do so through the chat feature. Let me tell you about Be You. I'm sure you've heard a lot about it today if you've been on, but you can always learn more. Be You is a national mental health initiative for educators and they are the organiser of this conference.

It's led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. Best of all, it is completely free. It is available to every educator, every early learning service and school in Australia. The goals of Be You, well it's to empower educators to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing, as well, importantly, their own mental health.

It offers educators online professional learning, fact sheets, interactive sessions and events and other resources. It offers learning communities tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing including support from a Be You consultant. And they are just fabulous.

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Look, the discussions throughout this conference obviously highlight to you constantly the Be You resources, the tools, and the professional learning. And that is because it's to show you how Be You can support a whole school approach and service to mental wellbeing. Today was a great day. The theme obviously was educator wellbeing, which for us is a strategic priority of Be You. Now, you also come into this conversation with just so much experience and knowledge. And we'd love to hear from you today, we'd love you to actually put some questions to us. I'm going to introduce our panellists shortly.

And honestly, nothing is off limits. So, please use the chat box during this session. Now, prior to that, we have also had some questions that you've submitted too, before today. And what we noticed was when they all came in that there were actually four quite similar themes, and they're the ones that we will tackle in between hearing from you.

Now, the conference is also being recorded. And this is really important. This might be something that you want to watch again, or it actually might be something that you want to share with one of your colleagues or your peers. All recordings are going to be available on the Be You website in four weeks time.

And that's for every session of both days. And just a little teaser here at the end, you're also going to receive a certificate of participation for joining us today, which we will email to you.

Now, I have the honour of introducing my fellow panellists here today. I would like to introduce first of all Debbie Yates. Now, Debbie is a State Manager for Be You at Early Childhood Australia. Hello, Debbie.

### Debbie Yates

Hi Jo, nice to be with you today. Normally, at this part of the day, you give a bit of an intro about us, but you've encouraged us to share today about ourselves. So, I guess my previous experience, I'm an early childhood teacher. And I've taught across both early learning services and also in primary school settings. I've got a bit of experience across both spaces. I've also worked as a manager at a range of community organisations that have a focus on supporting families and children. So, that's a bit about my background.

### Johanna Griggs

And she should actually be wearing a cape because Deb actually had to get through the flood waters to be with us today. We weren't even sure that you're going to make it at one stage. So, thank you.

### Debbie Yates

Yes, we did have a plan B in place in case I didn't get here. I live on the Central Coast, just above Sydney. So, has been impacted quite a lot by the floods, as a lot of areas have across New South Wales and Queensland. So, we'd really like to send best wishes to everybody in those situations, but I'm very thankful I could make it down today.

### Johanna Griggs

Yeah. And we also know that that's going to be affecting our educators currently and obviously into the future. So, that's something else that Be You will focus on not too far away. I'd also like to introduce Jeannette James. Now, she is a Be You National Service Development Advisor at Headspace. Do your spiel, Jeannette. (LAUGH)

### Jeannette James

Thanks, Jo, and thanks for being with us here today.

### Johanna Griggs

That's alright, love it.

### Jeannette James

And nice to join Deb as well. So, my name is Jeannette James and I'm the National Service Development Advisor. Like Deb, I've been involved with mental health and wellbeing in learning communities for quite some time and have enjoyed particularly family engagement as well as partnership brokering. I've worked in

the space between the world of school and supporting students to that transition to the world of work, and particularly interested in help seeking and promoting help seeking behaviours.

### Johanna Griggs

And apart from that, Jeannette, I'm gonna have to refer to you as what I know you as, which is JJ. JJ is an unbelievable chef. So, if you don't actually follow her on Instagram and actually live for her posts like I do, I recommend it because honestly, she will blow your mind. You and (INAUDIBLE) something else to a tee. Any how, back to what we're talking about today. It has obviously been a really fabulous day today. We had that keynote speaker this morning by Geri Sumpter and Patrice O'Brien.

And for me, that was actually a bit of a particular highlight, because it actually offered really practical suggestions around, not only looking after our own mental health, but what we all know that our educators and early service leaders have to do, which is supporting their colleagues as well as their whole communities. And I think the key takeaway for me was get support early. Don't wait till you're at crisis point.

There's so many steps that you can take, even if, you know we talk about the continuum and the green zone, the orange zone, the red zone. If you're in that green zone, there's things you can do to stay there. If you get to the orange zones, there are things that you can do to get back to that green zone. And I just thought that, that's just you can't reiterate that message enough. What about for you, Deb? What was your highlight?

### Debbie Yates

I think for me, it was actually listening to one of the concurrent sessions. There was Trish and Dee, who was sharing about transitions and how they impact on mental health and wellbeing. And Dee was really talking about herself and how she'd been managing transitions over this period of time. And also, how Trish as her consultant actually reached out to her one day and said, Hey, are you OK, Dee?

And she said, that was just such an important thing for her to have someone do that check-in point with her and go, "Are you OK? You're looking after everybody else, but what's happening for you?" And just like you said that's a really important starter question. And next steps is that, is the other conversation that you then have.

### Johanna Griggs

Well, that's brilliant. What about for you?

### Jeannette James

Yeah, agree Deb, I mean, if that the self-care of educators on looking after the carers is particularly important. I really like Geri and Patrice's keynote at the beginning where they spoke, there was an image of yachts. And even though we're weathering the same storm, you could be a yacht, you could be a boat, you could be a cruiser. And even though it's a similar environment, or situation, or a learning community, everyone does experience things differently.

And some people reacted to, say, let's talk about COVID this year, or last year. Some people handled that really well and other people, it was quite a big stressor for them. So, I think it's important to recognise that everyone does handle things differently. And it's important to check in, because even though you as a leader may be handling, your peers or your colleagues may not be. So, that that importance of checking in is

(CROSS TALK)

### Johanna Griggs

Don't you reckon that timelines really important as well, because they're also not going to react at the same time. So, you can't just give one answer that's going to make everyone feel better at one point. It might be several months down the track, like we actually are seeing with the bushfire recovery at the moment.

## Jeannette James

And what you said before, about it's not, not a luxury, it should wait till the end. We need to build this into our schedule and our daily routine or our weekly routine, because that's important to have that time to ourselves in order to feel rejuvenated and to refuel. I like those messages this morning and throughout the concurrent sessions.

## Debbie Yates

So, when you're in the green zone, you can help someone who might be in the orange. I think that's the other thing, too, is that there's that recognising that I'm in a comfortable place at the moment means that I can maybe be that support for someone else. And that might be reversed at another point in time.

## Johanna Griggs

Brilliant. Well, we do have a poll today. We love a bit of a poll on our beautiful conferences. Reflecting on today's session, we're asking you what do you see? And you can actually answer this if you haven't taken part in any of the earlier sessions as well. But what do you see is a key element to supporting a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing?

Is it A, understanding the mental health literacy, which can sometimes feel a little bit overwhelming as well because there's a lot of it out there? Is it B, leadership support? C, embracing inclusivity and diversity? D, positive workplace culture? Or E, normalising help seeking behaviours? Now, there might be something else that you see. I mean, to be honest, I'm looking at where is F, which is (LAUGHS) all the above. (LAUGHTER)

## Jeannette James

And I think you can in the chat, that there's options that are in the poll, there's options that you can choose multiple responses as well. But if you have another strategy in the sharing of ideas, please pop them in the chat because we do collate these into resources at the end of the conference.

## Johanna Griggs

Great. Well, while we actually allow everyone the time to fill out the poll, well, let's just talk about some of the educator market research that has just been done. Now in December 2020, Beyond Blue commissioned Ipsos to conduct the third annual Be You educator research project. Now they recruited a representative sample of 961 participants across the education sector of Australia, which was fantastic. And we appreciate everyone's time who actually was involved with it. Some really fabulous things came out of it, I think positive things (INAUDIBLE) forward.

## Debbie Yates

They did, they did. And I think part of it is that it actually reaffirmed the stories we were hearing from Early Learning Services in schools. So, it really told us that educators are noticing that depression, anxiety and other mental health issues continue to be the top issue facing learners in Australia. And that almost all educators now feel that supporting the mental health of learners is really an important part of their job, which tells us that Be You is needed now more than ever.

## Jeannette James

I think it also showed us that awareness is the greatest agent of change, and that mental health literacy point is integral. So, the research showed us that Be You educators were more likely to recognise the signs and symptoms of different mental health concerns and issues, they were more likely to support children and young people that were experiencing poor mental health at any given time, and to initiate that conversation which is often that first step so that you notice in the inquire and provide model that we'll speak about later on, but not only for the learning community but to the families as well.

## Johanna Griggs

Yeah, which quite often is that first hurdle that people are almost afraid to take, they're afraid not necessarily that they'll, you know, do the wrong thing but they might say the wrong thing. And I think if they have that knowledge and they have that confidence of what to say and how to then be able to take the next steps forward, that's got to be a great thing.

## Debbie Yates

It does and it opens up that conversation, like I said, it's really about feeling confident to initiate that conversation. Once you start then it's so much easier to flow on to the next parts, but just like you said, taking that first step and starting the conversation can often be the hardest.

## Jeannette James

Yeah. And not only maybe the stigma around mental health and taking that first step but sometimes people, you don't know what you don't know, right? So, they maybe they don't know where to go or how to seek help. And there's so many resources out there like conversation starters from Are You OK Day for instance, that helped those prompting conversations if you aren't sure at any given time.

## Johanna Griggs

We actually have a question here this is from Adam (UNKNOWN), who says, can we unpack further the common language that we are to use within the service about wellbeing, like what are some suggestions to build a repertoire of words that could assist us all?

## Debbie Yates

I think probably, and it's actually interesting because this is one of the responses to one of the other questions, but for me it's actually about developing that language and developing that language within your community. So, I think actually opening up that conversation and asking your community, what are the words that we use that we feel familiar with that feel comfortable for us to actually have these conversations, because depending on the make-up of your community, their current understanding around mental health and wellbeing, perhaps cultural differences that might be at play in your community.

So, it's really important to ask that conversation and not assume, or not make a decision yourself but to ask others and get a collective voice around that, yeah.

## Johanna Griggs

You want to say anything?

## Jeannette James

I always want to say something. (CROSS TALK) (LAUGHTER) Your mental health literacy is, it's, you know, the number one basic foundation of mental health within school communities and early learning communities. But starting off with like the Be You resources but the different layers and the different approaches to the different stakeholders, the students, so if the students are talking the same language, if the parents, the families are talking the same language, if the sector supports are talking the same language.

So, you can't be what you can't see. So, the more we model help seeking behaviours and the more we're experiencing and chatting about the importance of mental health and wellbeing, that supports the shared language. So, sometimes it's as easy as ensuring that all the different stakeholders are on the same page with the planning of mental health.

## Johanna Griggs

Well, I think one of the other great things that came out of the educator market research was, very clearly, schools and early learning centres are prioritising mental health more than they've ever done before. And it's obvious because there's a need.

So, I mean, it's not from the horse before the cart. They see the need. But the fact that they're embracing, looking and learning as much as they can to find the best ways that they can help their whole school communities, and I say whole school communities because it's not just the students we're talking about or just the educator we're talking about, it's actually getting everyone at every level involved if we can.

[Jeannette James](#)

Do you think COVID's changed that at all Jo?

[Johanna Griggs](#)

I think COVID changed things dramatically. I mean, in a way it sounds terrible, but, obviously, everything went online and that's one of the great things about Be You, is, this is all offered online. And so I think people access things probably with less hesitancy than they were doing previously. I mean, I think it's changed a lot of things that might actually hang on for a long time, but certainly for educators, I mean, that was the most challenging year in the most challenging circumstances on a number of fronts.

And then particularly in those areas, I mean, COVID was traumatic enough, but in the areas that were affected by bushfires and, you know, and now we're seeing floods, like it's, she can be a drought prior to that. I mean it can be a pretty cruel country when it wants to be.

[Jeannette James](#)

I think it really showed the importance of that family engagement and the importance that you really need to engage with our families in order to enhance learning and to optimise learning, I think that that was one of the key lessons from last year for me.

[Johanna Griggs](#)

OK. So, what does Adam say now? He says, how do you remain professional with sharing? And I say that in the loveliest way Adam (INAUDIBLE) as well. How do you remain professional if sharing mental health struggles? He battles with this as he feels in danger of over sharing with work colleagues. And this would cross the line between being a professional and becoming personally involved. I think that's a great question.

[Debbie Yates](#)

Yeah. I think this is where we really need to consider not just those individual connection points but actually the systems and structures that sit within the early learning services in schools. So, you know, for some people talking about process or systems can be a bit like, eh, but that's not, you know, is that really relevant? It actually is really relevant. So, making sure you've got really strong systems and structures can support you to consider your boundaries, what sits within your role and your professional responsibilities, and what that looks and feels like within your community. So, I think having those systems and structures in place is a really strong support for you as an individual, a professional within that workspace.

[Jeannette James](#)

Yeah, absolutely. That planning time is really important to have, I mean, we always use that analogy of a garden but it's so true, isn't it? You need to really cultivate the garden and the garden bed and have that planning in order for the trees and the gardens to flourish.

And I think that's the same with learning communities. And if someone was struggling and they felt, either for them the mental health stigma is preventing them from discussing that with another, there, an example that came to mind was a school that we worked with in the Hunter Valley where a really passionate mental health coordinator, she mapped the strengths of the educators to the strengths of the students, and like a buddy system approach. So, not only were they connecting and feeling that sense of belonging just because of the relationship, but it was two-way. So, because they shared similar strengths, they were able to encourage each other, they were able to share with each other.

So, the student was encouraging the teacher around certain avenues. And so the teacher was also sharing with the student, but then when there came that moment where one of them was struggling, then they could

share that with each other as well. But if they noticed it. So, for, particularly... So, a student was to notice that the teacher was struggling at any given time, they could say, hey, Miss, I noticed that, you know, Miss Griggs is struggling, you know, maybe she needs some support or help. I think that was a beautiful strategy that school put in place.

### Johanna Griggs

What you're both talking about is actually coming through ironically on the poll. I mean, we're talking about whole learning communities. And what is actually leading in the polling at the moment is a positive workplace culture. Now, if you think about Be You, if you're actually accessing the resources and taking the steps to create an entire community that is understanding and knowledgeable and supportive of one another, we have a positive workplace culture. So, you know, what you're saying is absolutely bang on.

Well, as we mentioned before, we have lots of questions that we also received before. And Adam I want you to keep yours going as well and anyone else who'd like to send us some. But we also, as I mentioned, we had lots of questions that were submitted prior to today. So, we're actually going to tackle those in between. And the first one, ladies, is, how can we encourage all staff to contribute to a positive workplace culture? And I think, particularly when you look at that...

### Debbie Yates

Was that planned?

### Johanna Griggs

It actually wasn't. (LAUGHTER) I just got a thing going, hey Jo (INAUDIBLE) check the poll results. I was like, wow, I didn't even know that. (LAUGHTER) Who would like to go first?

### Debbie Yates

I'll step in first if that's OK. And I think it's like we just were talking about before, it really does flow on around that element of starting with having open conversations about what a positive workplace culture looks like, but not just even what does it look like, what does it feel like? What does it sound like? What do you experience when you walk into that setting? And how is it relevant to your specific community?

Because it should, hopefully, look and feel and sound different in different spaces. I think building that understanding and that community ownership of what a positive workplace culture is, is such an important first step and it's often missed. There can be real assumptions that people make that when they use language such as workplace culture or wellbeing or mental health, that we're all talking about the same thing and we all have a common understanding but that's often not the case. So, really starting there by having those initial conversations, working out what that is, acknowledging different perspectives, like really acknowledging that different, you know, different people have different views on that, and building a collective plan to work towards positive workplace culture is really important.

That has to include, I guess, a variety of approaches and strategies to support the fact that there's different perspectives around that. I guess one of the examples that came to mind for me was a family day care service, and they have some challenges when they're considering a positive workplace culture because they're not all in the one building. So, you might have a service coordinator who's supporting family day care educators that are working in their own home, often across a really, you know, large geographical area. And one service coordinator we were speaking to once, she actually talked about how when she was inducting new educators, one of the things she asked them was, what do you prefer coffee or tea? How do you take your coffee and tea? Like, what does that look and feel like for you though?

So, they kind of did that, she recorded that, because one of her jobs was to actually go visit them in their home and to have conversations with them. And she wanted that to not feel like she was, you know, coming in to, you know, assess them or check them. It's a supportive conversation. So, she made sure she bought them their preference of the tea and coffee and how they liked it. And I just thought that was such a small simple thing but, gee, that bill's a positive workplace culture.

Johanna Griggs

Absolutely.

Debbie Yates

So, yeah, that's just a little example that I think really highlights how even in diverse service structures where you're not all in the one building, you can still take those little steps.

Jeannette James

I love it. I love the small steps.

Debbie Yates

Now I feel like I want a coffee.

Johanna Griggs

The small steps is actually really important thing to keep in the back of your mind at all times.

Jeannette James

Absolutely.

Johanna Griggs

It doesn't have to be daunting. You don't have to leap in completely.

Jeannette James

Yeah, that's right. Just take that first step, just take that first leap. And, it does remind me of workplace climates maybe 10 years ago, 15 years ago and how much we have changed. I mean, we spoke about COVID last year and how people are understanding the importance now of mental health and learning and enhancing learning. But before mental health and mental illness, people thought that that mental health was synonymous with mental illness, and we know now that that's not. So, again, that's down to the mental health literacy and the shared language.

Johanna Griggs

And the awareness.

Jeannette James

Exactly, the awareness. We were coming into the city today and my son dropped me off at the train station, and there was a massive amount of traffic. And he said, "Oh, the sun has brought people out." How true is that?

Johanna Griggs

So true.

Jeannette James

When the sun's out, we come out to play. When the environment's right, we play. And I think in making sure that we have that conducive school climate, learning community climate, staffing climate, but if people are feeling stressed, they can't commit. They don't have the executive brain functioning in order to think and to feel and to react.

So I agree with you, Deb, about the assumptions because sometimes people don't understand what it can look like or what it can feel like. So I think it's important to strip it back and ensure that we have, you know, the key to the universe, the triple R, the relationships, relationships, relationships like the example with the



tea and the coffee. Once you develop those relationships, it's much easier to put those mental health procedures in place.

### Johanna Griggs

So I'm gonna throw a curly one at you, taking all that into consideration because Belinda has asked us, alright, what about when your school situation isn't set up like that? And so you've got to change... how do you put school culture to put staff wellbeing at the front of school and dedicating time to deal with work staff bullying and other things that come up like that?

### Jeannette James

Well, I think you need to look at... If it's not within your school system, I'm particularly talking for the school systems here from my point of view, is reach out to the sectors. The sectors have so much in place now. The planning and the resources and their commitment and priority to staff and educator wellbeing is massive in the last two or three years. So if you're not getting that support within your own environment, I would reach out to someone within the sector and get support that way.

### Johanna Griggs

What about for an early learning service?

### Debbie Yates

Yeah, and I think that is one of the challenges often for early learning services because the sector is quite, it's really diverse and it doesn't necessarily have the systems, the systems that sit around it, sometimes, as they might have in the school sector.

So I think, in those circumstances, one of the things you might still do is reach out to colleagues in other settings to get advice and support, and also consider the other...you know. If it's a really serious issue, there are things like No Fair Work, there are, you know, other bodies that you can go to if you really have a serious issue within your workplace. But yeah, just with everything, starting small, I still think that first small step is the important one.

### Jeannette James

And don't ignore it. I mean you mentioned that right at the very beginning. Don't let it go on.

### Johanna Griggs

Because that's when you do reach crisis point before you know it. You just sort of take it, think about it in the colour continuum. Go back to the green. Shall we move on to our next question, ladies? Question two, how would you respond to those... Well, we hear this all the time. How do you respond to those people who say that they actually don't have time for self-care? I mean, you hear this often.

And first of all, as a daughter of a school teacher, I'm saying I understand teachers have the busiest, and early learning service leaders as well, they have the busiest and fullest plates at the moment. And it can feel overwhelming. But knowing how important the self-care aspect of that is, what do you do when someone's saying they haven't got time?

### Debbie Yates

Yeah. I think, and I don't mean to sound like a broken record, but I think it's really also important to explore concepts of self-care and to really understand what does that mean when we're talking to people about that. So you might be sort of having a conversation with someone and they go, "I don't have time for self-care." But when you actually explore and discuss what that looks like, they actually might already be doing things that, for them, are self-care but they might not use that same language.

So they might go to the gym three times a week, but they don't see that as self-care. That, for them, is just, that's just what they do. I have a family member who really loves animals and supports the RSPCA and spends a lot of time volunteering there. Like, to me, I look at her, she has such a busy life and then she spends a whole weekend sometimes, you know, a couple times a month at the RSPCA. To me, that would

be really stressful. For her, that really fills her cup. So I think starting off by not making assumptions, by not putting our own view of self-care onto somebody else, having that open conversation is really important.

But I think one of the things that came up in the keynote, I know you're gonna tap on it too, as well, is around that notice, inquire and provide conversation. So if we're noticing a colleague is having some additional stresses or perhaps they're responding in a different way to regular stresses, so they might not be normal, the normal things that happen in our world, but their response...

### Johanna Griggs

For some reason that day, everything is overwhelming.

### Debbie Yates

Yeah. To use some of those skills that we can learn through Be You about notice, inquire and provide to really touch base with them and see if we can provide some support. And I guess that's where I look at it also... We talk a lot about self-care but I also like to think about community care. So it really is also about considering how we can support our colleagues if they're having some challenging times. Is there a task we can take off them or is there some other way that we can support and help?

And really to model it yourself. I think if you're asking others to consider self-care because it's important, and you're not doing it yourself, and you're not taking a break when you need it, you're taking on 20 other tasks when, you know, you really probably should have said no. So I think really developing that workplace culture where it's OK to take time out for yourself. You've got to model it if you want to see it in others.

### Jeannette James

And what happens if you don't? What happens if you don't engage in the self-care and you are languishing and then you're at that roadblock and you do stop as we've spoken about a couple of times? I like Deb, what you mentioned about not assuming what people understand by self-care and it's also maybe the question of what self-care isn't.

So a lot of people think that self-care is a nice bubbly bath or, you know, going for a walk or it's a luxury, it's something that you do every now and again. But self-care really is something that fuels you. And as you said about your sister, it's really personal. So it has to be what fuels you. And self-care is not just around mental health and wellbeing. Self-care is physical, self-care is social, it's spiritual, it's professional. So as an educator, what fuels you? If you're interested in student voice and you haven't been able to engage in that space, perhaps develop some opportunities where you can play in that space once again. I think that's important to look at creative ways where self-care can be built into the time.

### Johanna Griggs

I've never thought about that. As you say, it's the stuff that fills your cup. So if that is the stuff that you absolutely thrive and you hear you know, young children with great ideas and they inspire you, well, that fills your cup instantly.

### Jeannette James

It's like with you on the farm and with the beekeeping and the honey.

### Johanna Griggs

Beekeeping and my veggie growing.

### Jeannette James

Yeah, that fuels you and that really builds your cup and it ensures your mental health and you're a very busy person. I think it's the same with educators. So one example is of a school. What they did is they proposed this very similar question a few years ago, and they all met together with this common issue and they did the backward design. So where do we want to be in three years time and why do we want to be

there more importantly? And they discovered that when they were sick, they had to do lesson plans in the morning.

They had to, you know, get the (INAUDIBLE) They're stressing about their classes. They were not wanting to take a sick day. They were marking after school, they were preparing lessons on the weekend, and they would just go, go, go, and burning the candle at both ends. So what they do is they all got together and did like a world cafe type situation. And what they devised is the leadership was there and they committed.

So they've built in marking time into the timetable. They meet in learning communities, this is three years ago, and they developed lesson plans and programs all together so that's accessible to everyone. So it's taking away that preparation.

### Johanna Griggs

Think of a template share for everyone to be able to share.

### Jeannette James

And you can tweak it, obviously, and personalise it as you need to do in the education learning space. But at least you've got that base there to draw upon as a starting base. And they've built in marking time into the timetable. So rather than take it home, that's their time. Then they've privileged that time on the weekend for them. So they come back on Monday refuelled. Now, that's taken time, but it's something that that school community recognised was an issue for them three years ago and they've built to this point.

### Johanna Griggs

And I'm sure at the start, when that was first suggested, people would have been going, Oh, how is this gonna help? Or "It can't be done." But the actual fact is sometimes you've actually got to do it so that people can see. I saw in one of the other presentations today, they were talking about a garden space that had just been created outside of an office.

And every time anyone was feeling like it was just getting too much for them in the day, they'd just take a quick (INAUDIBLE). We know being surrounded by nature is, for the majority of people, something that can calm them and make them feel good. And I just thought that was just... That is something that's achievable at schools and early learning service centres.

### Jeannette James

Self-care, often, mindfulness may not be for everyone. But that shoulder to shoulder chat might be. So having that shoulder to shoulder chat and connecting with another colleague at lunchtime, walking around the oval, for instance, one, you're connecting, two, you're getting outside, three, you're having a little bit of a break, four, you're getting that physical exercise. So there's some tweaks that can be made to build into the day.

### Johanna Griggs

We've got another question, what's the best thing to do when you actually can see an educator is struggling but they completely shut down and don't want to engage or talk to you?

### Debbie Yates

I reckon we go to the next (CROSS TALK)  
(LAUGHTER)

### Johanna Griggs

Let's go to question three, because I reckon we're gonna answer that next.

### Debbie Yates

This is where it's so interesting. We said there were themes that came through...

## Johanna Griggs

And this is coming through again now.

## Debbie Yates

And it's coming through again now. It's just, these are really common themes that we're finding in our services and schools.

## Jeannette James

Yeah, we do get this question quite a bit. So what do you do? (CROSS TALK)

## Johanna Griggs

How do you support a colleague, whose experiencing a really stressful event?

## Jeannette James

Absolutely, and it's that noticing inquire, provide approach, I think is the best one to use. I mean if you haven't heard of the nip, nip it in the bud, or at the nip approach, the nip model it's available on the Be You learning modules. But it's really around that noticing and inquiring sensitively and then providing that support and that support is obviously contextual in your learning environment and the modules provide some ideas for that.

But it's really about providing those structures and like that school community did in the backward planning and design, is where are those structures, what happens so that you're not wondering as a solo educator what to do, if you know that system support is available. I mean it is interesting with learning communities, and also early learning communities. We often focus on the students and the learning people and there is so much planning that goes into the students.

However we don't privilege that for the staff. So if we are looking at support structures and resources for the students, why aren't we doing the same thing for educators? It is great, it is great to see that happening already but I think it can be done a little bit more.

## Johanna Griggs

But to answer that question, what if somebody doesn't want to engage and they are shutting you down, what's the message that you would actually go back because they still need to hear it, I'm not going to judge, I'm just going to listen, when you are ready to talk I want you to know I can see that something is upsetting you and I will just be here.

## Jeannette James

Yeah, and it's that, again it's that shoulder to shoulder, knowing that you're walking alongside them. And some people don't like to engage, some people don't like to share their personal information. But as long as they know the avenues for support either outside of that learning space or within, or they might feel comfortable talking to someone else rather than you. So maybe it's a different approach.

## Johanna Griggs

Maybe it's a support service that's available and you just give them the information,

(CROSS TALK)

## Jeannette James

Or another colleague?

## Johanna Griggs

A colleague, it could be somebody outside of that, if they are really worried about, you know, their school area maybe it could be, here's a support service, I can see you're struggling, if you don't feel comfortable

talking to me, there is going to be someone out there who won't judge you, who is there who can provide the right (INAUDIBLE)

### Debbie Yates

Yeah. And I think that's one of the things I... The first thought that came to my mind when I read this question of how do I support a colleague whose experienced a stressful event, I automatically wanted to reframe it as how do we support a colleague who has experienced a stressful event. And I think that's really reflective of what you've both been saying, it's about you know, I might be the one who could support or I could find someone else who could support, or I could support by linking them with someone else within the community or it might even be that I've got it in my mind that I'm going to, you know, they might not be ready right now but I make sure I check in in another week or another two weeks.

And I think it's also about coming back to those systems and structures again. So rather than having a colleague who is really experiencing a stressful event and then kind of going, "Oh, where do I have a support number? Where would I refer them?" Having that in advance, building those systems and structures and processes so that when it happens there is not a delay, that information is at hand straight away.

### Johanna Griggs

Brilliant advice. Another question that's come through. How do you prove educator well being is a worthwhile investment? So say there is a school that comes up with this great idea like you explained from three years ago. How do you actually go to the powers that be and say, this is something that we should be investing in, it will actually help our school overall. The students will have a much positive experience, the educators and the early service leaders will have a much more positive experience, this is going to benefit us in so many different ways.

### Debbie Yates

I'd say get Jo Griggs to come here for a chat.

### Johanna Griggs

I would love to (LAUGHTER) (CROSS TALK)

We are in early stages of an evaluation and we are actually seeing some pretty amazing things that are coming through. And I can't wait till we can actually, when it's all finished and we can share that. You know then, I'm just hoping every person turns to their peer or their colleague or someone that they know at a school nearby or a early learning service nearby that might not have Be You and says, why haven't you? Or gets the parents engaged, why are you agitating for this at your school? This would be fantastic.

### Debbie Yates

Almost you can frame it the other way of going why wouldn't we?

### Johanna Griggs

Well I think it should be framed that way. (LAUGHTER) That's what I meant when I said why.

### Jeannette James

And there are so many surveys too that the Be You surveys that are available for staff and for students and for family that then you can track and you can analyse the data over a given times so you can track the results that way as well.

### Johanna Griggs

Yeah, beautiful. I think you'd be tracking, tracking in those little faces first and foremost because that's who you'll be benefiting. Another question ladies, how can I involve parents in transitions which you were talking about earlier and you're both obviously, you have plenty of experience with, and encourage them to be more engaged?

## Debbie Yates

Do you want to start this one JJ?

## Jeannette James

Yeah sure. It's interesting when that, the question about parents because it's much more than parents.

## Johanna Griggs

It's parents, carers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, it's everyone. And I think we can also rephrase the question about various stakeholders because the question was particularly about transitions, but if we broaden it out to what stakeholder voices do we have and look at, just before the panel we were speaking about, the concept of student voice and some of the schools that we've worked with actually have either a family member on the action team, on the Be You action team, or the wellbeing team, or they have a student action team that feed into the action team, the Be You action team, which is wonderful to have all those various voices and opportunities.. That's the ideal.

(CROSS TALK)

That really is the ideal to have all of that.

## Jeannette James

And the kids are so passionate, like it's gorgeous. And the initiatives that they devise themselves. Because one, we all know the change management guidelines is, if you're involved and you're invested and you have that commitment, you are more likely to follow through. I think there's a book by, at the moment by... God, I've forgotten his name, by James Clear I think, Atomic Habits, and it's building those habits and so starting small and then building a habit based on something you are already doing.

And I think with the action teams, the action teams are already formed we've got the student action team that can feed into that. And again the concepts we spoke about before starting off small and building bigger, really does make an impact.

## Debbie Yates

And I think, a lot of the conversations we've had today over the course of this day, day one of the virtual conference have been about educator wellbeing. But when we're talking about whole learning communities, obviously we're also talking about families. So I think that's really important when we're considering whole learning community approaches to mental health and wellbeing to include families and members of the broader community in the conversation and the decision making. So not just one-way, informing, that two-way partnership and communication.

And I think you know transitions, the small transitions happen on every single day within an early learning service. Like so, the transitions to get a group of toddlers to wash their hands, (LAUGHTER) ooh, that's great fun. But there's also those really big transitions that happen, but all of them actually play a part in building our mental health and wellbeing. They reflect and respond to how we're feeling on that day.

So I think if our aim for this question, our aim was to increase engagement, families engagement with transitions, then we really need to plan for ways to build and grow that sense of belonging and connection to our learning community. Which is really also a very strong protective factor for mental health and wellbeing.

So if families feel connected, they feel a sense of belonging, they are going to want to engage and have conversations around transitions when they happen. Whether it be from moving from a toddler room to a kinder room in a long day care setting or moving from an early learning service to a primary school.

So yeah, they will want to be engaged, I think that's really important. And I think, we often think of transitions as change but they really also have a basis in continuity. Like I think, if we can think about what our existing routines or rituals that we have in our services, that we have in our families and use these to

build on to support our transitions, then they're much more likely to be engaging and to really be supporting of mental health and wellbeing, yeah.

### Johanna Griggs

Another question for you both. How do you protect yourself from a negative work environment? I know that's kind of broadening beyond Be You but it's what people are facing.

### Debbie Yates

I think one of the things we talk about especially around educator wellbeing is really considering what are our personal stresses? Like what are the things that impact on us on a day-to-day basis, and what are the protective factors we can build to support our behaviours around them.

So I guess if you are in a workplace that's maybe having some additional challenges and whether that's a one-off event, or whether it's some ongoing cultural issues that are trying to work on but might take time to change, to really be cognizant in considering your own stresses and your own stress behaviour reactions, and what protective factors you can put in place to support them is one of the things that comes to mind for me.

### Jeannette James

Good idea Deb about checking in not only with yourself but another, because again it might be an assumption of a particular time of what's actually occurring.

### Debbie Yates

Sorry my watch is (LAUGHTER)

(CROSS TALK)

Siri wants to talk about mental health and wellbeing.

### Jeannette James

Oh that was funny. But I think it's also important to sometimes say no and educators don't do that really well. Educators just seem to absorb so much. So sometimes it's about...

### Johanna Griggs

So sometimes they're their own worst enemy.

### Jeannette James

Sometimes you can't say no, it's tricky because if you're on a short-term contract for instance in a school environment, if you're in a one-teacher school, it is hard to say no, they absorb so much, educators by their very nature. And you'll know this with your Mum, they're just such caring people. And they want to help. Like their number one passion is helping people.

### Johanna Griggs

And they love the vocation of teaching.

### Jeannette James

They love it, yeah, absolutely. So it's again going back to finding what their core, what refuels them, but it's also about letting balls drop, like, and my line manager says that to me as well, that you need to let some balls drop and say no to something so that you can spend time and invest in the areas that you need to at any given time. But it is a really tricky one. I do sympathise with the person that asked that question.

## Johanna Griggs

It's kind of mental wellbeing management though. It's actually prioritising for you and again, taking small steps. So, what's the one small step that you can take to protect yourself first. And then from there, how can you seek some more help? Just gonna throw one at you both (LAUGHTER)

(CROSS TALK)

But seriously, I mean, you have your teams that are out there. They're at the front line. So, in an early learning service, what is the one factor that you think that has the breakthrough for somebody to actually really see the benefits of embracing Be You, and I'll ask you the same in relation to schools.

## Debbie Yates

Oh, it's really hard to pinpoint one factor. And I guess for me, one of the really important things for people to know about Be You is that it is so flexible and it's about what works for you and what your needs currently are. And I think one of the things we really do to support early learning services when they're starting to engage, is consider what they're already doing around mental health and wellbeing. So, I think, they might be doing a lot.

## Johanna Griggs

Which is always nice to hear that you're on the right path.

## Debbie Yates

Yeah. So, to me, and for often when they kind of start listing it and they might not have actually thought about it before, or they might've been doing things, which they haven't actually looked at through the lens of mental health and wellbeing. So, they haven't recognised, oh, we do this, this and this. They haven't recognised that that actually is about building a mentally healthy community, they haven't named it that before.

So, I think actually having those initial conversations and starting from that strengths-based approach of going, what do we do? You know, what are we doing? And really acknowledging and celebrating that as a first step is just so empowering for early learning services. So, I think once you've done that, then you can actually go, OK, well, where do we want to go next? And like you said, sort of go well in two years time, I'd like to be here. How can Be You support us to get to there? Yeah.

## Johanna Griggs

Talk to that consultant first, it's hard to put the plans in place.

## Jeannette James

It's definitely those small steps and that ripple effect like starting small and seeing, and feeling and experiencing the joys in the kids' faces or the students' faces when a particular initiative, or equally, we're talking today about educator wellbeing. When the educators feel really valued because you've put a procedure or a structure or a system in place to support them, how valued do you feel? And I think that's...

## Johanna Griggs

It's pretty much what everyone wants to feel in their jobs. They want to be heard, and they want to be seen and they want to be appreciated.

## Jeannette James

And they want to feel, I mean connected, that sense of connection and belonging is massive. And Nicola and Shiralee spoke about it in their session earlier, is that idea of opportunities for joy. So, when you have the opportunity for joy, but you see the joy that comes out of opportunities, it's just a ripple effect. It's like, yeah, it's, increases and enhances your will and your enthusiasm to want to do more.



## Debbie Yates

And I think also being able to really identify your needs. So, if it's a learning community, what you really want to do is find some new ways to engage with families. Perhaps that's something you've identified that maybe after last year with impacts of COVID or just some you know, disengagement, perhaps in some spaces of the sector.

## Johanna Griggs

Well, there was a lot of loneliness I think as well, that was coming into their world.

## Debbie Yates

There was. So, you might choose that to be a focus point. Well, that's great. Then you can use the resources and learning modules or some of the... even to something as simple as a fact sheet, as your starting point to begin having those conversations to reflect on what's happening with families, how are we supporting with them? How are we asking them what their needs are? So, really simple steps, but if you're choosing actually to go, hi, some of our educators have been talking about how they'd really like to build their knowledge and understanding about social, emotional learning and how we can support children. Well, then that's great. Start there. So, yeah (CROSS TALK).

## Johanna Griggs

I reckon that's the key with Be You is that you can actually adapt it to just what your school needs or early learning service.

## Jeannette James

And the broader community Jo. I think that's really important. Sometimes we do get stuck in a rut and we do forget what else is out there. And connecting, there's check-in sessions that we have online and conversations that we have online, where you hear from other schools and educators and being placed in those conversations where you're hearing and you're listening and it might spark an interest for you that you can then, then follow up.

So, I think it's important that to recognise that Be You is just more than online website, it is a community and it is approach and there is just so many different avenues where you can delve in and dip into.

## Johanna Griggs

I'm glad you said that 'cause I literally bang on every single meeting we have about the importance of sharing the storytelling because, it's that, what can seem daunting, you hear somebody else just talking. It might not be a whole of, it might be one thing that they've done and you go, well, that's something I can actually actively, you know, start in my school or early learning service, and then all of a sudden it doesn't feel so bad. And then you have the snowball effect of where that can go.

## Jeannette James

But to share the resource or the idea. So, rather than reinvent the wheel, if you can have that conversation with someone and that's the beauty of the...

## Johanna Griggs

Well it's tangible for people as well. They can actually see that it works. We were talking before about having, you know, what makes our cups full. And we have an educator who said that they find it really hard to find the time and energy to help themselves. When their cup is depleted through constant giving, constant talking and constantly maintaining positivity in doing so. So, what are your pearls of wisdom there?

## Debbie Yates

Yeah, and I think that's where, when we were talking earlier about, you know, the mental health continuum or the battery, which was shown, I think in the keynote where if you're on the not so full. Well, the more

emptying end of the battery, that's when you turn to someone who you know is at the full end of the battery and ask them for some support. And if you are in the full end of the battery, that's when you can be also looking around and going, can I help someone who's at the other end? I think that's one of the things, that community approach is really important.

### Jeannette James

I really believe that when you are full and you're in that green end or that flourishing end, is to simply write down whether you've got it on notes on your phone, whether you've got it on the front of your teacher diary or stuck up on your computer, five things that fill your cup, five various things that you can do at any given time, whether that's a, you know, a two-week, two-week, God, two-minute gratitude. It'd be nice to go away for two weeks.

A two-minute gratitude process or something, little bit, a variety of things that in a given time when you are stressed and you are at the languishing end, and you're not thinking straight, face it, that you can look back and refer to something or have that buddy system. So, a friend can say to you, hey. Stop. Why don't you recognise and yeah, do that, that nip it in the bud and the notice, inquire, provide, and provide that support for you, or just encourage you to do something that they know fills your cup.

### Johanna Griggs

Well, ladies, this has been awesome today. I mean the whole day has been fantastic, but there's actually a pretty cool program tomorrow. Maybe we should talk resources first. What would be your pointers to, if people are listening to this and they're going OK, well, there's a whole mass of resources there. So, what should I be looking out for?

### Jeannette James

Yeah, I think there's a plethora of resources online. But one in particular that we'd like to draw your attention to is our wellbeing tools for you, but also the educator wellbeing plan that's recently been released.

### Johanna Griggs

Yeah, that's done, that's relatively recent.

### Jeannette James

Yeah, very recent. And the mental health continuum. You've heard us speak about it a lot, but I'd certainly go and look for that on the Be You website as well. And of course all the professional learning modules and then numerous fact sheets that we have available online. But if you're not sure, because there is a plethora worth of information on the website, contact the consultant, dip into one of the Be You sessions and it's particularly the check-in sessions. And that support will be provided for you.

### Johanna Griggs

Beautiful. What can we look forward to tomorrow?

### Debbie Yates

Well, another busy day.

(CROSS TALK)

(LAUGHTER) So we're exploring similar themes but on a bit of a slightly different approach, I guess. So, we're really talking about inclusion tomorrow. So, what is meant by inclusion? Why is inclusion a protective factor for mental health? What influences and shapes our understanding and practice of inclusion and also practical strategies and approaches to support everyone's inclusion and connection to the learning community.

And I think that's the really big point about practical strategies. We really try and focus so that people can walk away from these sessions and this conference with lots of practical strategies. They can hopefully go and try and just give it a try in your own service or school.

## Johanna Griggs

And then if you're not sure, buddy system, talk to somebody else. Yeah. What have we got? I mean, if you're recapping today all the things, we've really just heard that it is incredibly important to prioritise our wellbeing, but we understand that for everyone, that's not always easy, but your idea of just doing the five little tips and writing down the pointers or where you can start from is a great way of looking at that.

When we're struggling to put ourselves first, we always remember that if we're looking after our own wellbeing, we're obviously going to be in a much better position to actually care for somebody else. I think you reiterated that when you're in the green zone, how much easier or the full battery, the low battery, I thought that was fantastic. How often that we need to look after ourselves, it's really important to work out what works for you.

And it's the same as the Be You program overall, you need to find out what works for you individually and also for your whole school or early learning service community. And there's lots of different strategies. There's plenty there. I think, our beautiful Beyond Blue chair, Julia Gillard has summed it up perfectly when she says mental health and wellbeing is not something that you need to manage by yourself.

And I guess if that was the one message that we could get out of today on top of the 8 million other messages (LAUGHTER) is that, you know, you don't have to do this by yourself. There is so much help available out there and Be You is your starting point, and it might be one question that you ask that starts this to get implemented in your early learning service or your school, but, ladies what a top day?

I've had an absolute ball. Thank you both for your knowledge, your expertise, your wisdom, and your company.

## Jeannette James

Thanks.

## Debbie Yates

Thanks so much for you joining us today too Jo.

## Johanna Griggs

That's alright. Thanks everyone. Have fun tomorrow. Look after yourselves and we'll see you again soon.