

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Inclusive practices for mentally healthy communities

Presented by Renee Wright and Hannah Jamieson

Renee Wright

Hi, everyone, and welcome to day two of the virtual conference and today's session, inclusive practices for mentally healthy communities. My name is Renee Wright, state manager of Early Childhood Australia for Be You.

Hannah Jamieson

And my name's Hannah Jamieson. I'm one of the national education advisors for Headspace Be You team. Before we start today, let's do an acknowledgement of country. I'd like to start by saying Wominjeka, which is a Wurundjeri word which means welcome, but also come with intention. And I love that idea of really coming into a session deliberately. I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we're meeting today and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. And I also extend that acknowledgement to those Elders out in the communities where you're watching us from today.

I'd really encourage you to put in the chat the lands from which you're meeting, and I'd like to pay my respects to the Aboriginal people who's had the longest continuous culture of over 60,000 years. You'll see on the screen now a number of phone numbers, which are available for mental health support. I really encourage you, we all have an iPhone nowadays, just to grab it and take a photo of these. It's a really great idea to know the points of access if we do need assistance and this might not be for us, but it might be for loved ones. It's really important to look after yourself. This afternoon we are talking about topics around wellbeing.

So, I just really encourage you to be mindful about how you're travelling at the end of the day. If you do need to have a break, just to be able to step away, take a break from the computer, but remember these numbers are here to support you. Thanks, Renee. So, about Be You. Hopefully you've been able to join us for our two day conference. Be You is a national mental health initiative, and we have been the organisers, or Be You have been the organisers of this conference. It's led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. And it's completely free, funded by the federal government, and is available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia.

I love that Be You has this wonderful call to action around helping co-create Australia's most mentally healthy generation. It seeks to empower educators and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and to talk frankly, and give resources around mental health. It offers online professional learning, a number of fact sheets, webinars, such as today's. I really encourage you to get on the website and have a look at the events page for upcoming events, and it offers a number of learning tools for your community. And really, I

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think the most important thing is that there is a consultant, a Be You consultant, who's able to work alongside you and your school in your well being journey. So, we've been part of a two day conference and hopefully you've found some really wonderful sessions from this. And I really appreciate you taking the time out of what I'm sure has been a really busy term.

So, we've heard from a number of experts, including educators, about a number of different areas, specifically around well being and inclusion. Our first day yesterday was around how learning communities are supporting educator well being for everybody's benefit. We talked about how to take care of self when responding to grief and loss in a school community. We talked about what role leaders can have in supporting educator well being. And then that really important topic around positive transitions in educator well being. And today's sessions have been around inclusion.

Renee Wright

Thanks, Hannah. So, that's a great segue to look at today's session outline. So, in today's session, we will be exploring what is meant by inclusion and how it's a protective factor for mental health. We will also be looking at the range of environmental factors, which influence and shape understanding and practice of inclusion. And we'll also be examining some practical strategies and approaches that you can take back to your early learning service or school to support everyone's inclusion. So, we want these sessions to be as interactive as possible. So, we'd love to hear from you, we've got some polls and the chat will be monitored. So, please feel free to contribute your ideas, your comments and your provocations in the chat box.

OK. I think it's time we get started, which is exciting. So, I will lead the first section, which frames our discussion and we'll call this the whys and hows of inclusion. So, Hannah, I think it's poll time. Who doesn't like a poll, right? So, on your screen there will be a prompt for you to consider and it reads, choose the description which best describes what inclusion means to you. And we've got a few options there. So, A, inclusion is about diversity and having representation of educators, children, and families from different cultural backgrounds, different genders, life experiences as well. B is inclusion is about fairness and everyone getting the same opportunities and access to material resources. And C, inclusion is about removing barriers and giving people what they need to belong and meaningfully participate. So, have a think about maybe which sort of construct resonates with you, and we'd really love to hear what you think.

Hannah Jamieson

So far initially, Renee, really interestingly C seems to be what people are putting up. And I love that idea around removing barriers because I think sometimes our call to action, there's something we can do to actually help young people and their families to access school and learning and the early learning service. So, I love that. So, about 80% of our audience currently and it's sort of vacillating a little bit, but currently seeing it as removing barriers and giving people what they need, which I love.

Renee Wright

That's really encouraging. And I can see the graphs close by to you and I can see there's quite a difference there. That's fantastic. And I want to point out there's sort of no right or wrong answer, but in terms of the definition that has the most depth, it would absolutely be C. So, C describes equity, and as a contrast, if you look at B, which talks about getting the same opportunities, that's actually referring to equality. Look, that does have some merit, if you think about universal health care is a good example of that, or there's often conversation, isn't there, about having a universal income. There can be some benefits definitely. But I think this notion of fairness is kind of interesting to me. I mean, you know, how fair is the playing field for everyone?

We actually know that it actually isn't. And number A is also interesting. Inclusion is about diversity, because, again, I don't think that's incorrect, but I think it just presents a very narrow definition, and who doesn't like a good metaphor and some figurative language? And I've heard a few definitions that try and describe the difference between diversity and inclusion. So, diversity is almost the who. So, let's just say that I am doing some recruitment. I might want to have a bit more of a gender balance, I might want to have people that speak in varied languages, have varied life experience, that's the sort of who. But let's say they come through the door, that's not inclusion, OK, inclusion is the how. So, that's really, really integral to consider both of those dynamics. But in terms of some figurative language that I've heard, think of diversity is about having a seat around the table, like we are today. But inclusion is actually having a voice. And I

would even say it's actually more than that. It's about having a voice, but actually having people listen to you, like truly listen, that's inclusion, and being able to make decisions and have influence.

Hannah Jamieson

Absolutely, I love that idea. And I think it's about how people in learning communities can actually open up that table to get people to come and sit at it, and to make people feel safe as well, to feel welcome to come and be at that table, I love that idea.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Hannah Jamieson

That's wonderful. So, thank you very much for those polling results, really wonderful to see, and I love having a chance for educators just to think about what inclusion means to them. So, I think that's really wonderful.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely. We're gonna unpack this a little bit further because we just think it's so, so important. So, I think it's really useful to note there isn't a universal definition of inclusion. And what's really nice is if you look at different disciplines, they all look at inclusion via a different lens. So, if you look at, you know, the discipline of law, you tend to be looking at human rights and discrimination. If you look at social work, the lens of looking at that sort of socio-cultural construct of inclusion, and certainly psychology, often we'll look at more of a developmental lens. But I did find this definition, and I know it's on your screen.

And there's some key words that really resonated. It's really accessible, you can share this with your teams and have a conversation with it. I think we shall have a read. So, it reads, inclusion is a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people, irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical, or any other need or diversity. So, it's about access, it's about giving opportunities, and like you've mentioned, Hannah, it's about removing those barriers. What I really love is the first sentence. So, it's a universal human right. So, when we talk about inclusion, OK, it's not a charity, it's not being nice, you know, we don't get a gold star.

Hannah Jamieson

Yeah, absolutely.

Renee Wright

It's actually every single person's human right. So, I think that's really important just to consider.

Hannah Jamieson

It's really interesting, in a session that was earlier on today, we actually spoke about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child. And that's kind of, I love that you opened with the why and the how of diversity and inclusion. And I think that gives us a bit of the why should we do this, is that it is a human right. And the United Nations, when they ratified the Rights of the Child, it was actually about recognising that children are at a particular vulnerable stage, and that they need that additional support to help them to have equal access to things, particularly around education.

So, I love that, it's an absolute human right, that's our why around inclusion. And I suppose when we think about inclusion, you imagine a young person who's coming to school, whether it's starting in an early learning service, whether it's going into a primary or a secondary school, and you think about some of the barriers that they may face. I mean, if we have a young person who might have come from a refugee community, we're thinking about perhaps language barriers, cultural barriers, and that's not even getting down to things around understanding, around how the school is structured, around making friendships. So, every small effort that we can take to removing barriers is so incredibly important.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely, so well put. OK, so, we've looked at some other sort of definitions that explore inclusion. And I would really encourage you to have a look, have a little bit of a peruse of the different speech bubbles. And maybe you've got someone next to you that you could have a little chat with and go, oh, it's more than one strategy or one off strategy, what does that actually mean? So, I'd really suggest that you spend a few moments and have a look at some of those definitions. And I'm curious whether, you know, there's any particular constructs that resonate for you. I certainly like the one on the right of my screen that reads, truly seeing someone. And I think about this little boy that I had in my room.

So, it was in a toddler's room in an early learning centre. And, like many children, he experienced difficulty separating from his mum. And I had certain social scripts, and these scripts you learn in a textbook, you learn at university. And again, there's nothing wrong with them. So, a script, for example, would be, we'll call him Max. So, I would say, Max, I can see you're really sad. You know, mummy has gone to work, she'll be back after lunch, or she'll be back after you've had a sleep. So, really kind of referencing his emotional state but also referencing, you know, a routine that is, you know, that makes sense to him. But did I actually enter his internal world? Not really. And it was really interesting. I tried a different strategy where I said, I'm just really sorry that you're so sad. And I can see this is so hard for you. And, you know, I miss my mummy too and it's tough, isn't it? It was actually transforming because I entered his internal world instead of following a really nice script.

Hannah Jamieson

Yep, yep.

Renee Wright

OK, the script is OK. I'm not saying it's wrong, but I'm saying, like, let's enter people's internal world, or at least try to.

Hannah Jamieson

And that's true empathy, isn't it?

Renee Wright

It really is, it really is, and that is a precursor to inclusion.

Hannah Jamieson

Absolutely, yeah. The one that I love there is that it's more than a one off strategy. I love this idea. I was reading about schools that have large refugee populations. And this idea around having a peace garden or having a space for peace where it is a very peaceful and mindful place that is allowing young people who may need to have that quiet time either to reflect or just to take a break from the sort of sensory overload that a learning community can be as well. And I also love this idea around, if young people have particular religious needs, having a prayer space or a reflection space as well. And also, some schools that I've worked with have particular communities who have dietary needs. So, for example, providing halal or kosher food at a canteen or at events that they have as well is that it's more than just a one-off, it's not a token. It's around truly engaging and thinking about the needs of the community as well. I think that's really wonderful.

Renee Wright

Yeah, Fantastic. That's a great example. And I'm not sure if we have anything on the chat as yet, but please keep your comments coming. We'd really love to know what inclusion means to you. You might actually have a different construct and different words that come to mind. One item, if you'd like, that's not on the screen is looking at a strength based approach. And this little, I'm not sure if you'd call it a poem, but I found this little story that I'm gonna share with you. And I think it really speaks to that. So, if we plant a seed in the desert and it fails to grow, do we ask, what's wrong with the seed? No. The real responsibility lies with us to look at the environment around the seed and ask, what must change so that the seed can grow. I think we were talking earlier, and it was just so beautiful, Isn't it?

Hannah Jamieson

Isn't it lovely? It's absolutely wonderful. And that's really, I think, that idea around flourishing. I know that flourishing is something that a lot of educators are learning about. I think particularly through positive education, that's mentioned a lot, this concept of flourishing. But really, it's around, how can every child have an opportunity in a learning community to really learn. I was thinking about some of the things around what inclusion means in curriculum, which I think is something that's really important. So, obviously, we have the social and the wellbeing aspect, but around, how can our everyday practices in learning be really inclusive as well. And I was thinking about, particularly being trauma informed, I think that's a really important thing nowadays. Making a safe space. And I think that's something we can talk around what safety might mean, being predictable, having routines, I think is really important as well.

And I also love this idea, and I think it ties in nicely to the story that you've just read. Around encouraging storytelling. Because I think that each person comes, this is where, I guess, empathy comes in again, is that each person comes with a story. And so, how can we truly listen to the story that people are telling us? And when we ask young people to tell us their story, or to tell us about their understanding of the world, of their education, then we're telling them there's this beautiful underlying message, isn't there, that I want to hear what you're saying, you matter, your story here matters, and most importantly, you're known. I know you, I want to hear more about you. I love that idea of... Our speaker earlier, Daniel, talked about just really listening. And I think that that's something that can feel really simple, but is incredibly powerful.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely. I love your passion as you speak. (LAUGHTER) Just to even extend on that, Hannah. So, you mentioned sort of a trauma informed approach, and you gave some examples of what that might look like with children and young people. But, I'm also interested in a trauma informed approach as it relates to leadership. And with this particular story, if we were to kind of translate that, I think, let's pretend that you have an early childhood educator, or an educator in the school context, and you're noticing a few things that you're curious about. So, they're not attending meetings, they may not be participating in a dominant way. So, in terms of maybe speaking up and contributing, you're not really seeing that happening. You might notice that they just don't seem particularly engaged. It's really important to actually try and understand, well, what is their story, and what's happening from them.

And it might be... I really like this sort of metaphor that we each have a backpack, and we take our values, our beliefs, our histories, and potentially there's, you know, in any workplace you will have people that have maybe traumas and experiences that are challenging for them. And so, this idea of storytelling and actually, you know, being curious and saying, you know, this is what I've noticed, and I'm trying to understand, you know, what support might you need. Or what can we do so that you feel comfortable? So, I think, yeah, you've raised a really good point there. And I think what's really beautiful about this little story is you can translate that. I also think of children that maybe show externalising behaviours, you know. You know, yelling, kicking. I remember having little people that had experienced trauma throwing chairs and, you know, having a really tough time in life. And I'm sure, in the school, in secondary school space, it's the same. But I think this story tells us, come on, let's look, you know, beyond the veneer and actually go, what is happening for this child and what do they need in the environment? What do they need from us as educators to really, really thrive?

Hannah Jamieson

Yeah, I love that. Absolutely. And that curiosity, it's not about having the solution, is it? It's not about, I can fix something. It's about, I'm curious about what you're experiencing, and whether that's for our young people or for the staff, which you raise a really good point. Because we know sometimes people can go very quickly to fight or flight. And so, it's about helping really to calm, to listen, and seek to understand first, I think.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely. And I guess, you know, you've just raised a really good point for me as well, Hannah. That there is no right or wrong way to do inclusion. It's ongoing. So, you know, there's no recipe, there's no cookbook. I mean, it would make life a lot easier, but there isn't. And so, I have to think, if I had to go back into early learning now, and I'm sure at one point I will, I would have to relearn things and unlearn things.

And each family, each child, each educator would be different, as I am, to another educator. So, just, I think, keep that in mind and be kind to yourself.

Hannah Jamieson

Absolutely. Earlier, one of the sessions we had Daniel from Dandenong Primary School. He's been the principal there for five years. He has Australia's most diverse population, as shown by the census. And he said that every single day he is still learning.

Renee Wright

Powerful.

Hannah Jamieson

Yeah, so everyone's learning still.

Renee Wright

Everyone's learning. I've once heard this expression, be comfortable leaning into the darkness, be comfortable with the grey. And I just think, I try to remind myself of that when I'm wanting, you know, to know the right way, or... You know, it's a nice message, I think.

Hannah Jamieson

So, we have a second poll for you.

Renee Wright

Excellent.

Hannah Jamieson

It should come up now. So, we've got the benefits of inclusion, and they are very, very many. So, if you have a look now, please feel free to put them in. So, is it about providing richness of perspectives and opportunities to learn from and with others? I love that phrasing. Individuals experiencing meaningful participation, which improves their mental health. Fostering belonging and self-esteem. Increased productivity and innovation, and that, I think, comes back to our point around workforce as well. Or all of the above. So, please have a quick look at that and I'll just reload our results. Gosh, I love it.

Renee Wright

People are express, you're so engaged. Thank you.

Hannah Jamieson

So, people are seeing it as all of those things. I think that's really wonderful.

Renee Wright

Yeah, that is really great. I guess we were being a bit cheeky 'cause, you know, we know that we're kind of preaching to the converted here, and it's a nice refresher, but all of those things, yeah, absolutely.

Hannah Jamieson

Absolutely.

Renee Wright

Yeah.

Hannah Jamieson

So, I guess, the question I'd ask you, Renee, is how long do we make people wait? How long can we make children, families and educators wait? When do we start this change for inclusion?

Renee Wright

Straight away, straight away. And I think that question is actually kind of, we want it to be a little bit stirring because children and families and educators cannot wait. None of us can, and I've got lots of data here about facts, and... But I just wanna put that aside and I guess, I think we want to have an honest conversation. People are actually dying earlier. So, the length of life, their quality of life is diminished because of social exclusion. That's not OK. Like, we need to pause and let that simmer. And so, you know, we can start, and I think in the previous session Daniel was saying, you know, greeting people in their first language, you know. Finding out about people's interests, sharing about your own stories, we can do that straight away.

You know, you don't need to have a degree to do that. You don't need to have a well being policy to do that. And we'll explore this a little bit further, you know. Really strong leadership is absolutely an enabler of inclusion, but we know that in some early learning services and schools that's still emerging. So, the case for change is imminent, you know, and we can't wait. We can't wait. I don't think it's negotiable, and I think, if we're looking at some drivers, you have a professional responsibility whether you are in a school system or early learning. So, we've got the code of ethics and I think in the school system, you've got like, your teacher standards and your own professional code of ethics. It clearly says, inclusion for all. So, that is our mandate, isn't it? As educators, we have said our life, our work, is to be of service to educators, to families, to children, otherwise, we could've pursued other careers. So, it is a moral imperative. I think in the previous slide, I'll just go back... Oops. I've got the wrong button, I can do that. (LAUGHS) Great. That will teach me.

(LAUGHTER)

Don't get too excited by the little button. But in the poll actually, we spoke about increased productivity and innovation. And I was reading one study that was saying that workforces that are truly quite diverse and inclusive, OK, they're actually five times more innovative.

Hannah Jamieson

OK.

Renee Wright

You know, there's a part of me that didn't really want to go down that side because I feel like the moral imperative is actually imperative. It is the key kind of driving factor. But I also know that there's lots of leaders watching today, and we understand the systems that you work in are complex, they're political, and that you may need to go back and, you know, when you're wanting to make systems improvements and improvements in your early learning or school, you know, you might have a regional manager or someone that says, you know, what's your case for change? Why is this so important? So, you know, have a think about that. There's lots of data and information if you're keen. But, you know, I think you've got the main point that, you know, it's absolutely urgent. OK. Let's move on, shall we? So, we now want to look at some socio-political factors that shape how embed inclusion. And we'll be referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system which we're both a bit of a fan of, aren't we?

Hannah Jamieson

Yep. (LAUGHS)

Renee Wright

And I think it's a very, you know, inclusive model, and I think we sometimes worry, in drawing on sociology when we're looking at so-called wicked problems like mental health and depression or homelessness and inclusion. There can be a focus on the individual, you know? Just do a little bit of self-care and you'll be fine. And I think the intention is really fantastic, but actually, you know, the personal is political and we're part of a very complex system. So, Bronfenbrenner is the opposite of being oppressive. He's actually really, really

empowering. So, I'm looking forward to explore together. So, we're gonna start off with the macrosystem, OK. So, we're looking at social and cultural values. So, let's have a think about this.

In an Australian context, I would argue that we are really influenced by neoliberal values, OK. So, neoliberal values really position workforce participation. So, having a job is being really important. Deregulation, tick, really, really important. Economic prosperity, tick, really, really important. If you're thinking, OK, Renee, what point are you trying to make? The point I'm trying to make is that's not necessarily happening just out there. It does actually influence our role as educators and particularly what inclusion means. Hannah and I were talking, and I was working and teaching, actually, in a school in Singapore. Now, Singapore, and they're really very proud of that, they follow very much sort of neoliberal ideals. And in this particular early learning, it was a school, but early learning section that I was working in, which was, you know, beautiful in terms of the aesthetics and the teachers were very, very strong.

There was a lot of pressure on children to be ready for primary school and then to be ready for middle school and then, to be ready for, I guess, high school and university. And in fact, I remember the director said to me, Renee, these children will be the next politicians." And it was reflected in the expectations of how we taught. Think about this, four year olds doing reflections at the end of the day in Mandarin and English. That's what they did. Then, I'd go outside. So, the indoor was just stunning, but the outdoor was actually the size of a balcony. OK. I'm not very good with Maths, but really, really small. And so, what this meant was children that were, you know, were kind of, I would say top heavy, if you like, they had a competence in sort of oral communication and literacy and then, certainly, the Maths and Science programs that we had were really strong as well.

But they really flourished in that environment. But what does inclusion mean for those children that actually don't fit that particular mould? It means that they are othered. And that's not inclusion. Yeah? And I think of an example, you know, being in New Zealand, where it was the first time I saw children literally swinging from the trees. I was actually a bit nervous watching them, but they were having a great time. (LAUGHS) But, so different. And I'm not saying one is right, one is wrong. I'm definitely not saying that. But I think we need to locate the different practices that I was exposed to based on that kind of political, economic, and kind of cultural set of values.

Hannah Jamieson

I think it's a really interesting point. I mean, one of the first questions when we meet young people, isn't it, if we meet them in a social situation or the, you know, the children of our friends is we say, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Renee Wright

Yeah. So, we're, you know, sometimes it might be because we don't have anything to say, but mostly it's around positioning kids as what will your occupation be. And it's just an interesting way to think about it. Even, I think, as a Year 12 teacher, you know, there's a very big difference. I know for Year 12s, whether it's doing Year 12 or international baccalaureate, that it's very much around, you know, attendance, obviously, is very important. But whether that's about, you need to be here because you need the content, or whether we want you here because you're part of this community. Obviously, the content is important, but it's interesting that we don't position it as, I want you here because you're connected to us, you're part of our community.

I think that's a very interesting way to think about the macrosystem. Yeah, absolutely. That's such a clear distinction, isn't it? And I think about it in terms of early learning. So, if you are currently supporting a four-year-old program, what does school readiness mean for you? Is it about, you know, the child being ready for school? And then, if that is your value and your philosophy, that sort of schoolification, then what does that mean for inclusion in your practice? As a contrast, you might subscribe to this idea that, no, no, no, we are going to nurture the child as they are. So, really support the being not the becoming, OK. The being is really critical. And you would actually argue, the school, actually, and the system needs to be ready for this child.

So, it's just something to consider, and, I guess, as another contrast with our babies and infants, you know, do you find that sometimes maybe you're wanting to accelerate their development. You know, you're taking the nine month old and I've certainly seen this with my little nephews and whatnot. So, there's absolutely no

criticism here, but, you know, might be my sister or someone actually is taking my little nephew when he was younger and prompting him to walk before he's actually ready, potentially. So, why are we doing that? What stops us from enjoying the being? You know, why are we taking a five-month-old child that doesn't have great core strength at the moment and popping 50 pillows behind them. And it might be really valid. You could say look, Renee, it's about so they can see the perspective, so they can enter the social world. That's beautiful, but can you see the difference? It's actually informed, as opposed to doing it, and it might be subscribing to these unconscious kind of political and social values.

Hannah Jamieson

Should we look at the exosystem, I think is our next one.

Renee Wright

I think so. Thank you. So, the exosystem in this context, I really want you to focus on your community, OK. And certainly the local policies. So, it could relate to housing and employment and so forth. There's a few kind of key questions that I think are useful to just keep front of mind, OK. So, with community, you know, what are your community assets? OK, if you're in an early learning or school, let's be really strength based, OK. So, where I live, I would say some of the assets would be there's some really beautiful parks, and they're accessible. There's lots of trams. If I need to get into the city centre or I need to go in a range of directions, I can access that. The local service system, there's, you know, doctors, there's like speech pathologists, there's psychologists. So, that's some strengths.

Hannah Jamieson

Speaking to Daniel earlier from Dandenong Primary School, one of the things that he identified in the exosystem was actually the local council. There was Dandenong Local Council. Because they cater to a really diverse community, inclusion, one of the really important things for them to be really inclusive was to actually access some of those the council services, which actually helped. They wouldn't be able to be as inclusive without accessing that support.

Renee Wright

Yeah, fantastic.

Hannah Jamieson

So, I think one of the things is not just looking at Bronfenbrenner's system as a set of barriers, but also as things that we can use as well.

Renee Wright

Absolutely, enablers. Definitely, I think that's such a good point you'll raise, Hannah. Because for each of these kind of discrete systems, and they're not really discrete, they're actually quite fluid and dynamic. And they, you know, talk to each other, but, you know, there's kind of the light in the shadow, isn't there? So, they can be barriers, but actually we really want you to be focusing where you can on how they can actually be enablers. So, that's such a great, great example. In some early learning services I've known, you know, some of the directors build a relationship with the local maternal health nurse, and actually come and do checks in the early learning service. So, really knowing your community, going, well, what are the strengths?

Also I think, you know, shouldn't really sugar-coat everything. What are some of the vulnerabilities? Because then you can plan for that. So, I know that I was in a consultancy role and I was supporting a service in Victoria, and at that point, a lot of great community assets, but there was a higher incident rate of domestic violence and unemployment was higher than the national average. And so, this service worked with other services. So, they were almost like a bit of a coalition and they did some really fantastic things. So, getting in connection with food banks, the local bakery, it might have been Baker's Delight or something. And they were donating bread and other bits and pieces, like pastries, I hope. And they set up a little, a kitchenette area, and so, families, educators, even people in the community could donate, and then could actually, you know, take some of these resources. Now, it wasn't about food insecurity or poverty.

So, I want to be clear about that. And so, there had to be some really clear messaging, and that kind of safety. So, people didn't feel like, oh, you know, I'm so poor that they're now giving me free bread. It wasn't about that, but it was actually being responsive that, actually the cost of groceries can be expensive, but it was also looking at time. So, families were trying to apply for jobs and they were time poor. I mean, I think we can all identify with that. Yeah, so, that's an example though where actually identifying some of the challenges can be flipped, so you can go, OK, who's in my community that I can connect with.

Hannah Jamieson

Yeah, absolutely, identifying that need, yeah.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely. Alright. Let's look at the mesosystem. So, in this context, I want you to be thinking about the relationship that early learning or school has with the family. And Hannah, I'm going to put you on the spot, because you had a really... Like, really? Yes. Because you had a really great little example. We were chatting the other day, and I can't remember exactly what it was, because there's been a few that we've shared. I remember I think it had to do with people's perception of school and how that can be both a barrier, but it can be an enabler.

Hannah Jamieson

Yeah, absolutely. (CROSSTALK). I think, so, yeah, I mean, I think it's really important. And this is where we come back to that really powerful but basic idea around listening. When we think about, you know, all our best intentions, as a learning community, we might say we're very welcoming, we're very inclusive. Of course, people would want to come up to me if I was the, you know, the centre leader or the principal. You know, we always welcome people in, but I think we also need to then think about barriers that families have to accessing school or early learning services, and that might be around stigma. We need to be really mindful around parent or carer perceptions around what education means to them.

Our parents and carers might be coming in with their own, I loved your idea about the backpack, maybe coming in with their own experiences, their own memories around what school or early learning meant to them, and they may not always be positive ones. We also may have fear. For some people, whether it's people who have been brought up in Australia or whether they've come, particularly, I was thinking about Daniel's example with refugee communities, there may be some fear around authority figures. It may be, there may be some stigma or shame around asking for help or seeking help. There may be cultural ideas around that the school is the one that will care for children inside these hours and that I'm not going to interfere as a parent or carer. So, I think that we need to be mindful around the different perceptions there that people come in with and that our... However, you know, we don't, it may not be meant, but that we may come in with our own preconceived ideas, I think.

Renee Wright

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's really valuable. OK. We might go to the next layer, which is looking at the microsystem now. So, in this context, I want you to think about either school or early learning, and just thinking about, OK, your policies, your practices, the culture, the leadership, you know, who's in leadership, the quality of leadership, and how do all these factors influence how you embed inclusion.

Hannah Jamieson

I love this example from one of the schools that I work with, had a review. If I get my words out. Had a review of their uniform policy in secondary school, and part of that was around getting consultation from the student body, getting consultation from the parent and carer body around any changes that they felt they needed to the uniform. And so that chance of listening to student voice. And one of the things that came out of there was around, that people who, some of the females in the school wanted to wear trousers, and that was something, I know this may be an age-old battle for the times for some schools, and some schools may already have this in place. But it was around people's sense of feeling safe and feeling comfortable.

And it also then identified, I feel like it was a real learning opportunity because some young people felt that this was an opportunity for them to talk about their own self-identity, and understanding that they didn't feel comfortable wearing a dress based on their own identity. And so, I think that each time we think about the

microsystem, about our immediate system, our immediate environment, it's another opportunity to learn. And every time we can come to a situation with open ears and a sense of being willing to listen, I come back to this again and again, that young people and their families may be able, that might be the time that they feel they can share something with us about how they can be better included.

Renee Wright

Thank you. Wonderful. OK. And the last layer, if you like, is the individual lens that I really want you to consider. So, we've looked at a range of different environmental factors from kind of big picture, macrosystem, and just a moment ago Hannah spoke about the microsystem. You know, this system, and when you think about system improvement, system reform, it takes a really long time, you know, it's a bit of a slow burn. And, you know, you can make a difference. There might be lots of noise that's happening in the background. And if I think about the microsystem, you know, again, really great leadership but sometimes it's emerging.

Some services have really clear policies around inclusion and engagement, and I know some early learning services, there is a no exclusion policy. And there are practices and there's funding to support that as well. But that's not the reality everywhere. So, we do accept that. But I think it's really important that we pause and consider, OK, as an individual, what difference can I make? Because you can make huge difference, huge difference. And so there's a few prompts on the screen that I would get you to think about. You know, what is your image of yourself as an educator? You know, and thinking about your range of pedagogical practice, OK, who is that actually serving? And is anyone being left behind? And the last one, which I think is really powerful, is what is your legacy, or what do you think your legacy will be?

And in my experience, and I've seen this with educators and even teachers that have taught me, you know, your legacy is not going to be your strategic plan. I'm sorry to break it to you, it generally isn't going to be that. And I've personally never had a family or a child say to me, oh, Renee, that portfolio you did was just so amazing. You know, it really is not going to be, you know, your lasting legacy. It's about relationships, it's about how you made people feel, it's about how you made people belong and feel safe.

So, please just keep that in mind as we move on to the next section. So, we're going to look at inclusion in practice. So, this will be a bit of fun. OK. So, on your screen, you will see a definition that looks at curriculum. And we just wanted to point out that when we're looking at inclusive practices, it's not about a single event or, you know, it's not a checklist of activities. I mean, that would be nice in some ways and easy, but it's actually everything. OK. So, it's your interactions, it's experiences, it's your routines. I think in early learning, sort of 80% of your time is in routines, right? So, it's really, really critical that we're thinking about inclusion in a really expansive way. OK. The next slide now, you will see a few ideas that reflect early learning. And Hannah, you'll have a chat in a moment about primary and secondary school as well. You've all noticed that we've been thinking more about what are the social determinants of inclusion and health, OK?

So, for example, actually, it will be the next slide that comes up, it actually references transportation, which we know can be a barrier, for example. But there's a few other ideas here to consider as well. So, we've got recruitment. So, I've spoken to directors that say, oh, we'd love to have some Aboriginal and First Australian educators in our service. Like, OK, that's great, what's your approach? Let's be intentional about that. Oh, we're promoting on Seek. OK, and I hope I'm not criticising anyone who works at Seek, but, OK, that's one approach. But might there be other approaches? Is that the best platform? Do you need to actually get into partnership with some Aboriginal controlled organisations and really understand this better, and what might be helpful. Because it's not about a diversity quota, you know.

So, thinking about recruitment as an example. I've seen multiple early learning services have takeaway packages. Again, families that are time poor. And, you know, we want to be sustainable with food, and there's often an abundance leftovers. So, one particular service, the cook was sort of packaging it up, and early learning educators and families could just, no shame, take that. And that would have worked for me, meal at the end of the day. So, we've been thinking about inclusion, we want to be thinking more expansively. We want to be thinking about food insecurity, potentially, about being time poor, about making sure our early learning service reflects the diversity of our communities. The last one on this slide reads, I see you, I know you, and it matters that you're here. That is just so incredibly powerful. And I know that we both kind of punted on that, didn't we? (LAUGHTER)

Yeah, so we do have a little video, I'm just looking at time, we probably won't have time to show you that, unfortunately. But I know that our great chat moderators will pop it in the chat for you. But just as a reflection, go, what does that look like in practice? I see you, I know you, and it matters that you're here. How are we communicating these through our actions and our body language when we see children?

Hannah Jamieson

Absolutely.

Renee Wright

I mentioned before that I don't like scripts, but I've used, because I really did mean it, when I used to see my little people in the beginning of the day, usually, I would say things like, Oh, I'm so happy to see you. Or I'd say to the casual educator, in early learning up to 30% of our workforce is casual, I'd be like, "Oh, hey, welcome. Let me do a quick introduction of the educators you'll be working with, OK, you can put your bag here. That's inclusion, that's acknowledging people. Just the next slide, I've got a few more that represent early learning.

And this sort of video package will be available. So, you will be able to have a look at some of these additional slides. But, Hannah, I'm gonna segue to you.

Hannah Jamieson

Awesome, I might pinch the clicker.

Renee Wright

Yes, you can.

Hannah Jamieson

So, just some examples from primary and secondary school as well, I think. One of the ones that really stays with me from primary school is around inclusion in all the different learning opportunities. So, one of the schools that I've had the privilege of working with had a young boy in grade five who had haemophilia. And so, it's really about making sure that he felt as included as he possibly could in all activities. And so what that looked like was the leadership exploring and investigating what sort of professional learning their staff could do, so that they absolutely had confidence and had the skills to go forward and actually include this young person in things like science experiments, PE, excursions, talking to parents about what they would like for the young person in that experience.

So, I think that that's really, really powerful. And I know, particularly for after school care, that there's really some schools and then into after school care will have some wonderful kind of communication books, so that they're able to sort of check in and what that transition from school into after school care looks like. So, they're able just to touch base with how the young person has experienced the day, and what's happening for them. So, I think it's really important that inclusion can come in a variety of different ways. In a secondary school, and this was an incredibly powerful experience that I was told about, was a secondary school that really wanted to understand better for one of their families, which was a refugee family, about how to make it as safe and inclusive as possible around fire drills.

The situation was, and all educators among us will know that we have to have regular fire drills, there has to be an evacuation to a certain point. And that for some people, because we know that we try and have it almost like a practice run so that people shouldn't know that it's coming, that that can come with quite a bit of unpredictability, uncertainty, a lot of noise, there can be a lot of moving about, sudden movements. Sometimes people, as well meaning, particularly young people can make a few jokes about what might be happening. And so this school really wanted to understand better how that experience could be really trauma informed for the family. That included working with translators to help understand, help the parents and carers, the family and the young person understand, OK, in the future, in this term, we're going to have a fire drill.

Really helping them to understand that in their language, but also unpacking what the purpose of it was. And then within a certain amount of time, letting the family know that that would happen. Giving them some

predictability about, these are the sorts of things that you will see and hear. This is the person, the teacher or the early learning, in your case, it would be our early learning educator around, this is the person that you look for, for information. This is what you can expect. But the thing that was most powerful was afterwards going back to that family and finding out how they felt that experience went for them. Getting some feedback, so that the next time we have to do it, they had to do it, that they were saying, OK, what they struggled with or what really helped was this, and really being able to inform that because I think Daniel earlier said, we don't know what we don't know. And so, for us, we might just go, oh, a fire drill. I hope it's not raining, or, yay, we get a bit of a break. And instead it's around, this can be a completely different experience for some people. So, I think that that's something really to bear in mind.

Renee Wright

And so intentional as well, that planning.

Hannah Jamieson

So, what's next? Really, we want you to have a bit of a think around inclusion in action. We've had a lot of, we've talked a lot around, I guess, the theory of inclusion and the why. One of the things that I think we've spoken about is about inclusion being a very deliberate thing, that this is something that can't wait. We know now that, I think it's 20%, so, one in five Australians will experience racism in a given year, and racism or discrimination. And so there is a very, there's a real imperative about why we have to do this. But yet, there's this immensity of the moral why. And in amongst that are the small moments, the reasons why. Inclusion is part of our wider system of beliefs, and our practice, and it can change, we can change our values and our beliefs. And first and foremost, feeling included is highly protective to our well being. Feeling that we belong and we're seen is highly, highly protective.

So, from here, I would like to thank you so very much for being part of our afternoon session. On behalf of Renee and myself, we've really appreciated it. I leave you with a challenge. What can you begin today? What inclusive practices can you, from here on in, begin? I'd like to thank you very much. I encourage you to connect with us via our Be You website, at beyou.edu.au, and also on our social media channels. And please link in with your Be You consultant. I hope that you have a really wonderful upcoming holidays, whether it's in early learning or in schools, and I thank you so very much for being part of it, goodbye.

Renee Wright

Thank you, bye.