

Newsletter

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CONVENER'S CORNER

By Ross Whitfeld

Towards the end of last term, I heard one of those stories that we as counsellors dread. The day has begun as a very normal spring day. A slight chill in the air, a crispness in the ocean, the early hint of perfume coming from my Jasmine and all felt relatively okay considering these COVID times.

I had met with this student before and I thought this was a going to be a simple catch up, a cup of tea and a round of UNO however, I was totally ambushed and completely taken aback when the student began to describe the early horrors of their childhood. Why did the student decide to tell me there and then when I has been meeting with them for years? I don't know, but years of counselling has always taught me to expect the unexpected.

The student spoke of their experience in a matter of fact tone. There was no asking for sympathy, sorrow or pity. There were no tears, perhaps a slight croak in the voice but to passing observer it would have been seen as normal conversation between a staff member and student. But this was no normal conversation and the more we spoke, the deeper the rivers of grief flowed and as I absorbed myself into to this student with my heart and soul, I also reminded myself that my colleagues all around Australia and across the world were having similar conversations.

There were no psychological theories or therapies that were going to help me with this student at the time; perhaps all of that would come later. What was required was the simplicity of my being, of my non-judgemental listening of and my human connection. As for the student, I genuinely believe he just wanted me to sit with him and simply hear his story – why then? He did not know, he just said the time was right to take off his mask and to acknowledge his past.

I wrote in my last newsletter article about our Swiss Army Knife of skills we as school counsellors have. When I reflect upon my interaction with this student, as well as 100s of others I have worked with over the years, I believe that our greatest skill is just to “be”. The Coronavirus has unequivocally changed how we see the world. As psychologists we are continually teaching our students to reframe a negative or unhelpful situation into one that is more manageable or even helpful/positive and we have certainly had our work cut out for us over the past 9 months in this regard.

Two common positive refrains I have heard in our global response to Corona has been

- a) that we are all in this together – in a world that seems perpetually divided it is encouraging to see growing unification
- b) people reuniting with the simple things in life – puzzles, bicycle riding, family dinners, nights in (although for our Victorian members this may have worn thin)

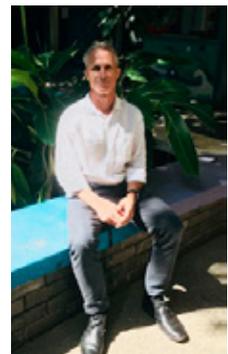
As you come to the end the year and reflect upon your practice and set your goals for next year, I encourage you to remind yourself that whilst theory and specific therapies are very important in our practice, so too are the of the simple things in our practice such as just being present.

November also brings in changes to our PiSIG committee and I would like to acknowledge our departing committee members, Charmain Newman, John Burns, Matt O'Conner and Dawn Russell, the four of you have done an amazing job and your commitment to our Interest Group is much appreciated. On behalf of the PiSIG committee I wish all our members well for the end of the year and for the year ahead. Much will be written about 2020 and I am hoping that somewhere in the history books there is a line that is written “and

let us not forget the school counsellors and school psychologists, an amazing bunch of professionals who were the glue and fabric of our school communities and who also helped us through the toughest of times”.

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OVERWHELM & THE HOLIDAY REST

By Vanessa Sleeman

“Only two more weeks until the holidays! Then I can rest!”. So goes the catch cry of the overwhelmed school psychologist. But is it really that simple? Work like crazy for ten, eleven weeks and then crash over the holidays and return refreshed?

What if that isn't the answer to the crazy, overwhelmed, overworked psychologist? How then do you tackle the chronic tiredness, busy-ness and compassion fatigue that comes with the daily demands of such a role?

The alarm goes off. I resist the urge to groan and roll over back to sleep and haul my body out of bed. Shower, dress, breakfast, get the rest of the family up and out ready for the day. Jump in the car and head off to school. On the way I stop for my daily coffee, battling with the desire to save my funds while allowing myself something “nice” in my daily caffeine fix of a professionally made coffee and a pleasant conversation with the barista in the craziness of my day. After all, I'm worth it, aren't I?

I get to school and start preparing for the day ahead – make my list of what I have to get done, prioritise, plan out student appointments. Briefly consider how my day is going to look by the end and if it will vaguely

resemble the timetable I am bravely putting together this morning or if it will completely go out the window at the first sign of crisis or problems that arise.

The bell rings and my first student arrives.

I get into my rhythm; see student, take some notes, make a plan, add things to my 'to do' list and on to the next

one. Guided by, and yet slave to, the ringing of the bells every 50 minutes.

A brief moment over recess to pause momentarily and have a sip of water – keep drinking, keep hydrated. Maybe stop and chat to a staff member who wanders down the hallway. Pick up photocopying off the printer, check my pigeonhole. Organise rooms for the meeting I have next week.

Wonder if I have time to make another coffee in the tiny kitchen near my office then dismiss it as the bell rings again. Back to it.

Try to find a few moments between students to walk the hallways – a moment of reprieve from the four walls that are my office space. I love my office. It is a sanctuary of calm within the crazy environment that is a school and I get lots of comments from teachers and students alike about how peaceful and relaxed it is. But sometimes I can get stuck in it all day and those four walls of calm feel more oppressive and encasing than calming and at those times I need to get out and move, interact, engage with someone other than those in need of my time, attention and care.

Lunch time! Halfway through the day! Lunch time is a very busy time of day for me, I often get a lot of students dropping in to make appointments or wanting to talk or I have appointments. But I do try to have some lunch either before or after this time and typically away from my desk, even if it is crammed into the tiny kitchen space. Sometimes it's good to have a different view while you refuel!

The afternoon rush is on! An emergency consult comes in, a student in distress. I reach out for help from one of the Admin staff to help me shuffle students I had booked to see to be able to respond to a student in distress. This is not an unusual occurrence and one which happens on a regular basis in schools. I have learnt with time that having structure is really helpful for stability and consistency and to reduce stress, but this must be coupled with a high degree of flexibility to be able

“Only two more weeks until the holidays! Then I can rest!”

to not become swamped with issues that arise and be able to respond in a timely and appropriate way. It is definitely a balancing act! Don't forget to keep sipping that water! And continue walking the hallways to stay mobile and take a micro-headspace break in between tasks.

The final bell rings for the end of the school day. Usually this signals paperwork or meetings. Sometimes it means a DCJ report or a debrief with my Deputy. I try to leave on time as much as possible,

and if not, I aim to balance my longer afternoons at work with leaving earlier on other days. Work-life balance and all that. As I drive home from work in the afternoons, I mentally shift gears about halfway through the journey, moving from a review of my work day to planning my evening with my family. I resist the urge to check work emails and my bag is (thankfully) empty of reports or policies to write.

As I climb into bed at the end of another busy, interesting, fulfilling, but still exhausting day, I think about the upcoming holidays. Maybe it isn't about a “holiday recharge”. Maybe it is those small moments throughout the day and week to stop, pause and rest that make the difference. Those moments to step back, to connect with others, to care for myself, rather than the “grand gesture” of the holiday break.

I'll let you know after a good night's sleep.

Vanessa has been a Psychologist and APS member for over 20 years and a member of the PiSIG committee for the past 2 years. Her background includes work within various Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services across Sydney, Adult Mental Health Services and NSW Corrective Services, before moving into the education area.

Vanessa currently works at Danebank Anglican School for Girls in Sydney, where she has been for the past 7 years. She is passionate about early intervention and prevention of mental health issues in young people and promoting student wellbeing using individual and school-wide approaches.



RAISING CHILDREN'S AWARENESS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE THINKING

By Sue Roffey

CBT is now mainstream therapeutic intervention. In conjunction with trained psychologists or counsellors, clients are asked to explore how their thinking patterns are either helpful or unhelpful to them. There is plenty of evidence for positive outcomes.

Between the ages of 5 and 10, children increasingly understand that thinking positively improves emotions and thinking negatively makes one feel worse (Bamford & Lagattuta (2011). It makes sense to instil the possible options for children before an unhelpful way of seeing the world becomes firmly established.

With some seed funding from the Royal Society of Arts, Dr Keith Heggart and I set about developing five positive-thinking and five negative-thinking characters that were introduced into six stories. After several iterations, and Elizabeth Stanley coming on board as our illustrator, they were piloted with children between the ages of 7 and 13. Getting the story, the tone and the illustrations to all work together was challenging, but in the end it seemed that they were best suited for upper primary but also worth trying with first year secondary.

The Wellbeing stories address issues that are pertinent to this age-group: test anxiety; transition and managing change; perfectionism; organisation (linked to family breakdown and shared parenting); loss and depression; and entitlement. Each story has a narrator and a support person. Some are written in the first person, two are siblings of the main character, one is a friend and one a head-teacher where the entitled person is a teacher on his staff who eventually comes good with the help of a colleague!

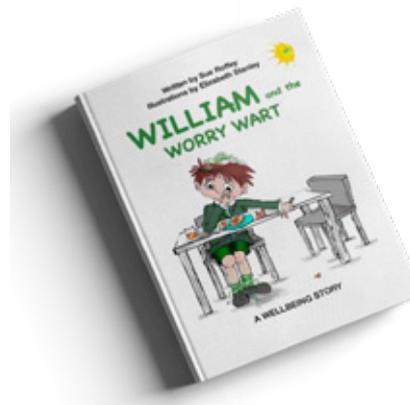
Each story comes with a teacher toolkit and a family toolkit. The family toolkit says more about the issue in the story and gives links to resources. The teacher toolkit is based in the Circle Solutions framework for social and emotional learning (Roffey, 2020). Each story is divided into ten short chapters and for each there are 2 or 3 activities that students do together. Although best in SEL lessons most can also be completed in a counselling session.

Many of you will know the film *Inside Out* that deals with the emotions of joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust. Here we do something a bit similar with thinking styles. These include worry, negativity, if-only thinking, thankfulness, mindfulness and common sense!

You can read more about the stories and characters by downloading a free introductory booklet from www.wellbeingstories.com.

The stories can be read in a single sitting but students will get more out of them if they have the opportunity to discuss the issues raised and the value of different ways of thinking.

All feedback welcome!



References

Bamford, C. & Lagattuta, K.H. (2011) Looking on the bright side: Children's knowledge about the benefits of positive versus negative thinking. *Child Development* 83 (2) 667-682

Roffey, S. (2020) *Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing* 3rd Edition. Sage Publications

Dr Sue Roffey has been a teacher, educational psychologist and academic. She now has honorary professorships at University College London and Western Sydney and is an Associate Fellow at Exeter. A prolific author, Sue is an established authority on all aspects of school and student wellbeing, including behaviour, social and emotional learning and relationships. www.growinggreatschoolsworldwide.com

VISIBLE WELLBEING AT THE HUB: ONE YEAR ON

By Jane Mosco and Sue O'Connor

Student wellbeing is a key concern for schools, with learning and wellbeing outcomes intrinsically linked. Recent resources such as the [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#) (ASWF) can help schools to create a systemic whole school approach to wellbeing, enabling schools to create learning spaces that are inclusive and safe, with a focus on building positive relationships, developing participation and fostering a sense of belonging at school. The ASWF framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and encourages schools to develop whole school approaches to wellbeing identifying five specific elements: Leadership, Inclusion, Student Voice, Support and Partnerships. Whilst each school must contextualise these elements for their own needs, the framework provides principles and examples of effective wellbeing practices to consider.

Visible wellbeing in practice

In 2019, with a review of school building usage, a central space in our school was made available to be visioned and transformed into a Student Wellbeing Hub. For the first time this meant that all the specialist wellbeing staff team would be housed together in a collective one-stop-shop for staff, students and families to access.

Led by the Director of Student Wellbeing K-12, in consultation with the wellbeing team, a design for the Wellbeing Hub evolved to include offices and counselling rooms for two part-time school counsellors, two chaplains and a Director of Student Wellbeing K-12. Specifically, the rooms developed included:

- Small group or counselling room suitable for Primary students
- Small group or counselling room suitable for High School students
- Private discreet seating area for students to wait, take time out, or self-regulate away from the crowd,
- Oasis room: A multi-purpose space for student clubs, such as Breakfast club, LGBTQ, Human Rights, Goori Language, Teacher Wellbeing meetings, Debating groups, and other student groups.

So, one year on, what's working well?

Our first year in the Wellbeing Hub was spent developing the space and prioritising it to be student-friendly.

Student voice

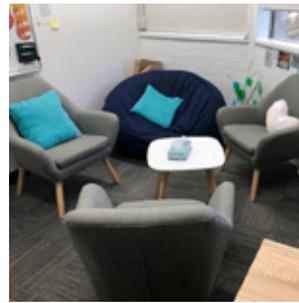
Groups of students have helped design and create the space to ensure that it is welcoming, inclusive and student-friendly. Students have painted walls and created mosaics



Jane Mosco



Sue O'Connor



enhancing the message that the Wellbeing Hub is a one stop shop for all things wellbeing.

This year our Year 11's Society and Culture class undertook research exploring student wellbeing from student perspectives, holding student focus groups across the school allowing students to have a say in things that impact them. The ideas from this research were presented to the College Leadership team.

Inclusion

The Wellbeing hub is a haven for those needing a sensory break from the busy pace of school, or those needing a relaxed meeting space for student groups and clubs.

Support

Wellbeing staff are available to chat to students or provide specific support such as appointments with counsellors. The Hub provides information on community services and local supports. Our school wellbeing pocket sized support card is also available, identifying useful phone help-lines for students to access support out-of-school hours.

What's next?

- 1 To further develop further Wellbeing Hub programmes in the Oasis room to include explicit teaching of social and emotional skills, and to increase awareness of Mental Health so as to enhance wellbeing through resilience, coping, and help-seeking skills.
- 2 To further develop a sensory supportive space to help students with opportunities for self-regulation. It is envisioned that this will be developed and designed with students at the school in partnership with local Occupational Therapy students.

Whilst not every school may have the opportunity for such a big project, perhaps there is a wall, or an underutilised space that could provide an opportunity to develop Visible Wellbeing. Perhaps highlighting student voice, inclusion or support alongside visible leadership, or effective family and community partnerships. Prioritising systemic student wellbeing through whole school approaches can benefit both learning and wellbeing outcomes.

What could be your next step?

Jane is a psychologist at Bishop Druitt College, a K-12 school in regional NSW within the school's multi-disciplinary wellbeing team. Jane describes herself as a learning detective, being passionate about helping students to better understand their learning strengths and challenges, as well as finding innovative ways to improve wellbeing. In her 'spare time' Jane researches the nexus between learning and student wellbeing at Southern Cross University (SCU) as a PhD candidate with the Centre for Children and Young People. Jane is a committee member of the Australian Psychologists in Schools Interest Group.

Sue is the Director of Student Wellbeing K-12 at Bishop Druitt College. Last year Sue coordinated the successful transformation of the current Student Wellbeing Hub. She is passionate about supporting students and staff. She was instrumental in the development of fair behaviour management procedures and is an advocate for restorative justice. Sue is currently training as a Love Bites facilitator, and is always looking for improved wellbeing practices for both students and staff.

APISIG 2021 COMMITTEE MEMBERS



— Mr Ross Whitfeld

Ross has been a school counsellor/psychologist for 20 years. His experience has included work in the NSW Independent system, with the NSW Department of Education in Sydney and in western NSW, and internationally in Penang at the Uplands school. Ross is currently working as the school counsellor at Balgowlah Boys in Sydney and as Assistant Principal – Head of Wellbeing at The Beach School, a selective high school for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties requiring an alternate school setting. Ross has been a member of the APS for 20 years and on the PiSIG committee for 3 years.

In addition to school counselling, Ross has worked in the Solmon Islands with development work, lectured in communications at UTS, taught in NSW and London, has been a Troop Commander with the Army Reserves and is currently a member of the Rural Fire Service.

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— Ms Jane Mosco

Jane has worked with children and young people in schools for over 23 years. Initially, she worked as a primary school teacher, and then as a psychologist. Focussing on children and adolescent wellbeing, she has worked both in multiple-disciplinary teams in clinics and schools, as well as in her successful private practice. Jane is interested in improving student wellbeing and experiences of school, through individual and systemic approaches, informed by the views of students. She is particularly interested in the nexus of learning and wellbeing at school and the idea of neurodevelopmental differentiation alongside respectful student-teacher relationships.

Jane currently works part-time as a psychologist in a K-12 school in regional NSW within the school's multi-disciplinary wellbeing team. Jane is also a PhD candidate at Southern Cross University with the Centre for Children and Young People researching student wellbeing and learning differences. Jane is a board-approved supervisor.

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— Ms Simonne Elise

Simonne Elise has been a Psychologist and APS member for over 20 years. Simonne has both teaching and Psychology qualifications with her most recent study being the completion of a Master of Education (Inclusive Education). She currently works at St Mary's College Wollongong as the Senior Psychologist.

Simonne is an Honorary Fellow with the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Wollongong. Simonne is a supervisor for 4+2 and 5+1 provisional Psychologists and she describes providing supervision as her favourite part of her work.

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— Ms Vanessa Sleeman

Vanessa has been a Psychologist and APS member for over 20 years and a member of the PiSIG committee for the past 2 years. Her background includes work within various Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services across Sydney, Adult Mental Health Services and NSW Corrective Services, before moving into the education area.

Vanessa currently works at Danebank Anglican School for Girls in Sydney, where she has been for the past 7 years. She is passionate about early intervention and prevention of mental health issues in young people and promoting student wellbeing using individual and school-wide approaches.

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APISIG 2021 COMMITTEE MEMBERS

— Ms Rachel Weymouth

Rachel worked as a Primary Teacher in Melbourne for more than 11 years before commencing work as a psychologist. She then provided training and supervision to crisis telephone counsellors and youth workers and worked in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, consultancy, organisational review and strategic planning before returning to the public education sector.

Rachel has provided psychological, educational, disability and welfare services within schools for more than 20 years, initially in Melbourne and subsequently in regional NSW. Committed to supporting children and young people and their families and teachers, she currently provides supervision and support to a team of counsellors and works in collaboration with schools, local agencies and educational services teams to improve learning and wellbeing outcomes for students of all ages.



— Mrs Emma Merlino

Emma is a registered psychologist who has many years experience working for various government agencies and also in private practice. Emma has a particular interest in working with young people and has worked with NSW Health and headspace. Emma is the team leader of the school counselling team for the Catholic Schools Office in the Maitland Newcastle Diocese.

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— Mrs Cassandra Gist

Endorsed as a Health Psychologist, Cassandra currently works with children and adolescents in an Independent School. Previous experience includes her own consultancy business; hospital outpatients in public system; and university assessments.

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— Ms Collette Caffrey

Collette is a Provisional Psychologist at Notre Dame College in Victoria. Her Honours thesis explored the subjective wellbeing of family members diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Collette holds a strong interest in the overall wellbeing of families and the impact this has on individual members. Collette has a long career in the education field working for 30 years in the state sector. Roles in the education field included primary teacher, reading recovery, Leader of English and Literacy, Primary Principal and Regional Literacy Coach. Collette has also engaged in early childhood, opening and leading the development of a childcare Centre as the Director. Until recently, Collette has been employed in educational settings navigating social and educational poverty including leadership of a number of initiatives. Additional to a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), Collette holds the qualification of Masters of School Leadership, Bachelor of Psychology, and Bachelor of Education.



— Mrs Kate Caldecott-Davis

Kate is an experienced psychologist and PsyBa-approved supervisor, who works as a school counsellor at an independent Pre-K-12 school in Sydney, and in private practice with children and adolescents. Kate holds a Bachelor's Degree and Postgraduate Diplomas in Psychology, a Master's Degree in Research, and a Master's Degree in Gifted Education (*with Excellence*). In addition to Kate's professional practice, and work in the area of gifted education, she conducts quantitative research investigating motivational processes underlying optimal psycho-social functioning of students and teachers within educational settings. Kate is passionate about empowering all students to thrive at school, which is reflected in her holistic approach to working with children, families, and educators.

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