

CASE STUDY:

Wellbeing for all



Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration

Albert Park Preschool

Established in 1948 in Melbourne's inner bayside suburb of Albert Park, Albert Park Preschool is a fixture in the local community and prides itself on promoting 'wellbeing for all'.

We are all connected

"We take a holistic approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of children, by nurturing the wellbeing of our staff, families and the community in which we live and play." Jenny Whelan, Administration Director and Chair, Wellbeing Subcommittee, Albert Park Preschool.

The health, safety and wellbeing of children has always been a priority for the kindergarten, but Albert Park Preschool now has a broader approach to wellbeing. The kindergarten works to support the health and wellbeing of everyone who encounters the service – children, families, staff, visitors and the local community. This broad and inclusive approach recognises that the wellbeing of adults has an impact on the wellbeing of children.

Embedding wellbeing into the service

"People come and go from organisations over time. To be successful, we knew that we had to embed wellbeing into the permanent structures and culture of the kindergarten." Jenny Whelan

Albert Park Preschool is working to promote wellbeing for all members of the community, both now and in the future, by embedding wellbeing into the service. A key element of this has been the creation of a Wellbeing Subcommittee, which oversees the preschool's *Wellbeing for All* policy, goals and initiatives.

Building a strong team

Albert Park Preschool has built a strong, community-wide team to support wellbeing. A number of factors were critical to the success of their team building work, including:

- **Leadership buy-in:** The commitment and support of the kindergarten's Committee President was secured from the outset, and led to the creation of Committee of Management portfolios for both Health and Wellbeing.
- **Staff involvement:** Extensive and ongoing staff consultation was undertaken to ensure staff ownership and buy-in. As a result, new staff leadership positions in Health & Safety and Wellbeing were established.
- **Community involvement:** The service has diverse representation on its Wellbeing Subcommittee, which is made up of employees, management, community health professionals and parent representatives.
- **Workforce training:** Albert Park Preschool recognises and celebrates their staff as a key strength, and a critical element of the kindergarten's approach to promoting wellbeing is workforce education. All staff have learnt mindfulness and yoga techniques, and had training to avoid musculoskeletal injuries that are common in early childhood settings. The kindergarten achieved silver status as a mentally healthy workplace under the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) accreditation in 2016 and will be "going for gold" in 2018.
- **Commitment of budget:** The preschool has successfully implemented many low-cost initiatives, and has recently generated a passive income for the centre's wellbeing initiatives by partnering with a kindergarten parent and local pharmacist to produce and market an eco-friendly room spray. This initiative emerged from parent participation in the program and was inspired by native lemon myrtle grown in the kindergarten's garden.

Engaging the local community

“We reached out to our parent community and found that it was full of these amazing resources.”
Jenny Whelan

The centre is committed to strengthening community partnerships to support the transitions of children to and from the kindergarten and promote wellbeing.

The service regularly reaches out to and engages with the local community. As a community sessional kindergarten, the centre is governed by a committee of parent volunteers. Parents with a formal background in health and wellbeing participate in the kindergarten program by undertaking yoga classes, planned physical activities and healthy eating incursions with the children and staff. Many members of the Wellbeing Team are also now actively engaged in supporting wellbeing initiatives at the local primary school.

Wellbeing of the children

“Working in the early childhood sector is incredibly rewarding work; it’s joyful work, but it’s challenging and the WorkSafe statistics prove that: 15 per cent of injuries in early childhood settings are psychological. Wellbeing is a really important part of the work that we do with children. We believe really strongly about the children as citizens from birth. They are the people that will be leading workplaces of the future.” Jenny Whelan

Albert Park Preschool recognises the importance of health and wellbeing as a precondition for lifelong learning. The kindergarten staff lead wellbeing sessions with the children that include yoga, mindfulness and a range of techniques to support little people to understand and manage big emotions. Engaging the children in conversation to support the development of emotional literacy, and learning from their voices the things that make them feel happy and safe at kinder, are key elements of the approach. In pursuing “wellbeing for all” the preschool is guided by its philosophy of embracing diversity, connecting with nature, and celebrating the incredible marvel of being human. To support this, children regularly spend time in the kindergarten community garden and participate in walking excursions. Connection to family and community

is further celebrated with annual events such as family sports day and celebration of culture featuring a smoking ceremony performed by members of the Boon Wurrung people, the traditional custodians of the land on which the preschool stands.

Small changes with big results

“By focusing on mental health and wellbeing we have strengthened our culture. We have a very safe culture, a very good feedback culture. One of the joyous moments for me was with our family survey last year - we had one hundred per cent of families feeling safe to provide feedback and share concerns. Also in the survey we had a comment that for us now has become a reflection of what we’ve been doing: ‘it’s a little kinder with a big heart.’” Jenny Whelan

The kindergarten’s focus on wellbeing has delivered many benefits, including:

- ✓ Improved wellbeing of children
- ✓ Increased workforce competence
- ✓ Strengthened workplace culture
- ✓ High satisfaction among staff, committee of management and families
- ✓ Strong family engagement
- ✓ Decrease in workplace concerns

<http://albertparkkinder.com.au/>

<https://vimeo.com/235289533>

The Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration is a partnership between SuperFriend, VicHealth and WorkSafe Victoria. We are working together to help workplaces create positive and supportive work cultures and environments by focusing on organisational leadership and encouraging workplaces to implement positive mental wellbeing strategies that enhance existing policies and processes.

For more information, please visit:
www.leadingwellvic.com.au

Published May 2018