

WoW case study – Government service

The Queensland Cross Sector Mental Wellbeing Capacity Building Project

The Queensland Government recognises the value of mental health and wellbeing as a foundation for individual and economic prosperity. The Queensland Cross Sector Wellbeing Capacity Building (WCB) Project has applied the Wheel of Wellbeing (WoW), an evidence-based framework, to strengthen and embed understanding about, and capacity for improved positive mental health and wellbeing across Queensland. Funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC) and designed and delivered by Implemental the WCB project has worked with government, non-government, and community stakeholders to tailor capacity building to key settings and locations. This case study describes the application of WoW in a government service delivery setting, with positive outcomes enabled through the partnership and commitment of organisational leaders and staff.

The Wheel of Wellbeing

The WoW is a simple framework that includes six elements (*Body – be active, Mind – keep learning, Spirit – give, People – connect, Place – take notice, and Planet – care*). The WoW is delivered in workshops and activities designed to engage, inform and encourage people to make changes in their lives which promote mental health and wellbeing, and then to actively share these experiences with others.



Strategic context

A regional branch of a government service was looking for ways to improve staff morale following indicators of disengagement in previous staff satisfaction surveys.

The service supports vulnerable community members by telephone in a fast-paced and demanding service delivery environment. Staff must regularly make difficult decisions and are often supporting people in crisis. This can cause higher than normal levels of stress and anxiety for staff in the workplace.

The service leader became aware of the WoW through local networking that involved the regional mental health and wellbeing hub. (See <https://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au/awareness-promotion/mental-health-wellbeing/regional-wellbeing-hubs>). The service leader identified the potential benefit of the WoW framework for improving staff health and wellbeing and addressing concerns about staff morale.

Implementation

After attendance at a one-day introductory WoW workshop by 20 staff, this large government service made a significant investment supporting 8 staff members to participate in the five-day intensive program (DIY Happiness).

Following completion of the DIY Happiness program, the organisation's leadership supported development of a wide range of interactive WoW training and activities tailored to the needs of their workplace.

Staff across the government service branch were invited to participate in WoW training, workshops and activities run by staff known to them. Staff were informed that these opportunities were designed to improve their positive mental health and wellbeing. Participation was voluntary.

Activities

All staff (N>200) of this service have participated in some WoW activities since October 2018. The service has developed and delivered two structured WoW programs: a 14-week 'WoW Explorer' program and a seven session 'Wow Lite' program. The service has also integrated WoW thinking and practice into their induction program.

The service regularly runs one-off 'WoW events' in the workplace and in other community health service settings. They have created a WoW community-of-support that completes health and wellbeing activities outside of the workplace. WoW facilitators and program participants highlighted strong engagement and uptake in WoW activities.

Outcomes

Individual changes

- Increased psychological and physical care strategies and activities were reported. For example: meditation, yoga, walking.
- Staff were observed using more positive mental health language and thinking through exposure to wellbeing science.
- Staff conversations about positive mental health increased, including discussions about activities that support mental health.
- Staff were observed to build new connections following WoW activities. Shared interests and activities supported this through, for example: book clubs, walking groups and gardening.

Organisational changes

- The service adopted health promotion frameworks. Implementation of the WoW is regularly discussed and reviewed at leadership team meetings.
- Positive mental health and wellbeing strategies are shared in staff meetings and supervision. There are regular newsletters and electronic communications promoting the WoW.
- The WoW has been integrated into induction and training activities.
- Ongoing WoW activities are being run in the workplace that touch all staff. This includes social activities and novel reminders to check in on personal health and wellbeing.
- Workplace interest and participation in health and wellbeing activities has increased, staff morale and satisfaction is reported to have improved.

Systems level changes

- Executive leaders have advocated for adoption of the WoW more broadly across their organisation.
- The government service has participated in collaborative WoW activities via the regional wellbeing hub in collaboration with other community and health sector services.
- The service has run multiple introductory WoW workshops and activities with local community service organisations, for example Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, schools, multi-cultural and disability services. Information has been regularly shared and promoted in network meetings.

Changes in health and wellbeing

Implementation of WoW activities has resulted in improvements in mental health and wellbeing. This included improved relationships and increased psychological and physical care activities.

“[Completing WoW training] gave me a renewed sense of purpose, personally and at work.”

“You can visibly see changes in people. There's more camaraderie, people are more familiar and friendly.”

“Staff are less stressed and more friendly since we started implementing the WoW.”

“Just being able to identify how you are feeling has been a gain, to check in with yourself during the day.”

Embedding the WoW

This government service has worked hard to strategically embed WoW thinking and practice. This has occurred through strong initial investments of staff time in completing the five-day intensive (DIY Happiness) workshop and concerted follow up support and resources to activate WoW activities within the service. The service has integrated WoW thinking and practice by:

- Incorporating the WoW framework into their staff induction program which has provided a conceptual framework and language for staff to discuss positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace
- Developing tailored WoW workshops for staff which again provides a framework for staff to discuss positive mental health and wellbeing
- Integrating WoW activities and reflections into leadership meetings and staff supervision
- Running regular activities focused on a specific WoW element, for example through bringing your ‘garden’ to work days, or creating a social group to complete positive mental health and wellbeing activities outside the workplace
- Integrating WoW concepts in daily practice by, for example, ringing a bell twice daily to remind staff to stretch and take a break
- Sharing WoW thinking and practice in newsletters and other staff communications.

Enablers

- The flexible nature of WoW concepts and resources has allowed the service to create activities adapted to their local context.
- Staff recognition that the WoW was valuable to them personally as well as professionally was considered important for staff voluntarily attending workshops and trialling new positive mental health and wellbeing activities.
- There was strong leadership and resource investment to support implementation. Having multiple staff trained in and talking about the WoW was viewed as important to developing momentum for WoW thinking and practice.
- Embedding the WoW at all organisational levels and into daily practice. Leadership use the WoW and its six elements to frame discussions about mental health and wellbeing, these are shared in supervision, team meetings, communications and through regular WoW branded events and activities.

Barriers

- Costs were identified as a barrier to further expansion of the WoW. The costs of sending 10 staff to the five-day intensive (DIY Happiness) workshop, providing time for these staff to develop tailored WoW programs for the service, integrating WoW thinking and practice into inductions, running WoW one-off activities and supporting WoW groups were recognised as costly. There are also significant costs associated with providing time for staff to complete workshops and backfilling shifts.
- The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in reduced capacity to run workshops, while some activities were still offered online it was considered preferable for staff to complete these workshops face to face.

Sharing the WoW

This government service has strategically shared the WoW with others. They have also worked hard to share WoW practice within their own organisation, by advocating for broader adoption of the WoW framework across other local service sites and at an executive level. A WoW community-of-support has been supported by the agency to undertake and share WoW activities outside of the workplace. This group organises events in the community out of work hours, such as a walking group to support positive mental health and wellbeing.

The service has also participated in WoW activities through the regional wellbeing hub and provided structured WoW introduction activities to other services in their local area, including education, disability, multi-cultural, and Aboriginal services.

The service also reports strong organic and unstructured sharing of WoW thinking and practice by participating staff. This has included sharing WoW learning with family, friends and work colleagues who had not participated in WoW workshops.

Conclusion

In this workplace, strong leadership and significant investment has resulted in widespread adoption of the WoW to support positive mental health and wellbeing. The framework is introduced to staff during their induction, is offered as part of staff learning and development opportunities, and regular WoW activities and communications support the embedding of WoW thinking and practice.

Furthermore, this service has effectively shared the WoW with other services, allowing transmission and uptake of WoW thinking and practice in new settings.

Significant investments in the WoW are reported to be reaping benefits for this service, including improved staff morale and relationships in the workplace and reduced staff absences.