

## WoW case study – (P-6) state school

### 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 public-school setting, with positive outcomes enabled through the partnership and commitment of regional and school leaders.

### 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

Through partnership with the Queensland Department of Education (DoE) key education personnel have been formally trained in WoW. Over time a tailored version of the WoW program was developed specifically for education settings (*Wow Ed*) that aligned the WoW evidence base, resources and activities with the DoE policies and strategies including the Queensland DoE *Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework*. The *Wow Ed* program was developed through a collaboration between Implemental, the *Principal Advisor – Mental Health Student Engagement and Wellbeing* (North Coast Region and Metro North Region) and other key stakeholders.

At one (P-6) state school, the principal was committed to developing a more structured approach to mental health and wellbeing support for students and teachers, including by integrating WoW with the school's implementation of the *Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework*. The initial focus of this work was in their primary school setting.

There was strong support from key personnel, including the teaching staff and guidance officer who recognised the valuable impacts improved health and wellbeing has on teaching quality, workplace satisfaction and student learning.

## Implementation

Following participation in a one-day WoW introductory program, three staff were supported to participate in the WoW five-day DIY Happiness program that verifies participants as WoW practitioners and links them into ongoing network of practice support.

There was strong commitment by the school's leadership to implement the WoW framework. Two teachers were regularly released from the classroom to prepare and run activities with students and teachers. Additional resources were provided to fund activities.

School leaders and WoW practitioners believed having three staff trained in WoW built momentum for changed thinking and practice related to health and wellbeing within the school. The drive, energy and personal interest of the WoW practitioners was also recognised as important to effectively implementing and embedding the WoW framework.

Implementation of the WoW framework has been further supported by integrating WoW thinking and practice into the existing school curriculum, wellbeing policies and activities. There has been a strong focus on consistently using the framework and the six WoW elements in all school wellbeing activities. This has led to both students and staff using more health-promoting thinking and practice.

## Activities

This (P-6) state school has run WoW activities and/or shared WoW resources with students, teachers, parents, and other local education providers. The school has also integrated WoW thinking and practice into school vision statements and policies.

WoW-specific curriculum has been developed for students and is being consistently and widely applied. Mindfulness activities are now routine practices to assist students to refocus after a break.

Teachers have regular opportunities to learn more about the WoW framework in staff meetings, through a newsletter, via planning and wellness days, and through participation in WoW activities. Continuation of WoW activities was prioritised in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and facilitators ran multiple online activities to support staff during this time.

WoW practitioners also shared resources with parents in response to the pandemic and these were positively received.

There has been a strong push to ensure health and wellbeing sits at the forefront of school decision making. This has led to consistent use of the WoW to structure 'mental health week' activities, and student and teacher wellbeing days. The school has integrated WoW thinking and practice into school wellbeing and behaviour management policies, and into its organisational vision - *To have psychologically healthy students and staff*.

The school has worked to share their WoW knowledge beyond the school, conducting a WoW open day and running WoW introductory sessions with other schools.

The next step for WoW activities at the school includes transitioning key WoW thinking and practice developed in the primary school setting into the middle school and offering WoW activities to parents and caregivers.

## Outcomes

### Individual changes

- Teachers and students are using more health-promoting language and frameworks to reflect on their wellbeing.
- Teachers and students report increased knowledge about strategies to maintain health and wellbeing.
- There has been a marked increase in social, psychological and physical care activities reported by teachers and students. Teachers report calmer classrooms following WoW activities.

### Organisational changes

- There is a more consistent and comprehensive understanding of the science and evidence behind positive mental health and wellbeing.
- There is more systematic planning related to health and wellbeing using the WoW framework.
- Regular WoW activities are being run at the school. It informs school curriculum, health and wellness activities, staff development and communications, and parent support activities.
- The WoW has been integrated into the school vision, policies, and behaviour management strategies.

### Systems level changes

- Activities at this school form part of a broader strategic approach to appropriately integrate *WoW Ed* into education settings to support DoE student and staff wellbeing objectives. The important role and leadership of the *Principal Advisor - Mental Health Student Engagement and Wellbeing* to support this is recognised.
- The school has supported and trained other education providers in the WoW Framework.
- The school has acted as an exemplar of good WoW practice in school settings to advocate for broader uptake of the WoW across the education system.

## Changes in health and wellbeing

Practitioners report improved health and wellbeing in students and staff following implementation of the WoW framework. Teachers report increased awareness and use of strategies to support their health and wellbeing. Students are recognised to be calmer, and classroom environments more conducive to learning.

*“During Covid, teachers ran meditation each morning. They said it really helped students start their day better.”*

*“There have been big increases in staff awareness of their own mental health.”*

*“It’s hard to know what impact it has had [on wellbeing] but teachers and students continue to request activities like mindfulness, yoga, gratitude.”*

*“I think the mental health of staff has improved dramatically.”*

## Embedding the WoW

This (P-6) state school has prioritised school resources to embed the WoW framework. Factors considered most helpful included:

- Training a critical mass, in this instance three school staff to support each other in WoW implementation and build momentum

- Dedicating time and resources to implement WoW activities, including time to develop curriculum for students, embed WoW practices into school policies and processes, and run activities for teachers
- Sharing the science behind positive mental health and wellbeing with staff to build credibility for WoW activities
- Using the WoW repeatedly and consistently. The primary school completes a WoW activity each day of the week (e.g. mindfulness Monday; fun Friday).

While the initial focus of WoW activities has been in the primary school, the school is now incorporating more ‘whole of school’ activities (e.g. meditation in school assembly) and has developed a strategic plan to implement more WoW practice into their middle school during 2021.

## Enablers

- The role of the *Principal Advisor – Mental Health Student Engagement and Wellbeing* (North Coast Region) was highlighted as an important conduit to ongoing WoW learning opportunities and resources. The value of WoW champions within the school was also acknowledged as important to uptake by others.
- Teachers reported that the personal health and wellbeing gains they’ve received through participation in WoW activities has encouraged them to share what they have learnt with students and parents.
- The simplicity of the WoW framework is reported to have facilitated easy uptake of ideas and activities by teachers in the classroom. Teachers feel confident and capable of sharing WoW thinking and practice with students.
- The strengths-based nature of the WoW was considered important to implementation. WoW practitioners and other school staff reported that a strengths focus complemented other education strategies and initiatives and their own personal beliefs.
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## Barriers

- Similar to other staff training, the costs of backfilling classroom teachers was recognised as a barrier to further sharing WoW practice with other local schools. It costs approximately \$500 per day to cover a classroom teacher and these costs are currently being subsumed by the school. While the school allocates a significant portion of their health and wellbeing budget to WoW activities, this doesn’t include costs associated with sharing the WoW with others.
- While the WoW is a simple and easy to use framework, it was acknowledged that when staff leave it takes time and further resources to train new teachers in WoW practice and the benefits of positively framed health and wellbeing activities.

## Sharing the WoW

This state school has shared the WoW widely, including strategic engagement of students, teachers, and parents within the school. Having embedded the WoW effectively within their primary school setting they are now implementing WoW practice into their middle school.

The school has also shared the WoW through a WoW open day which six schools attended, and they have completed WoW training with three other local primary schools. Network meetings attended by the School Guidance Officer has provided further opportunities to share the WoW.

## Conclusion

Development of an education-specific WoW (*WoW Ed*) and strong support for implementation of this framework by the *Principal Advisor – Mental Health Student Engagement and Wellbeing* (Northern Region) has facilitated strong engagement with the WoW at this (P-6) state school. Coupled with a strong commitment by the school principal, other

organisational leaders, and substantial resourcing, the WoW framework is now well embedded in the primary school with plans for further implementation into the middle school.

The school has effectively shared their learnings with other local education providers, although costs associated with this has limited the engagement of other schools.

Teachers, students and parents have all reported positive health and wellbeing benefits as a result of participation in WoW activities.