

WoW case study – Regional wellbeing hub

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 through the planning and implementation of a Regional Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub. This demonstrated the importance and impact of providing a common language and framework for engaging diverse services and community stakeholders in mental health and wellbeing improvements.

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

WoW has been used to support efforts to improve understanding and capacity for improved mental health and wellbeing at the community level. WoW underpinned the model for piloting three Regional Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs from 2016 to 2020. The Regional Wellbeing Hubs initiative was funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission and delivered in collaboration with the Wellbeing Capacity Building project. This case study describes how WoW was used in the operation of one Hub. Work in this geographical area focused on using WoW to engage and support vulnerable and isolated community groups, with a focus primarily on strategic and systems-level initiatives.

Additional information on the Commission’s mental health and wellbeing initiatives is available at: <https://www.gmhc.qld.gov.au/awareness-promotion/mental-health-wellbeing-initiatives>.

Implementation

This Hub employed a *Wellbeing Hub Coordinator* to enhance mental health and wellbeing in two communities. This person was trained in two complementary wellbeing models: WoW to provide a framework for improving people’s wellbeing at an individual level (primarily through training, activities, and events), while the Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) assisted decision making and planning in relation to broader health determinants, population characteristics and values.

Using these approaches, hub leads worked alongside partner organisations and community members to understand, support and enhance local mental health and wellbeing initiatives. There was strong support by participants to use WoW as a way of strengthening existing, and identifying new wellbeing initiatives. Local strategic activities were WoW branded and community members and service providers began to see WoW as a unifying framework, symbolising their efforts to help everyone to flourish, particularly those most likely to be struggling.

Activities

The coordinator(s) worked in partnership with local leaders, community members, organisations, service providers, government departments/representatives and academics. Activities included:

- Six co-facilitated workshops that led to the development of a WoW branded Collaborative Action Plan to enable more people to flourish (focus areas included housing, education and employment)
- Engagement of key community and service leaders to undertake a Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment, to identify the factors most likely to help/hinder mental wellbeing, in relation to a multi-purpose community space. This helped to initiate a community-led response to wellbeing which included weekly wellbeing days with free activities for different age groups, access to health and social services, and free transport (these initiatives used WoW elements and branding)
- Enhanced service coordination activities, and the development of new governance and service delivery models for volunteer organisations
- Co-chairing a network to enhance access to health and social services
- Providing WoW workshops and activities to a range of groups, including building apprentices, childcare workers, volunteer organisations, service providers and the community as a whole (e.g., stalls at local festivals and information days)
- Identifying two local people to be trained as verified WoW practitioners, able to conduct training themselves
- Co-developing and co-delivering professional presentations on different aspects of these initiatives at various professional and academic forums.

Outcomes

Individual changes

- Increased awareness of the importance of wellbeing and how to improve it.
- More engagement in wellbeing activities, especially for older people (e.g., Men’s Sheds, Progress Association).
- Improved access to health and community services and increased referrals to family violence, mental health and Alcohol and Other Drug services.
- Community members report increased social, psychological and physical care activities. There has been strong uptake of group activities like walking and cooking groups which reduce social isolation.

Organisational changes

- Community organisations have used WoW to strengthen their governance and service delivery frameworks.
- Community and health service providers better understand the science behind wellness, and have broadened their understanding of health and wellbeing, as well as undertaking more health promotion practice.

Systems level changes

- WoW has provided a unifying framework for service funders, service providers and community members to work together on shared goals and to better delineate work roles.
- Shared use of WoW across the health and community service system has led to further investments by the local Primary Health Network.
- Greater community ownership and initiative to address local needs has been reported. Service providers report stronger engagement around key local issues by community members using WoW.
- Effective collaborative responses to the Covid -19 pandemic which highlighted existing community wellbeing and resilience

Changes in health and wellbeing

Using WoW to provide a common language and a framework for building knowledge skills was a significant contributor to observed benefits for individuals and groups. Increased social participation, particularly by isolated community members, has been reported alongside increased psychological and physical care activities. Knowledge of, and access to, health and community services increased as a result of activity arising from the Collaborative Action Plan. The Collaborative Action Plan involved 40 community and health organisations, 80 community members, and federal, state and local government representatives working together. This facilitated widespread exposure to the WoW for health and community service organisations, volunteer organisations and local community members.

“When we started, the perception around mental health was that it was all about when things were not going well. There have been dramatic changes to perceptions... focusing more on health promotion and prevention activities.”

“There are people we know who have done the workshop, and then weeks or months later they’ve been at a time in their life where they’ve been on the brink of suicide. They’ve used what they learned in the workshop to get through, and it’s helped them.”

“This communities COVID-19 disaster management working group was better prepared to offer community driven solutions to the ‘shock’ of the crisis, compared to other local areas. The legacy of the WoW program was evident in the initiatives that emerged to support community resilience and recovery.”

Embedding WoW

The regional wellbeing hub’s promotion and use of WoW has facilitated its integration into the local community. This has occurred both strategically and practically.

The WoW has been embedded as a tool to assist with service planning activities with local community, health, and volunteer services. This has enabled organisations with different theoretical foundations to come together under the unifying wellbeing framework. WoW was particularly useful helpful in this way due to it being understandable and simple to use, and adaptable to local contexts. This allowed over 40 local community and health services to use WoW collaboratively.

Practically, the WoW has been used to brand wellbeing activities in the local community. It has been used to highlight existing community wellbeing initiatives and promote new ones. WoW branding of community-based health and wellbeing initiatives has been viewed as useful for encouraging participation. The recognition of the WoW brand, and many activities being offered by local and trusted community services and members, has facilitated in increased involvement across the community.

Enablers

- The strategic roles of the *Wellbeing Hub Coordinator(s)* were recognised as being necessary to effectively implement WoW activities in the local area and integrate with broader activities of the regional wellbeing hub. This role was also important in bringing community services and the community together.
- The simplicity of the WoW framework was recognised as important to bring organisations with different theory and practice bases together to plan activities. The WoW can be easily overlaid with existing organisational theory and practice and used as a unifying framework.

Barriers

- The impact of Covid-19 on WoW activities in the local community was noted. Many group activities had to stop for a period, and this has reduced participation and slowed momentum, especially for older people.
- While WoW implementation and activities have been well-resourced and supported, locally there has also been increasing demand for these activities. This has meant that not all community requests for WoW activities could be met.

Sharing the WoW

The collaborative approach embedded in the regional wellbeing hub facilitated widespread promotion and uptake of the WoW framework in this local community. Strong alignment of WoW and regional hub goals, and strong advocacy for the WoW by the Wellbeing Hub Coordinator(s), has been central to its effective promotion and uptake by local government services, community, health and volunteer services, and local community members.

Using trusted local community service providers and community members to run WoW activities was also recognised as important in effectively transmitting key WoW thinking and practice to others. Furthermore, embedding the WoW into local community activities such as weekend markets facilitated widespread exposure to the brand, thinking and practice.

Finally, positive experiences by community members who have participated in WoW activities have facilitated significant ripple effects, where individuals have informally shared their positive WoW experiences with friends and family.

Conclusion

Alignment between regional wellbeing hub activities and WoW has facilitated strong engagement with the framework in this geographical area. This has been mediated by strategic advocacy from personnel with key roles driving both WoW and regional wellbeing hub activities.

Using WoW for collaborative planning activities has allowed for widespread exposure to the framework. Agreements to identify wellbeing activities in the local community with WoW branding have further assisted in embedding WoW.

Implementation has been enhanced by training trusted local community members and service providers in WoW and encouraging them to engage the community more broadly.