



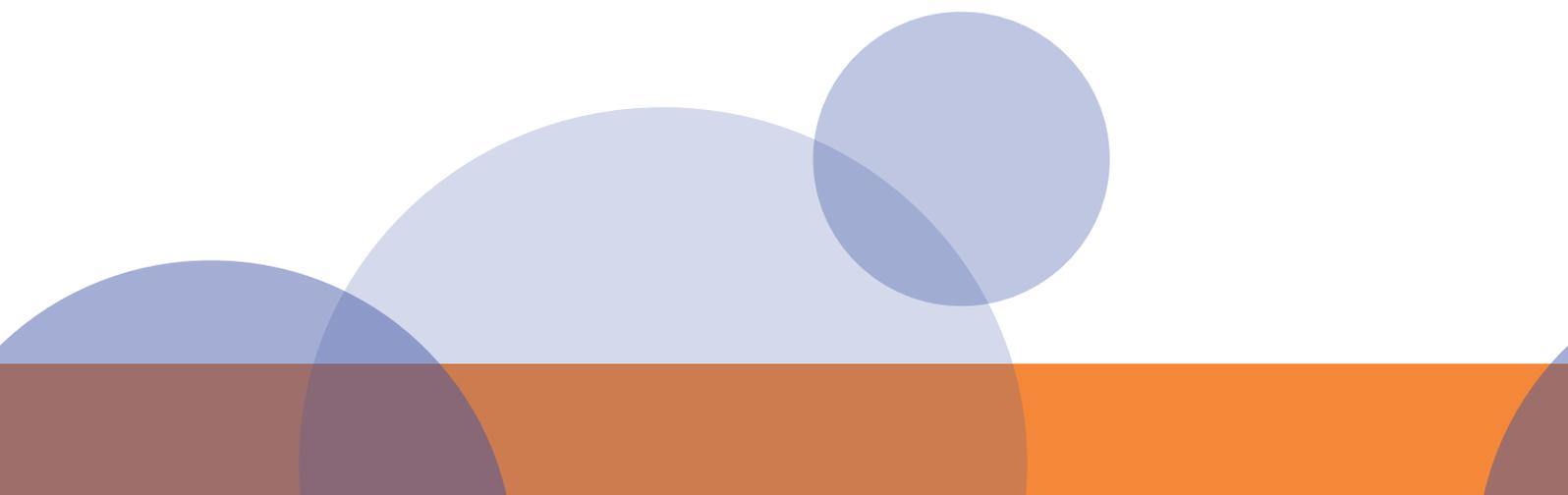
**Mental  
Health**  
Commission  
of New South Wales



Participant discussions from  
*Wellbeing Collaborative – Wellbeing is Everybody's  
Business*

Hosted by  
**Mental Health Commission of NSW**

**Sydney** and **Wollongong**, 27-28 February 2017



*This article includes the discussions and presentations of participants in this event but does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Mental Health Commission of NSW.*

## A world of wellbeing

By Cosetta Bosi

The University of Wollongong's student residence Kooloobong Village is a living, breathing example of what experts around the world say we should all be striving for: a place where wellbeing is placed at the heart of communities, our workplaces and our personal lives.

It didn't take long during a tour of the campus – with its enticing bushland setting, its Student Life & Wellbeing Hub, its activities such as breakfast time Yoga and Yoghurt, and the residence itself – to understand how powerful it was to have the idea of wellbeing so embedded in daily life.

[Kooloobong Village](#) is the jewel in the university's wellbeing crown. It is the first student residence in the world based on positive psychology – the study of human flourishing. It caters for around 450 undergraduate and post-graduate students, and the village is being expanded to cater for 800 more.

It begins with the [Wheel of Wellbeing](#), imprinted on its front doors, entreating all who enter to be active; to keep learning; to give; to connect; to take notice; and to care. The Wheel of Wellbeing is an innovative tool developed in the UK to help people turn theory into practice by taking simple, practical steps to improve their own wellbeing.

Those fundamental messages flow throughout the residence using the [positive psychology-based Live Out Loud program](#) to provide daily events and activities that are based on the science of wellbeing and that have a positive wellbeing rating.

This continues to the welcoming language used to name its common areas and rooms, such as the Gratitude room for the sharing of pre-loved items; to games rooms; to music; to sport; to activities such as Tea with TED [Talks]; and to the many student leaders who deliver programs to their fellow students and who are recognisable by the colour of their t-shirts representing each Wheel of Wellbeing domain.

The campus tour, led by the university's wellbeing co-ordinator, post-graduate student and Kooloobong resident Ninan Mathew, was part of a recent and vibrant two-day gathering of about 20 NSW, interstate and international mental health leaders from Government, NGO, private and academic settings.

### **Collaboration**

Dubbed the Wellbeing Collaborative Match, this was one of many similar gatherings held around Australia covering a wide range of issues in the mental health and wellbeing area. They were part of the lead-up to the International Initiative in Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) Forum held in Sydney in March, hosted by the NSW Mental Health Commission in association with the NSW Department of Health.

The participants came together to network; to present, workshop, formulate, share and gather ideas; to get a taste of wellbeing programs in action; and to seek out opportunities for collaboration on wellbeing across organisations and disciplines. They represented a diverse range of organisations and institutions.

### **Everybody's business**

The key question explored by the group was how could organisations and people be mobilised to develop and implement programs and policies to foster wellbeing?

It was clear that participants agreed passionately about positioning wellbeing as everybody's responsibility. However, they also agreed that coming up with a broadly applicable definition of wellbeing, having enough of the right kind of evidence, and finding the right language to use to get collaborative action happening across a variety of settings, continued to be a challenge.

For many, there was a desire for innovative ways to tackle mental health by looking through the lens of wellbeing to promote prevention initiatives rather than focusing purely on treatment and support of those with mental illness.

Wellbeing needed to be recognised and promoted in its own right.

## **From decision-making to action**

“There is some recognition that the invest-to-save concept is permeating,” said Dr Simone Caynes, principal policy adviser at the Queensland Mental Health Commission.

“But...I think one of the big issues is that we continue to drive this from a mental health policy perspective rather than seeing it as an integral part of social policy, economic policy, housing policy.”

Dr Caynes felt that wellbeing in an organisation was about really good human resource management and leadership.

Andrew Ellery, a program manager with iCare, said that irrespective of what wellbeing meant to any one individual, embedding it in all aspects of life was a win for everyone.

He noted it could be “tricky” to talk about it in some contexts, especially where equity was an issue.

“You’ve got to adapt to each situation and context...You can’t just take off-the-shelf policies and programs and expect them to work unless you’re talking to the people they’re going to affect,” Mr Ellery said.

Professor Prasuna Reddy, Professor of Mental Health and Implementation Science in the Faculty of Health at UTS, said: “I think we’re the kind of people that want to be inclusive, want to get an understanding, who really get this stuff, but in a sense that holds us back from moving.

“Why can’t we break it down to one simple thing that we can do that we think will make a difference? Just start with something rather than wait for it all to come together?”

The participants generally acknowledged that the many contributions fostering wellbeing already being made through the local community, through schools, through childcare centres and so on had to be better recognised and built on.

## **It's never too early to start**

During the visit to the University of Wollongong, participants took in another practical example – the cutting-edge [Early Start](#) Discovery Space for children aged birth to 10 years and their families.

Open to the public, it is a purpose-built, hands-on learning space allowing children, carers and educators to explore, create and play together alongside state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities.

The Early Start Discovery Space is filled with interactive, evolving playful experiences designed to spark imagination and ignite a love of learning.

Martha Johnson, Manager, Experiences and Visitors, explained there were multiple immersive “experiences” – in addition to smaller “encounters” - that presently ranged from an archaeological dig, a shipyard, a construction site, a tummy tour and a marketplace, to a café, a creative art space, a “lights, sound, action” stage experience and a “crawlers beach” for birth-2 year olds.

Early Start also comprises of multi-disciplinary research; courses for the next generation of early childhood teachers doing their training at the University of Wollongong; and partnerships with 41 early childhood centres in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW to allow innovation to be pioneered where it is most needed.

Both the Early Start initiative and Kooloobong Village were featured in the [Living Well Report](#), the people-focused companion document to [Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014-2024](#).

## **Putting people at the centre of program design**

There didn't seem to be any disagreement among participants that however you described it – wellbeing, resilience, good mental health – it was essential and ideas, definitions, designs and programs to promote it needed to be person-centred.

Presenter Dr Mieke van der Bijl-Brouwer, from the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), spoke about designing programs and projects from a perspective based on the deepest needs and aspirations of all stakeholders.

“What I’m interested in is how we can bring people together around complex issues related to mental health and wellbeing and how we can make that a productive collaboration,” she said.

Originally from the Netherlands, with a background in industrial design, her research spans the fields of human-centred design and innovation practices, including in the public sector. She contributes to the educational program of the UTS Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation – a world-first trans-disciplinary degree.

Dr van der Bijl-Brouwer led discussion on how different types of problems could be identified and addressed – despite their challenges and despite the fact people tended fall back on their own preferred ways of problem-solving.

Societal issues such as mental health and wellbeing, she said, were complex problems because they could not be put down to a single cause and effect.

### **We can all be leaders**

Understanding the role of research evidence, of data to galvanise action by decision-makers was the theme of presentations and discussion led by Ms Lena Etuk and Dr Alexandra Walker from the [Centre for Social Impact \(CSI\)](#).

The CSI is a collaboration between the University of NSW, Swinburne University of Technology (Melbourne) and the University of Western Australia to use research, teaching, measurement and the promotion of public debate to deliver positive social impact.

Dr Walker, a CSI research officer, has been carrying out a review of already published research on leadership, particularly leadership for social purpose organisations.

Twenty years ago, she said, organisations tended to operate with the model of a “heroic” leader, who had all the information, at the top of the hierarchy while the workers were regarded as “passive followers”.

At that time, the way to influence decision-makers, to influence the “person at the top”, was “to get them to like you” which made it more likely they trusted you. This approach led to the increased use of anecdotal information or hunches rather than data or measurement, Dr Walker said.

Her review found leadership had now become about collaboration. Technology and the information revolution meant we all had information at our fingertips so we could all be leaders.

“Now we influence and mobilise through the best use of information, through data and measurement,” Dr Walker said.

For the intern it might be more about frontline leadership and for the CEO more about systems leadership, she said, “but we have everyone exercising leadership all the time”.

Ms Etuk, who before joining the CSI was an applied social demographer at Oregon State University in the US, researches technological solutions for collecting and sharing scientific information to make a social impact.

“We have to get more data about what’s actually happening on the ground and then...use that in conjunction with some national research or other discourses that can inform that conversation.

“Everyone should be able to participate in that data gathering, that collection, that sharing, that dissemination. This is the new model of data-driven decision-making and collaborative leadership, she said.

During what proved to be a lively discussion, Dr Karen Newbigging, senior lecturer in Healthcare Policy and Management at the University of Birmingham, commented that the key role for mobilising decision-makers was taking information and turning it into intelligence – how it could be used, how it could be applied, how credible it was and how reliable it was.

## **The power of self-expression for wellbeing**

During the Wellbeing Match, participants experienced a performance by an energetic, up-and-coming hip hop group called Indigenoise.

The group has been nurtured by the not-for-profit [One Vision Productions](#), which empowers young people by teaching them freedom of expression through music, film and culture. The program has engaged a diverse range of people, including more than 40 Indigenous communities around Australia.

Founder and CEO Mark Robertson explained he was motivated to work with young people because of his own experience of growing up in a depressed part of Brisbane, leaving home young and ending up as a street kid. With the help of a mentor, he found his way back to university study and eventually to the life and work he knows now.

He spoke about bringing together two Indigenous communities in far north NSW who were at odds with each other. When the communities came to watch their young people performing together “all the Elders started crying and breaking down and I was like, man, this is it”.

What was needed, Mr Robertson said, were mentors, good teachers and programs that taught young people how to use their minds, how to think again.

## **Respect, responsibility and reciprocity**

Throughout the two days in Sydney and Wollongong, spinning the Wheel of Wellbeing – with its touch points of Spirit: give; Body: be active; Mind: keep learning; People: connect; Place: take notice; Planet: care – proved to be a popular but potent way to spark people to suggest ideas or highlight any practical action they had taken, no matter how small.

The wellbeing values illustrated by those touch points were strongly reflected in the words of Aunty Norma Ingram who offered the Welcome to Country at the start of the gathering.

She spoke about the importance of connection and of the mental health issues for Aboriginal people that had resulted from the disruption and disconnection from their culture and from their people.

Respect, responsibility, and reciprocity, she said, were the three very important issues and values for Aboriginal people. But, she stressed, these were actually values for all Australians.

**The following is a list of the Wellbeing Collaborative Match participating organisations:**

- iCare (part of WorkCover in NSW)
- Women's Mental Health Network (Victoria)
- Western Australian Association for Mental Health
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District
- Matua Raki, National Addiction Workforce Development Centre (New Zealand)
- Crowe Horwath (a global accounting firm)
- SuperFriend (a national mental health promotion foundation)
- Waves of Wellness Foundation (a mental health surf therapy charity)
- Birmingham University (UK)
- Monash University
- University of Technology Sydney
- University of Wollongong
- Mental Health Commission of NSW