



# **Embedding Mindfulness & Wellbeing in VET & Dual Sector Education for Improved Mental Health, Resilience & Performance**

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Tammy Casselson

Victorian Skills Authority Fellowship, 2024

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# 01

## Acknowledgements

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### The Awarding Bodies

The Fellow sincerely thanks the Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) for providing funding support for the ISS Institute and for this Fellowship.

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## Sponsor – The Victorian Skills Authority

The Victorian Skills Authority works in partnership with the International Specialised Skills Institute by funding the VET International Practitioner Fellowships. The Fellowship program focuses on developing opportunities within the VET sector to assist in building an Education State in Victoria that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. In addition, the program is funded to support the priorities of Skills First, including developing capacity and capability, innovative training practices and increasing teacher quality within the VET sector as well as building industry capability and developing Victoria's current and future workforce.

## Fellow's Acknowledgements

*You must surround yourself with the dreamers and  
the doers,*

*the believers and the thinkers,*

*but most of all surround yourself with those who  
see the greatness within you*

*even when you don't see it in yourself.*

*Edmund Lee*

The Fellow is filled with gratitude to be surrounded by exceptional people; friends, family, colleagues, and fellow journeymen who offer inspiration, support & kindness. First thank you to the VSA and the ISS Institute for making this a possibility. Especially thank you to Katrina Jojkity, Kay Schlesinger and Anne-Maree Butt for their incredible direction, passion, and encouragement to dream big.

At this point the Fellow will take the opportunity to thank the many colleagues, from Holmesglen, who have offered support and assistance with their immense knowledge, advice and moral support during this project (this includes many I have thanked personally); Robyn Neeson, Sam Duncan, Alyssa-Forbes Nicholson, Gabby Koutoukidis, Angela Frankl, Suzie Zarris, Veronica Ross, Clare Milligan, Janine Nielsen, Laura Delaney, Steve

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Thank you to the multitude of presenters and participants at the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) Congress, for their passion, enthusiasm to see change and impact and generosity to share knowledge and resources. Thank you to the organisers of the conference, ASN Events and to IPPA.

Thank you to Vicki Cabrera, Wellbeing & Social Impact Consultant, Claremont University, who the Fellow spent a day with, in Los Angeles, USA, and who presented multiple insightful papers at the IPPA congress.

Thank you to Craig Hassed OAM, Director of Education at the Monash Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies, coordinator of mindfulness programs across Monash University. Craig has been incredibly generous with his research data, experience, knowledge, and time helping the Fellow advocate for a mindfulness-based wellbeing (MBW) program at Holmesglen and in the VET sector.

Lastly the Fellow wishes to acknowledge her greatest inspiration; to always rise, to be an example of compassion, resilience and making a difference, her children, Teegan and Jayden.

I am so excited to share what I have learned and to make an impact.





# 02

## Executive Summary

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### Wellbeing For Resilience

This fellowship aims to share, learn, and build connections to discover possibilities to implement mindfulness and wellbeing into the Australian Vocational and Dual Education Sectors for improved Mental Health, Resilience & Performance.

Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs work well for diverse student cohorts especially needed in a post covid society where uncertainty and feelings of disconnection and isolation are at an all-time high. In a global society, of growing local multiculturalism, a society working to be equitable, but in reality, filled with many people feeling excluded, programs that teach tolerance, inclusivity, perspective and empathy are increasingly important.

Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as 'The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy'. However, wellbeing is a much larger term than this. It must encompass all dimensions of a person's life. A person truly thriving; this also includes a person managing through the challenges, the ability to 'bounce' with life, to be resilient.

There are opportunities for being proactive and innovative leaders, in a time where staff and students are struggling. A Proactive Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program will show students and staff they matter.

There have been murmurs building at a grassroots level, they are finally making themselves heard. Recognition that we have a mental health crisis,

that perceived psychological distress is at high levels and levels of wellbeing are low. We are facing increasing behavioural issues driving away educators, excluding students and a bigger crisis is looming.

Mindfulness-based programs have been shown to;

- benefit mental and physical health (improve mental health e.g. anxiety, depression, substance use, chronic pain, stress management),
- improve cognitive and affective processes (attention, memory, problem solving, emotional regulation),
- and have favourable interpersonal outcomes (relationship management, empathy, and pro-social behaviour). (Huppert, 2017)

This fellowship aims to identify best practice, as well as identify an implementation strategy of Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs to proactively offer staff, educators, and students resilience skills to thrive; to increase wellbeing, mental health, and performance.

The interventions explored offer simple, proven skills for students and staff, in VET and Higher Education, to improve mental health and allow all people to thrive and succeed. These interventions improve overall wellbeing and resilience scores. (Pidgeon & Keye, 2014).



## Fellowship Travel

This fellowship made it possible for the Fellow to pursue wellbeing, resilience and mindfulness interventions, programs and systems being applied and researched worldwide. Information gained could then be used to investigate best practice processes and applications to apply in VET and Dual Sector for Wellbeing and Success.

The Fellow travelled to Canada (Toronto and Vancouver) and USA (LA) in July 2023. The highlight was The International Positive Psychology Association Congress (Vancouver, Canada). This was an opportunity to engage with experts from over 50 countries.

## Fellowship Learnings

There were several Mindfulness-Based Programs in educational settings from around the world, many in tertiary education, all building resilient communities and getting promising results. These programs integrate positive psychology interventions into curriculum and existing subjects through teaching methodology to improve the general wellbeing, focus and performance of their students and achieve positive results. Many integrate the interventions into teaching methodology and institutional culture. Many have a stand-alone subject.

There is research being done at a vast number of universities all over the world, including Australia, with impressively large numbers of students/ participants showing the positive impact of different interventions, mindfulness programs used alone and in conjunction with other interventions.

While there is a large need in Vocational Education & Training (VET) there do not seem to be any programs focused on teaching proactive mindfulness, wellbeing or resilience skills in Victoria, Australia.

## Lessons Learned

In deeper consultation with these successful program leaders six themes emerged:

- Include High Impact Practices (HIP)
  - Research based activities and practices that continue to demonstrate impact even after significant time passed since the intervention.
- Use existing structures and policies
  - Understand the system as it stands and integrate your program using systems already in existence.
- Find Idea Champions to stand with you
  - Build a team of supporters who can play different roles.
- Include student, staff and industry voice
  - Include students, staff and industry as co-creators in development and implementation.
- Evaluate Results
  - Link teaching, interventions, and programs to research. Measure success and areas for improvement.
- Incentivise Participation and Support
  - Students and staff need an incentive to participate.
- Resilience is Key
  - The ability to 'bounce back' from stress or challenge.

## Opportunity For Impact

A Wellbeing program has the power to enrich individuals and a community with a capacity to thrive, and skills to navigate the opportunities and challenges that life presents.

A Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program:

- Builds and supports an inclusive work and learning community by teaching, among other, mindfulness, understanding, awareness, and interpersonal skills.
- Allows learners and staff to be future ready- with a focus on people skills, critical thinking, as well as flexibility and resilience.
- Improves mental health
- Increases perceived feelings of wellbeing

## Opportunity For Action

This fellowship has shone a light on the Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing work the Fellow has been implementing in classroom design and has helped legitimise the need for and benefits of such a program. Through having a group of champions who have supported the program there is a Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program including research to measure the Program's impact being developed and implemented by the Fellow.

Continued development and implementation, as well as continued rollouts are planned for. Further awareness building through dissemination of knowledge will hopefully lead to program development at other VET and Dual Sector Educational Institutions.

## Recommendation

Research supports Mindfulness-based Wellbeing interventions being integrated into teaching methodology, subject material, and stand-alone subjects. Resilience and Wellbeing are crucial skills that VET, and Dual Sector Institutes are well placed to offer training and practice so that people are healthier, happier and future ready.

For real change to occur the system, including the learning frameworks need to include unit of competencies that acknowledge Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing and its impact on resilience, mental health and performance for all people, personally and professionally.

## 03

# Fellowship Background

## Fellowship Aim - A Proactive Approach

**To Share, Learn & Build Connections to Implement Mindfulness & Wellbeing into The Australian Vocational & Dual Education Sectors for Improved Mental Health, Resilience & Performance**

This research aimed to identify best practice, as well as implementation strategy, for Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs to offer staff, educators, and students resilience skills to thrive; to increase wellbeing, mental health and performance.

Focusing on the student as a whole and taking a proactive rather than reactive approach using effective interventions and supportive environments is the foundation of the Framework for Positive Education. Positive education is a form of positive psychology in practical application, using different strategies to teach and promote positive emotions, positive relationships, and resilience.

If we want work ready students, we need to ensure they are able to assess and promote optimal wellbeing functioning. Wellbeing includes four dimensions; emotional, physical, social, spiritual. (Lomas, 2020) with a strong cognitive foundation.

Research has shown the success of Mindfulness programs (Casselson & Neeson, 2022), as well as experience in the classroom with students and

with staff. Research (Crone et al, 2023) showed improvement for personal and professional lives of graduates as overall wellbeing improved through “improved emotional health, decreased neuroticism, increased positive effect, decreased negative effect, and increased mindfulness”.

## The Need For A Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program

### Mental Health Crisis

We are experiencing a mental health crisis. Especially evident since Covid, mental health needs attention in the workplace and in education. The changing landscape requires VET to pivot and focus on this arena.

The Productivity Commission (2020) called for “The Australian Government to develop or commission guidance for non-university higher education providers and Vocational Education and Training providers on how they can best meet students’ mental health needs. (Action 6.4)”

- 1 in 5 people experience symptoms of mental illness every year
- 60% of people living with mental illness will not seek help
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Australians aged 15 to 44
- 9 people in Australia die by suicide every day

([aihw.gov.au/mentalhealth](https://aihw.gov.au/mentalhealth))

Mental Wellbeing was measured by KPMG in 2022 and showed Australians as having a consistently overall low wellbeing score including a higher proportion of Australians experiencing challenges with stress (40 percent), focus and concentration (43 percent) and sleep (34 percent).

Mental health issues are at an all-time high for staff and students in VET & the dual sector.

Increasing reports of antisocial behaviour and high attrition rates highlight the crucial need for building resilience in staff and students.

Wellbeing looks at performance and thriving. VET and Dual Sector Education have a high rate of social behaviour issues and attrition. Wellbeing programs don't only focus on surviving, they are also proactive and build skills needed for the workplace. We have an opportunity to build a more resilient community. This means a healthier community of students, educators and staff who will be able to achieve better results, have better interpersonal skills and prosocial behaviour (leading to better teamwork) and have increased wellbeing. This translates to less attrition and a more inclusive educational system accommodating all students. These tertiary communities will also offer more resilient, well-rounded students into the workforce.

## Inclusion

With increasing numbers of people facing mental health difficulties that may exclude them from study or work, workplaces and tertiary education providers need to prioritise integrating wellbeing into their Diversity and Inclusion Programs. Research has shown the success of such programs (Casselson & Neeson, 2023), as well as experience in the classroom with students and staff. A study by Hassed, et al (2007) found mindfulness-based wellbeing programs reduced depression, hostility, anxiety, improved psychological and physical quality of life. They also noted 90.5% of the students implemented the strategies taught to them.



## Job Ready 'Future Proof' Students

Employers are looking for job ready candidates. Top work skills include many skills that a wellbeing program incorporates. These skills are necessary for success professionally and personally in all industries. Including these top skills identified in research (Poláková et al, 2023):

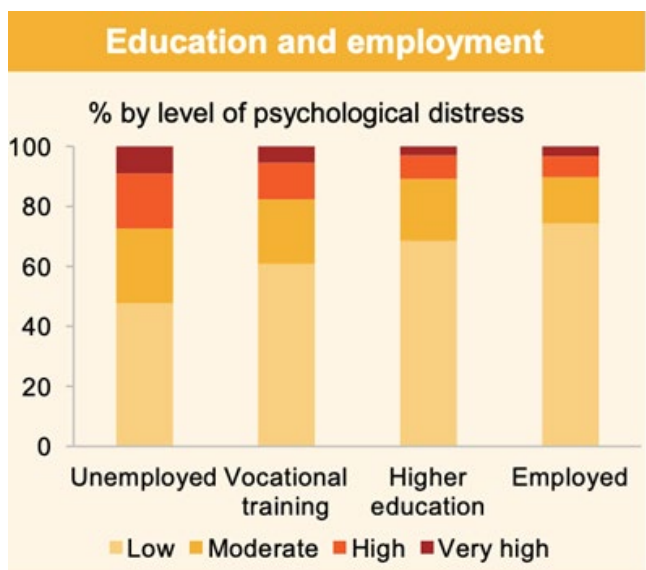
- Communication- interpersonal
- Teamwork
- Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity & Innovation
- Future Focus
- Problem Solving, reasoning
- Taking Responsibility

"These skills are indispensable for navigating challenges and capitalising on the opportunities presented" (Poláková et al, 2023).

## Importance To The Victorian VET Sector

Mindfulness interventions have been seen to be effective in increasing students': attention, concentration, working memory, performance, persistence & engagement, mental and physical health, prosocial behaviour. Research showed improved overall wellbeing. (Casselson & Neeson, 2023)

Research, here in Australia and around the world, indicates VET and Dual Sector Higher Education students, teachers and staff are experiencing very high levels of psychological distress, mental illness, and antisocial behaviour. A 2020 Gallup survey found that Prep (Year K)—12 teachers had the highest burnout with Tertiary educators and staff, falling in second place for professional burnout. (gallup.com)



(Productivity Commission, 2020)

## Methodology

The fellowship created an opportunity for learning, sharing, and building connections with experts around the world as well as visiting Institutes implementing wellbeing programs. The aim was to learn more about best practice and systemic implementation and how to make the greatest impact.

The Fellow travelled to Canada and the United States. Canada included a visit to Toronto where

the Fellow spent a day in conversation at Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

Vancouver, Canada was the highlight of the travel with four full days and evenings at the IPPA (International Positive Psychology Association) Congress 2023, engaging in discussions, workshops and community of practice sessions as well as presenting a poster. In Los Angeles, USA the Fellow spent time with Vicki Cabrera, Wellbeing & Social Impact Consultant, Claremont University.

## Fellowship Biography

**What if through our lives we could make another's life better, more joyful, more fulfilled?**

The Fellow has a strong passion for wellbeing and mindfulness. She works passionately to amplify people's strengths and guide them to live their best lives with compassion and agency. She is an advocate for education, awareness building and social justice change. For over 30 years she has combined teaching in the VET and dual sector, working in corporations as a coach/ trainer, building resilience and wellbeing and teaching trauma informed mindfulness & meditation. She is also a volunteer and counsellor.

Her education background (graduate and postgraduate) is a mix of commerce, psychology, psychometry, mindfulness and education. She strongly believes that education is only complete when it is holistic and includes (inter alia)- emotional intelligence, self-knowledge, ability to connect and collaborate, ability to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. Only then do we set people up for success.

Working with students and staff over a 30-year career the Fellow has had many opportunities to witness the power of Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Interventions. One of many examples includes a student who was particularly engaged in class, studied incredibly diligently, however could not attend



to assignments and exams without being overcome with anxiety and paralysing panic attacks. With breathwork coaching this student began to be able to complete assessments and went on to complete exams with success. A literature review undertaken by the Fellow and Robyn Neeson which became the basis of a poster presented at the 2023 IPPA Conference showed the benefits of a vast number of Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Studies at Tertiary Institutes worldwide. (Casselton & Neeson, 2022). As a part of further qualitative research, (Casselton, Neeson & Delaney, 2023) interviews with facilitator Laura Delaney revealed student outcomes such as, 'liked the effect of breathing in and out as it cleared their mind' 'felt less stressed', another student wrote in their feedback; 'it enabled me to have a happier and calmer life, focusing on the present.' 'I want to express my gratitude to you as the growth mindset I learned ... made me able to achieve my dream.'

## Acronyms & Definitions

<b>IPPA</b>	International Positive Psychology Association
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education (vocational college)
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>VSA</b>	Victorian Skills Authority
<b>AQF</b>	Australian Qualification Framework
<b>HIP</b>	High Impact Practice

### Wellbeing

A holistic term used to measure a sense of happiness and satisfaction with life, It includes four dimensions:

- Emotional - all-round sense of general life satisfaction, emotional regulation
- Physical- self-care, health, vitality, pain management, fitness, nutrition, healthy living habits
- Social- inclusion of healthy relationships, care, trust, support, connection, participation

- Spiritual- growth toward our potential, having meaning and purpose. It includes the physical aspect of personal or religious practices that are value driven.

These have a foundation of cognitive aspects that promote wellbeing including mindset and mindfulness.

### Resilience

#### 'To bounce back' or to 'bounce with'

Resilience is our ability to navigate successfully through life's stress events, both the challenges and opportunities of life. It is the ability to experience stress, to function, to struggle, to experience all emotions and come out the other side by being adaptable and flexible emotionally, mentally and behaviourally.

### Antifragile

#### 'We can grow through what we go through'

Antifragility is the ability to not only bounce back from the challenge but to expand and grow in the process. It is through struggle and experience that we learn and develop. Antifragility is the concept that we can thrive through failure and adversity if we find the lessons. We live in a constantly evolving world, antifragility means embracing change, developing, improving and innovating.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is recognised as both a competency and a state of being.

It is the deliberate act of paying attention, while remaining non-critical and open minded.

It includes the practice of choosing a focal point (for example your breath or an activity) so that you can become completely absorbed. It allows the user to stay on task, focused and motivated. It also calms the nervous system leading to feelings of less anxiety, calm and improved sense of wellbeing.

# 04

## Fellowship Learnings and Findings

The time to be proactive is now. The mental health crisis is real.

A suicide occurs ever 40 seconds around the world (who.int)

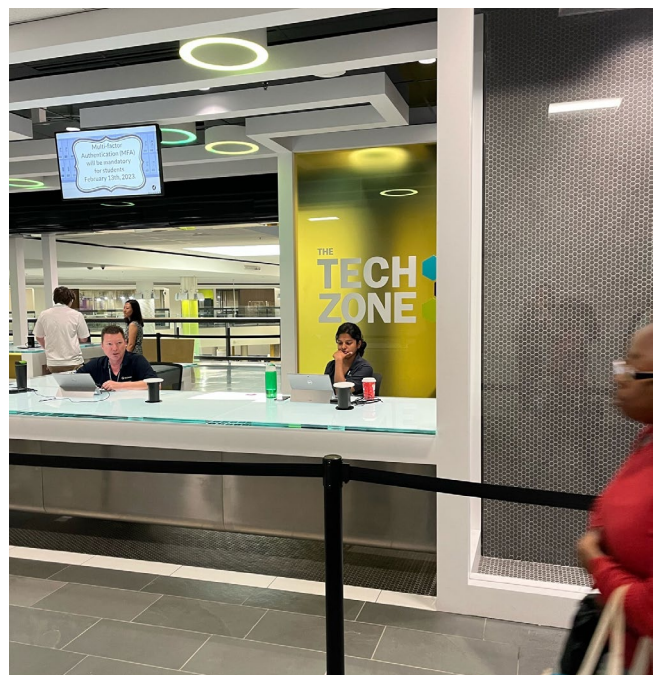
Tertiary institutes worldwide are integrating positive psychology interventions, including mindfulness, into curriculum and existing subjects through teaching methodology to improve the general wellbeing, focus and performance of their students and are achieving positive results.

Schools and Universities are recognizing the need for a proactive curriculum. There is very little proactive work being done in the VET sector to increase resilience.

### Collecting Golden Nuggets of Learning

1. The Fellow spent time at Humber College, Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning (Toronto) in discussion with Vanita Varma Ph.D. (Director, Centre for Innovation in Health & Wellness) and Nicole Tonus-Conti (Project Manager, Centre for Innovation in Health & Wellness). They run a successful, student led Mindfulness program. Discussions included what they have learned from their success and challenges, potential for future collaboration and the benefits they have seen from their Mindfulness and Wellbeing Program.

Their health promotion program includes structured healthy breaks. These include sessions of mindfulness or stretch sessions. They include students in their mindfulness training, who are studying wellness, as trainers, giving these students opportunities for life experience and practical placement. The Centre also partners with community organisations offering mindfulness and wellness days. We discussed the importance of including research as a part of the design as an important element. One of the takeaways from our discussion was the importance of looking for champions in the workplace.





2. The IPPA World Congress 2023 (<https://ippa-wc-2022.m.asnevents.com.au/schedule/search/abstracts>)

was an intense four days of a multitude of topics from climate change to The World Happiness Report, Death and Meaning, Post Traumatic Growth and so much more. A huge subset was around Wellbeing in Education. The significance of the diversity of topics reflects the width and depth of Positive Psychology. Researchers do not only focus on happiness and the positive emotions but also on how we can navigate the times that challenge us. Wellbeing includes both those dimensions too (feeling happy and managing the struggles). To future proof students, employees, community members need to be resilient. And more than that be antifragile. VET has a part to play in teaching these skills.

### Highlights of the conference included:

2.1 Steve Leventhal, Worldbeing (previously CoreStone), MD, United States, spoke inspiringly about his Wellbeing & Resilience work with marginalised youth and the huge impact on students, teachers and systems. ([www.worldbeing.org](http://www.worldbeing.org))

Adolescents in middle- and low-income countries, including India, Rwanda and Kenya, had improvements in resilience and these improvements were still evident 1.5 years later.

2.2 Luz Robinson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, School of Education, spoke from her lived experience there, where they had two failed attempts at suicide and two deaths by suicide before they were pushed, by the students call to action, to bring in a wellbeing program. Robinson presented their Suicide Prevention Strategy and Wellbeing Program. Their program; Source of Strength is used as a 'vehicle for healthy living'. It is made up of a subject for credit, including project based assessments, and a Wellbeing Club.

2.3 Maggie Zhao (WeThrive), University of Hong Kong, discussed the success of their wellbeing program. She shared the statistic that 96% of participants found the program valuable and 92% said they would recommend it to others. Zhao also explained that her students were co-creators of the wellbeing program. (Wethrive.hku)

2.4 Another impactful program was described by Sebrina Doyle Fosco, Penn State University, State College, PA, United States; The CARE program (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education). This is a mindfulness-based professional development program aimed at educators to improve educator wellbeing. Based in the United States this program was funded by the Department of Education. Research found improvements in educator wellbeing and productivity, and the educators classrooms became more positive environments. Student improvements resulted because of educator improvements. One year post intervention benefits were sustained. (Jennings et al, 2019)

2.5. Dr Gabriella Kellerman, CXO BetterUp, CA, United States and Dr Martin Seligman, Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology and Director of the Positive Psychology Center, University of Pennsylvania presented their research on the core work skills needed to thrive today and in the future where there is ongoing change occurring at an accelerating rate resulting in uncertainty. This has



been six years and over \$20 million worth of research. Their model is PRISM, each letter representing a skill we need to be future proof, successful, agile and thrive.

**Prospection.** This is our ability to plan for multiple alternatives in the future. To be agile.

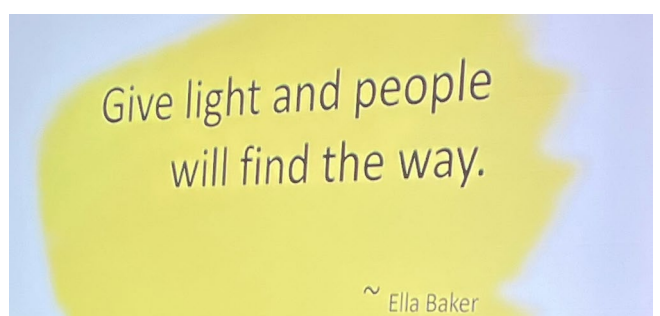
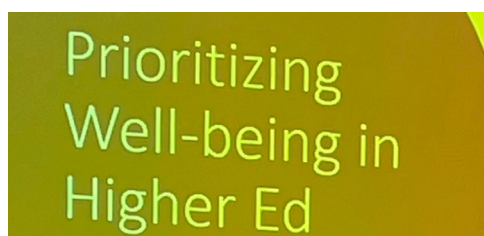
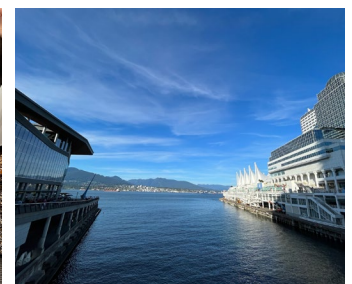
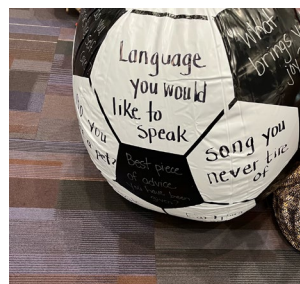
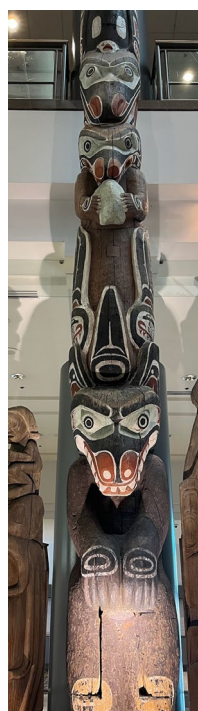
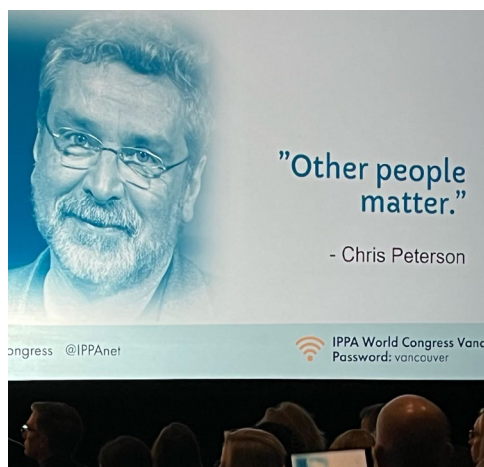
**Resilience.** This is our ability to navigate life's challenges and even learn from those challenges.

**Innovation.** The ability to come up with novel ideas, to be creative and innovative problem solvers and decision makers.

**Social connection and support.** Ability to build trust and rapport with a diverse set of people.

**Mattering and meaning.** The ability to understand our value (mattering) and how we fit into the greater picture (meaning) giving rise to motivation to work.

2.6 Dr Pninit Russo-Netzer, University of Tel Aviv, Israel, discussed the importance of both meaning (purpose) and mattering (a subjective feeling that we 'matter'/ are of value) for our wellbeing. She had multiple hands-on sessions including a session with Dr Michael Steger, Center for Meaning and Purpose, Colorado State University, CO, United States.





3. In Los Angeles, United States, I spent time with Vicki Cabrera, a Wellbeing and Social Impact Consultant and a PHD Wellbeing Researcher at Claremont University. She had multiple presentations at the IPPA Congress. We discussed her focus on measurement, the importance of measuring Wellbeing, and how to measure success in Wellbeing interventions.





4. Professor Craig Hassed OAM, Director of Education at the Monash Centre for Consciousness and Contemplative Studies, and coordinator of mindfulness programs across Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, has been an incredible source of information and guidance. He has generously shared research data, his knowledge, experience and time with the Fellow.

Hassed developed and embedded the first worldwide mindfulness-based healthy lifestyle course into the Monash medical course. Today mindfulness is taught in over 20 degree courses and over 8 faculties at Monash, with 5000 students taking Mindfulness as part of their core curriculum. (Hassed, 2023) Around 2000 staff attend some type of Mindfulness intervention at Monash each year.

## Golden Nuggets of Learning Themes and Recommendations

In discussion, further reading, reflection and synthesising of the learnings, findings and recommendations six core themes became apparent to the Fellow. (In no order of importance.)

### Include High Impact Practices (HIP)

Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs need to be immersed in scientifically backed, research based and action learning activities. Practices that have long lasting results were highlighted in each of the programs presented in the research. Research based activities and practices that continue to demonstrate impact even after significant time passed since the intervention. Having a wide range of interventions and then choosing the right intervention for the cohort to achieve maximum engagement is key.

### Use Existing Structures and Policies

One of the Fellow's greatest barriers to entry has been structures as they exist. The difficulty of bringing about large changes in systems weighed down by rules, regulations, and policies. The Fellow's discussions opened up the idea of building within and then building up rather than attempting to build a whole adjacent building from foundation up. Learning and developing and understanding

the system as it stands and then integrating your program. Finding crevices, however small, to build from within.

### Find Idea Champions to Stand with You

From the Fellow's very first meeting about this project there has been excitement and energy. Connection builds energy. Energy builds momentum. Having people around you to champion you and your ideas is essential. Champions come in many forms. Mentors, subject experts, colleagues, and friends who offer support, acknowledgement, advice, comradery partnership, strength and ideas. Build a team internally and externally of supporters and innovators who can play different roles.

### Include Student, Staff, and Industry Voice

Creating a program that is equitable and successful will allow people to have agency and include their voice. Another way is using feedback and research conducted from previous programs. Delivering a pilot program and including students, staff, and industry as co-creators in development and implementation.

### Evaluate Results

To know in which area of the Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program we are being successful in and in which areas we may need to make modifications we need to link the teaching outcomes and learnings to quantitative and qualitative research. There are many valid and reliable measures available for use for a Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program. The Fellow is currently conducting research with students who have undergone Mindfulness-Based Interventions using both qualitative and quantitative measures.

### Incentivise Participation and Support

In order for students and staff to engage and participate in programs we often need to incentivise the program. Find a hook to incentivise participation through embedding the program as part of required professional development or as credit toward a course. Word of mouth, education, and awareness of the benefits of the program can also be a substitute for an incentive.

## **Resilience Is Key**

Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs build agile people. People who can be flexible and deal with challenges and stress. Resilience is both a trait and a skill. It can be taught. Resilience is the ability to recover from stress situations quickly. An added dimension is to not just recover, but to learn from what you go through. This is known as antifragility.

# 05

## Recommendations & Considerations

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The Fellow's research had led to the following recommendations for Tertiary Educators and Policy Makers:

### For VET and Dual Sector Providers

As with the successful examples of Colleges and Technikons worldwide (including Hong Kong, Canada, United States) VET and Dual Sector Providers in Australia need to design and implement Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Interventions for increased resilience, performance, mental health, inclusion, and future-ready graduates.

This can be achieved explicitly and implicitly:

#### **1. A Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Subject that will be used as an elective or core subject and used for credits toward a degree or diploma.**

A wellbeing subject with a foundation in mindfulness, developing a student's ability to become an independent, resilient worker, with increased ability to manage their wellbeing, motivation, and relationships. The result will be students who perform at their potential, persevere, use impactful communication and flexible thinking. Students are taught skills that are based in theory, science and evidence from positive psychology and neuroscience, through action learning and high impact practices.

Managers who understand the impact of wellbeing on performance, mental health and resilience will find a way to implement this subject within the boundaries of policies and procedures.

This subject would be over a semester/trimester, each week exploring a topic through prereading, discussions, activities, and reflections. This subject could be face-to-face, hybrid or online.

#### **2. Educator Training in Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing.**

Training educators in Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing leads to improvement in educator resilience, wellbeing and productivity including skills like emotional regulation (stress responses), compassion and agility. This in turn leads the educator to having supportive, inclusive learning environments, leading to higher wellbeing for students. Research shows results are sustained one year post training as well as new benefits regarding wellbeing emerging. (Jennings et al, 2019)

This training would be over four days, preferably with time for practice between sessions. Each session explores topics through prereading, discussions, activities, and reflections. This subject could be face-to-face, hybrid or online. A retreat style training has become popular in the United States and could work to include focused attention and self-care, an added incentive to participate, daily mindfulness sessions and nutritious food.

## **Policymakers of The Victorian Skills Authority**

VET and Dual sector institutions are limited by the need to work within frameworks set up by learning bodies. The Fellow recommends that a Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing unit or set of units be designed and integrated into courses, explicit subjects, that teach the required skills. A foundation subject that builds personal resilience, agility, management of stress, reduces burnout, increases wellness, decreases mental health issues, decreases errors in the workplace, increases collaboration, decreases conflict. There are a couple of compatible units of competency present, more are needed. Secondly, training in Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing, for VET teachers should be incentivised to increase teachers' wellbeing, be strong role models, learn skills they can practise with their students and create positive learning classrooms. The benefits of wellbeing will therefore be transferred to students both implicitly and explicitly.

# 06

## Impacts of Fellowship

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### Personal Impact

This fellowship has been incredibly rewarding and enriching for the Fellow. A gratifying adventure into new challenges and experiences, a diverse range of people and increased knowledge of best practice internationally and in Australia. The opportunity to engage first with other fellows and people working with the fellowship and second during travels, connecting with like-minded people where everyone is incredibly passionate to do good work and make a difference, is incredibly inspiring.

Mentoring throughout the fellowship also pushed the Fellow to strive further and think bigger. This led to feeling more confident, making more connections, and building goals personally, professionally, and organisationally.

Developing a voice and feeling empowered to use that voice has led to the Fellow knocking on more doors, entering bigger rooms and sitting at tables she never imagined. This has led to experimenting further on social media, reaching out to connect to people and saying yes to every opportunity that has come her way.

There is a strong link in positive psychology to values and it was affirming to see values-based exercises as being HIP. She was particularly struck by Vinesh Sukumaran a Positive Psychologist from the University of Missouri-Columbia who spoke about his research into the impact of authenticity. The importance of living, working, and leading with

authenticity. Sukumaran (2024) says ‘removing the performance out of life.’

Both the Fellows lived experience and her expertise and experience in the field inform her drive to make a difference in the lives of educators, staff, and student. For the Fellow her resilience has been a key to her own sustained wellbeing. Learning new practices and implementing these along with forming connections with people full of passion and innovation has meant this has been an exceptional year of personal growth for the Fellow.

Being able to share the fellowship journey has been one of the most rewarding aspects. This has been especially fulfilling as a mother, to see her grown up children excited and proud.

### Professional Impact

The conference led to many golden nuggets that inform both the content and teaching technique. Research led to discovery of new High Impact Practices (HIP) and novel ways of using familiar HIP. The Fellow has been piloting the use of these. Research and discussions have also led to learning ways educational institutes have been implementing wellbeing programs successfully. This in turn has led to new ways of thinking and doing for the Fellow.

In addition, the Fellow:

- Guided a Meditation Session at the Holmesglen ASPIRE Conference



- Presented at Holmesglen October VET
- Published in Research Today, The Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA)

## Organisational Impact

The fellowship and continued research offered the Fellow credibility to expand the mindfulness work she had been doing at Holmesglen. During the fellowship year the Fellow continued to:

- Teach mindfulness and wellbeing practices within the classroom.
- Offer mindfulness sessions online through the Insight Timer app and on campus.
- Offer Community of Practice Sessions to share Mindfulness and Wellbeing information and interventions with teachers.
- Deliver Mindfulness and breathwork skills to counsellors. This will help with self-care for counsellors as well as offering tools and techniques for use with clients (students & staff).
- Conduct research as to the effectiveness of the mindfulness interventions as perceived by students.
- Continue to develop and propose a Wellbeing Subject in the business faculty. This will be linked with feedback research to make modifications and pilot the subject.
- Write and teach a wellbeing subject in the Mental Health Certificate IV.
- Holmesglen has committed to a Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program for their Diploma of Nursing staff (40 people) and beginning with 140 students. Rolling out to 1200 students. Following that the Bachelor of Nursing with 600 students.

## Broader Vet Sector Impact

The Fellow has had discussions and made connections beyond Holmesglen with the potential to have an impact on VET and Dual sector education.

The Fellow is hopeful that the innovations at Holmesglen will encourage other VET & Dual sector educators to follow with their own wellbeing programs.

Lastly, the hope is that the results of the research will inspire the VSA to investigate and embed mindfulness-based wellbeing in VET.

# 07

## Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

The dissemination of this research and information gathering has thus far included;

### Publication:

Casselson, T (2024). Embedding Mindfulness & Wellbeing into VET & Dual Sector Education for more Resilient Students and Staff. Research Today Magazine. Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA)

### Poster Presentation:

Casselson, T & Neeson, R. (2022) Do Mindfulness Interventions Help Higher Education Students To Flourish. In IPPA World Congress 2022, Virtual. <https://ippa-wc-2022.m.asnevents.com.au/schedule/session/20419/abstract/92572>

### Conference Presentations:

Aspire Conference 2023. A Moment of Respite. Breathe, Connect, Calm. Mindful Meditation. Holmesglen.

Embedding Mindfulness & Wellbeing into VET & Dual Sector Education. October VET – Holmesglen.





620
640

### Support Children

#### Nursing

## RESULTS

What is the change in protective factors, risk factors and behavioral concerns from among rural Head Start children?

Descriptive Summary of Changes in DECA-P2 Total or Categories from Time 1 to Time 2

Change Category from Time 1 to Time 2

Large Positive, Medium Positive, Small Positive, No Change, Small Negative, Medium Negative, Large Negative

Female, Male

There is a change in an increase in protective factor scores which means a decrease in risk factors from fall to spring.

of linear mixed effects analysis, found no statistically significant difference in T-scores at the Time 1 and spring (i.e. Time 2) assessments.

## IMPLICATIONS

Analysis further delineates the prevalence of risk factors in child protective factors among preschool children in rural, low-income communities and identifies areas in which these children are most in need of additional support.

Children in rural, low-income communities may specifically benefit from social emotional learning opportunities that are aimed at strengthening relationships and self-regulation during early childhood.

Additional attention is also needed for programs and services that work to prevent scarcity of resources in rural communities and foster resiliency.

Adopting a resiliency model allows us to importantly move beyond pathologizing young children, focusing instead on how to support positive developmental outcomes.

# Do mindfulness interventions help higher education students to flourish\*?

\*Flourishing as described in the PERMA model: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (Seligman 2011)  
Literature review 2017-2022

### LITERATURE REVIEW OUTCOMES

**Students experienced an increase in:**

- Ability to manage stress
- Ability to manage symptoms of chronic pain, depression and anxiety
- Attention, concentration and working memory
- Compassion for self and others
- Connection to others
- Emotion regulation
- Engagement and motivation
- Performance and persistence to complete tasks
- Sleep
- Wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional)

### POSITIVE RESULTS

**Irrespective of type or duration of intervention**

### Further research questions

What is the perceived effectiveness of mindfulness interventions for Vocational and Dual Sector students in Melbourne, Australia?

What is the students preferred approach to mindfulness implementation in Vocational and Dual Sector Education?

### Location of existing studies

### GAP:

Short term mindfulness interventions in Australian Vocational and Dual Sector Education

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PO Box 42, Holmesglen  
Victoria Australia 3146  
holmesglen.edu.au

**Graduate and Degree Programs**  
Tammy Casselton, Senior Lecturer  
Robyn Neeson, Senior Lecturer  
Email: Tammy.Casselton@holmesglen.com.au

**TAFE VICTORIA** holmesglen



# 08

## Conclusion

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Wellbeing is essential for us to be productive, and resilience is the key to building wellbeing. It's not just thriving but how we manage the struggles that is important. This underscores the importance of a Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Program that develops resilience.

A Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Subject focuses on the learner, teachers and staff and offers skills to be resilient, agile, engaged, and innovative in education, communities, and the workforce. The Fellow is implementing an innovative Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Subject. This will be linked with research to measure results and make modifications.

Research has been presented that Mindfulness-based Wellbeing Programs demonstrate successful outcomes for students, educators, and staff. There is a need to focus on wellbeing and building resilience due to the large proportion of the population dealing with mental health challenges. Outcomes include the ability to manage stress, which means better ability to cope with academic and workload as well as managing assessment stress. The best outcomes of resilience are not just to bounce back from stress and challenge but to grow and learn from those challenges.

More students and employees will be included when wellbeing is addressed in VET, Dual Sector Education, and the workplace. Wellbeing should be a part of Diversity and Inclusion Strategies. This will increase collaboration and synergy and reduce isolation.

The Fellow has presented the skills needed for a future-proof employee and demonstrated how Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Programs develop these skills. To be resilient, agile, have good communication and connection skills, be able to think critically and to be motivated.

Six key themes were identified; research has shown that resilience is key to wellbeing and success, interventions need to include HIP, successful implementation begins with using existing structures and policies, developing a program should include the voices of those involved in the program for optimal delivery and success, we need to find champions to work with us to get programs implemented, we need to include student and staff voice and we need to evaluate results being achieved.

Holmesglen is committed to prioritising the wellbeing and safety of their learners and staff. The goals outline building and supporting an inclusive work and learning community. Allowing learners and staff to be future ready- with a focus on people skills being critical as well as flexibility and resilience. This aligns with the Fellows Mindfulness-Based Wellbeing Subject goals.

Building wellbeing for educators, staff and students in VET and Dual Sector Higher Education is a proven way to improve increased resilience, thriving, performance, mental health, inclusion, and future-ready graduates.



# 09

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