

Maroondah Positive Education Network

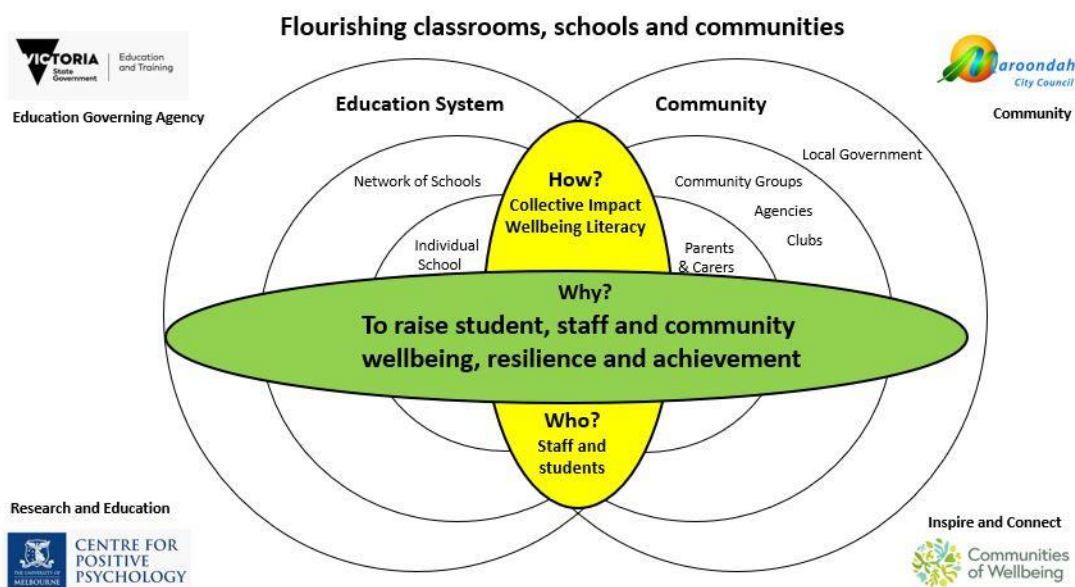
In 2013 Maroondah City Council (MCC) launched a community-wide consultation where diverse representatives came together to discuss key community issues. These discussions uncovered a recurring theme of mental ill health and a desire to build wellbeing as the priority for their plan for a thriving municipality by 2040.

Two years later with a focus on young people the Council began an engagement process for its Youth Strategy. Partnering with the Maroondah Network of Schools and the University of Melbourne (UOM), they undertook consultation about the wellbeing needs of 5000 local students. To do this schools measured the wellbeing of all students (10-18) using the UOM's Wellbeing Profiler Tool. From this collaboration, with data in hand, local school principals declared wellbeing as their shared priority (FISO goal) between their network and with Council.

Since then a journey of discovery and collaboration has facilitated a broad range of activities progressively establishing wellbeing as a focus across the community. The generative outcomes have confirmed what research tells us about the building of strong relationships, meaningful collaboration and the direct correlation with success.

Maroondah's Positive Education Project aims to mobilise a network of 27 government schools towards the goal of raising student, staff and community wellbeing, resilience and achievement. It is a partnership based upon the community-wide implementation of Positive Education - extending beyond traditional single school implementation, into a network of schools and the broader community.

This ambitious collaboration between local schools, the Department of Education and Training (Victoria), Maroondah City Council, The University of Melbourne, the Institute of Positive Education and local community groups, aims to improve wellbeing, resilience, engagement and achievement by influencing the language, behaviours, knowledge, processes, relationships, and environments within and across education and community systems.



Using the framework of Collective Impact, this systems approach aims to:

- Facilitate collaboration between Council, schools, and the broader community to enable Positive Education
- Develop a system of sustainable Positive Education leadership
- Increase schools' capacity to support student wellbeing
- Increase the capacity of parents and caregivers to support their children's and their own wellbeing
- Improve staff and students' ability to build wellbeing for themselves and others

Educational transformation is complex, and whilst models exist for single school implementation of positive education, achieving this across multiple schools is considerably more challenging. Simple models rarely work under conditions of complexity where the unpredictable interactions of multiple stakeholders affect outcomes (Kania & Kramer, 2013), particularly when this involves multiple systems across a community.

To achieve the ambitious plan to raise wellbeing across an entire community, a coherent framework has been critical. **Collective impact** is a model of social change to tackle complex community problems at a systems level (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The framework involves a centralised infrastructure, dedicated staff, and a structured process (a backbone) that establishes a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among a cross section of community stakeholders.

This model has provided a framework to lead the establishment of an array of activities which shifted our focus from implementing positive education in our schools to cultivating wellbeing literacy across the whole community.

The use of the term 'wellbeing literacy' helps to shift our thinking from achieving short-term gain through external interventions; to "exploring language mediated co-created actions which can create ongoing sustained wellbeing gains". This relates to the well-known proverb, "You give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. You teach him to fish and will feed him for a lifetime". (Oades and Johnston 2017)

The approach has so far achieved:

- Wellbeing Measurement in partnership with UOM – 2016, 2017 (students) and 2019, 2020 (staff, students and parents).
- All school Principals naming student wellbeing as a network priority
- All schools engaged in mentoring with GGS – this involved embarking on a journey to Learn, Live, Teach and Embed Positive Education using the GGS Road Mapping tool.
- Substantial funding and engagement from the Victorian Minister for Education – this has been extended to the end of 2021.
- Establishment of Heads of Positive Education (HOPE Leaders) in each school to lead implementation and share practice
- Development of wellbeing goals for annual implementation to enhance academic ones.
- Tailored training for Principals and with all staff in every school
- 90 education, community and Council staff attending a 3 day course in Positive Education

- 33 education and Council staff completing a Professional Certificate in Positive Education
- 27 staff learning about contextual wellbeing
- 1000 school staff attending a shared wellbeing day for the first day of 2019
- 80 new staff attending a positive education 'induction day' prior to the 2020 school year
- Themed days in schools to celebrate concepts such as gratitude and growth mindset
- A number of schools have run Appreciative Inquiries including one school who involved their whole school community – 650 students, staff and parents.
- 15 schools doing the **UR Strong** relational skills training
- 12 schools doing the **Smiling Mind** professional learning in Mindfulness
- 70 educators doing the Education Lab – Teacher Wellbeing Series
- 11 schools providing learning for families via the Flourishing Families series

These initial outcomes reflect the adoption of Geelong Grammar Schools philosophy of 'learn it, live it, teach it, embed it' as a key initial focus for the project. Building baseline knowledge and experience of positive education concepts, alongside enhancing leadership capacity and capability in relation to positive education has been pivotal.

The network's HOPE Leaders share responsibility for project implementation and have undertaken two key rounds of high quality training from the Institute of Positive Education and University of Melbourne to build their knowledge and capabilities. Armed with this experience, HOPE leaders in partnership with school leaders are now leading positive change in their school contexts, and across the network.

In addition to training, schools have been provided with a library of resources to foster deeper personal discovery of positive psychology concepts and research, and human resources in the form of a project leader to coach and support each school's progress.

At a network level, a community governance group (Steering Committee) was established with key leaders from partner organisations, including students, to bring shared expertise and practice to shape the project goals and implementation.

Whilst formal project structures and activities are central, the most valuable asset for effective project execution are positive relationships which build shared purpose, amplify achievement and motivate contributions towards the common agenda. This has been achieved through mutual support, the investment of time and effort and shared lived experience of positive psychology practice.

It is important for sustainability that wellbeing and resilience education is not seen to be "another thing" - an add on to an already crowded curriculum. It must be integrated into all school or community improvement priorities. It is also essential that the impacts are measurable, significantly positive and have multiple benefits across domains, or it is not sustainable. It is therefore important that in assessing, designing and implementing wellbeing education, that our evaluations are honest, reflective and evolve over time. The network HOPE leaders are a wonderful resource and their experiences at the coal face provide information and feedback to ensure the project remains relevant and beneficial. Wellbeing education should continue to earn its place by demonstrating its impact.

All government schools in Victoria use the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) as the unifying framework for improvement in **all key areas** of education. (e.g. literacy and numeracy). The FISO uses contemporary school improvement and school effectiveness research to help schools focus their efforts on key areas that are known to have the greatest impact on improved student outcomes. Central to this model is “student wellbeing, achievement and engagement” and our work has focused on this.

In the Maroondah Network our 27 schools have developed a shared FISO goal of “raising the wellbeing of staff, students and parents” and this is driving priorities in individual schools, throughout the network and into the community. This shared model has four stages:

- **Evaluate and diagnose** the performance successes and challenges around key improvement initiatives and strategies.
- **Prioritise and set goals** for improvement strategies and initiatives that have the greatest impact on student wellbeing and learning.
- **Develop and plan** improvement strategies and initiatives to ensure successful implementation
- **Implement and monitor** selected improvement strategies and initiatives and the impact these have on staff and student wellbeing and learning outcomes.

In practice in Maroondah a HOPE leader assesses contextual needs using data, observation, conversations and previous year’s goals. They then develop an Action Plan in consultation and collaboration with the School Improvement Team (SIT team) which informs leadership of the priorities based on the desire to raise wellbeing, resilience, engagement, and achievement data. Each year a school publishes its Annual Implementation Plan and the goals are laid out alongside other priorities. Most schools take wellbeing planning down to individual staff level where, in their Personal Development Plans (PDP) they set a personal wellbeing goal. Having accountability enables wellbeing to claim its stake in the professional learning calendar.

One of things we are most proud of is the inclusivity of our learning experiences. The knowledge, processes and skills we bring are universally relevant, and we encourage our learners to apply them into their personal life and then professional context. This means that primary, secondary, alternative educational settings and special development schools can all share the same learning experiences with community group leaders. The magic happens when individuals create a unique understanding and inspire others with their stories of transformation and then translate it to their professional or volunteer setting. The shared journey of discovery also leads to new possibilities, which has been one of the most exciting parts of the process.

Our success has come from the commitment of our partners and the effective collaboration made possible through our use of the Collective Impact Framework with five conditions:

- Backbone Organisation,
- Common Agenda,
- Shared Measurement,
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities,
- Continuous Communication.

This system's approach, is enabling us to turn our shared goals into real outcomes. While many organisations work in isolation, we recognise that only a team of committed partners will realise our vision of a community of wellbeing and sustain it with a common language and skillset, equipping us to be the best versions of ourselves individually and collectively.

Backbone organisation - is a team dedicated to orchestrating the project. In our case it is our, Steering Committee made up of the Department of Education and Training (DET), Maroondah City Council, the University of Melbourne and Communities of Wellbeing Inc and the Project Manger. The committee are the support function dedicated to guiding the vision, strategy and priorities, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement practices, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilising resources.

The Project Manager drives the day to day activities of the project, coaching the HOPE leaders, bringing to life the vision and guiding the strategic priorities. This role is also the key connector within education and beyond it, to gather like-minded individuals and organisations to build capacity, share the vision and partner in the implementation. In our case the essential relationship has been with our local government, The Maroondah City Council. Their aligned vision and willingness to collaborate has been the catalyst for a system-wide approach, rather than exclusively by organisation or sector. Their ongoing support with participation and resources has enabled the sustainability of the project for the last 5 years. Into the future the council have made wellbeing a core priority throughout their organisation and we see this as critical to our community flourishing together.

Common Agenda - all involved share an aspirational vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions. Our desire is to raise wellbeing by equipping individuals to manage the wellbeing of themselves and support the wellbeing of others.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities - A diverse set of multi-sector stakeholders coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a diverse but mutually reinforcing plan of action, tailored to needs and capabilities. The learning experiences, for example, the Professional Certificate of Positive Education was an important ingredient of our success, enabling our HOPE Leaders to be guided through the process of developing whole-school wellbeing plans. Graduates' projects were varied and included staff and leadership training, whole school immersion on topics like gratitude and positive relationships (connectedness). Staff wellbeing and school culture also featured strongly, acknowledging the importance of getting our environments right first to enable sustainable change. What we have discovered almost universally is that the success with student outcomes is better when staff **learn** and **live** the theory before **teaching** to students and parents and **embedding** within policies and procedures.

Shared Measurement - All involved agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement. We monitor our progress using the University of Melbourne's Wellbeing Profiler, DET's measurement tools and community-wide surveys. We are also very keen to introduce more Action Research methods.

Continuous Communication - All involved engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation. We have many conversations, official and impromptu, held daily between partners, building trust and forging strong relationships. This is where the magic happens as we establish new ways to utilise our collective strengths. We are proof of Aristotle's famous quote, 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'.

As we look to the future, we are excited to know that momentum is growing as enthusiasm about positive education is spreading. Inspiring stories are emerging as HOPE leaders discover staff using their own initiative to develop the concepts with their students and parents. Community members and parents are also taking the message to their own contexts.

We will continue to expand professional learning opportunities, and support our network's ongoing collaboration to grow our impact in our broader community. We welcome the opportunity to share and learn from other communities hoping to take a system's approach to raising wellbeing.

Edwina Ricci

Project Manager – Maroondah Positive Education network

Adam Cooper

Team Leader – Family, Child and Youth Services Maroondah City Council

Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDXj8-D4DEw>

Community AI - <https://www.facebook.com/communitiesofwellbeing/videos/193076052111822>