Learning Wisdom from Bhutan

It’s a long way from Bhutan to the University of New England but that’s where I bumped into Jurmey and her brother Tshewang in Youth Week. As part of the celebrations, the Armidale Dumaresq Council and other agencies including TAFE, the DEC and Hunter New England Health were running a Youth Opportunities Expo at Lazenby Hall. The focus was on local services for young people, career pathways, education and wellbeing. On the previous day a similar event, “Youth Inspire” was held at the showground in Glen Innes.

Waiting to be filmed for some video postcards Jurmey told me all about Bhutan. How they measured national prosperity there in terms of the material wealth, consumption and production as measured in countries like Australia by GDP.

It sounded pretty good to me and in essence the kind of holistic perspective on health and wellbeing we wanted to promote ourselves through displays, handouts, interactive games, tai chi and laughter yoga. In the end it was all about building positive emotions and social connection, powerful buffers in themselves against problems like stress, depression and anxiety.

We also asked the students two basic questions: what things in life are important to you? And how do you keep yourself well?

To see what they said, including Jurmey, cyber-visit ABC Open New England North West later this month and look for the video postcards and other positive stories we’ll be posting on mental health and flourishing.

Across the two Expo days we met hundreds of other inspiring students from more than a dozen different high schools across the New England from Tenterfield to Walcha, along with a terrific band of teachers and parents.
Promoting Wellness at Toomelah

A team from UNE and the Tamworth Stroke Service have been working in Toomelah to create a stroke education resource in close collaboration with the community and elders. *Written by the Mob for the Mob* uses a local analogy, art and music to address the problem of stroke and other vascular diseases which kill Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at a much higher rate and much younger than other Australians.

Toomelah Public school has been an important part of the project and the students have been adding their artworks to the resource. They’ve been learning about ways to prevent stroke as part of the wider picture of all the components in life that make a person well.

I was there a few weeks back to run some fun and interactive education relating to all of that. The Macintyre River just across the road made for a great metaphor – putting bad stuff in the river (oil, dog pooh, plastic bags) will make it pretty sick and it won’t really be able to do its job. Put bad stuff in your life (smokes, inactivity, disconnection from school and culture) and you could end up pretty much the same, physically, mentally and spiritually.

It linked well with the river concept that’s central to the booklet and we could simulate things with a fish tank and some slides.

I had a great time with the kids and staff plus I met some amazing people in the community. It left me feeling positive that efforts to close the gap in both health and education will in time prove successful.

Kids Get Life Wise at Gunnedah High

Several high schools attended recent briefings for the new look Mind Matters in both Tamworth and Armidale which will soon include excellent e-learning modules for teachers. Keep an eye on the website for these to come online and to find out more about Mind Matters. [www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)

The Mind Matters Framework is designed to address four key components important to student health and wellbeing:

**C1** Positive School Community

**C2** Student Skills for Resilience

**C3** Parents and Families

**C4** Supporting Students Experiencing Mental Health Difficulties

Life Wise days cover a broad range of topics relevant to adolescent health and wellbeing. Our recent day at Gunnedah HS saw the expertise of several agencies come together to provide workshops for students in Years 7-10. These included NSW Police, the Cancer Council and Hunter New England Health.

The workshops covered topics like cyber bullying, safe partying, brain health, body image, sexual health, smoking, alcohol and other drugs, exercise and healthy eating.

Similar days will be held next week at Moree Secondary College and next term in both Narrabri and Wee Waa.

If you have any feedback, information or details of upcoming events you’d like included in School Matters, or if you’d like me to help your school in any way please send me an email at: Bruce.Winter@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au