



**St Leonard's College**

An education for life.

# Wellbeing at St Leonard's College







# Living and Breathing Wellbeing

Dr Nathan Wilson, College Psychologist, Counselling Team Leader

St Leonard's College is deeply committed to prioritising the wellbeing of our young people. Various initiatives aimed at supporting our students are a resounding testament to this.

## New Wellbeing Centre

In August 2023 we opened our new dedicated Wellbeing Centre which offers numerous benefits for students, providing a welcoming and safe environment. It allows for more comprehensive and flexible support, enabling students to access various services tailored to their unique needs. Additionally, the space facilitates group programs and peer interactions, encouraging a sense of community and connection, vital for overall wellbeing. With this nurturing environment, students can better manage stress, develop coping skills, and enhance their overall academic and personal success.

One of the standout physical features of this centre is the meticulously crafted living green wall, an embodiment of lushness, species diversity, and natural aesthetics. Beyond its visual appeal, this living wall brings forth a multitude of benefits, including improved air quality through the filtration of impurities and a reduction in ambient noise levels. Most significantly, the living green wall acts as a catalyst for enhanced wellbeing, creating a space of restoration and positivity. Its presence instils a sense of calmness, effectively mitigating stress and promoting relaxation.

## Centralised Cross-College Counsellors

In 2023 we also introduced three new staff members and a more centralised wellbeing space to work from, the St Leonard's counselling team have taken the opportunity to enhance and update our approaches. While previously counsellors worked within the Junior School, Middle School and Senior School, we now have team members working across multiple schools and year-levels.

This allows students to have more options in choosing a counsellor based on who they think they might engage better with (e.g. male or female). It also allows our team to match students across different schools with the skill sets of each counsellor. This model will provide more continuity of support for students as they transition through the College, enabling their chosen counsellor to work with them as they progress from Years 5 and 6 through to Middle School, or from Middle School to Senior School.







### New Student Booking Platform

One of the challenges of running a counselling service within a school environment is managing no-shows for booked appointments and scheduling appointments with students at times that best suit their needs. Students frequently forget to attend as they are in the usual rhythm of going from class to class. To assist with this, we have introduced an online booking system that all students can access via STL Link. This allows students to easily select the day, time and the counsellor of choice. It also provides students with an automatic reminder email prior to their appointment, which helps to get them there.

### Flexible Modes of Service

Our amazing new Wellbeing Centre also allows us to offer more flexible modes of service, rather than relying solely on the 45-minute individual counselling appointment. Having our new space allows us to help students in circumstances when they may need a space to briefly re-regulate and then return to class, without engaging in a longer formal appointment. The centre also gives students a space to learn to self-manage their symptoms, with some support, but without the formal counselling appointment which some students are reluctant to engage in. We have also started implementing group programs in the Wellbeing Centre and we look forward to introducing more in the future.



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# Cultivating Emotional Resilience: Meet our Counselling Experts



Dr Nathan Wilson,  
College Psychologist,  
Counselling Team Leader

I am a Clinical Psychologist and have been working with young people and families in schools, private practice, and hospital settings. Joining St Leonard's College in 2023 has been a great experience. Having heard very positive feedback from counselling colleagues about St Leonard's approach to wellbeing and staff's capability to support students and families, I have now seen this for myself.

From my perspective, one of the major strengths of St Leonard's College that I see making a significant difference to student wellbeing is the dedicated Period X in the student timetable. This time is used in such a variety of different ways, allowing the flexible delivery of a broad range of support programs and opportunities for connection to all students. Amongst our students there is also a positive and accepting perspective on utilising the College counselling services that we offer, something that we want to continue to promote and foster in the future.



Dr Alison Brown,  
College Psychologist

Bringing over 23 years of experience in psychology and a foundation as a primary school teacher, I am a school psychologist with a PhD in family therapy. This background equips me with a systemic approach to address the diverse aspects of children's development. In the Junior School, I work closely with teachers, families, health professionals, and students themselves to create a nurturing environment where everyone plays a vital role. From observing and supporting students in classrooms and playgrounds to running proactive programs that foster social skills, resilience, and leadership, I aim to empower each child to thrive.

Collaborating with the wider counselling team, I ensure that students receive consistent and flexible support tailored to their unique needs. Our positive approach focuses on helping students in the moment, adjusting goals, and providing necessary accommodations. We want each child to feel heard, valued, and supported throughout their journey at St Leonard's College.

It is incredibly heartening to see students take ownership of their goals and reflect on their progress. Each child's voice matters, and together with our supportive team of teachers and specialists, we strive to create a meaningful and enriching experience for every student in our caring community.



Michelle Kozman,  
College Counsellor

Passionate about child and youth wellbeing, I've dedicated my entire career to working with this sector, providing therapeutic intervention to help and support young people and their families. Having spent the past five years specialising at the Royal Children's Hospital in the areas of trauma and mental health, it has been such an exciting transition to the vibrant environment at St Leonard's College.

As a parent of two older children studying law, I understand the crucial balance between academics and social-emotional wellbeing. This balance enables children and young people to flourish and achieve their fullest potential. Yet, in today's social climate, influenced by social media, this equilibrium can be difficult to maintain.

Furthermore, challenging periods are of course not limited to children and young people alone. By extension, I also love supporting parents and teachers to holistically assist a child through periods of change.

Our team has the clear objective of creating accessible support services at St Leonard's College, eliminating barriers for all students in need. Our aim is to achieve this goal through one-on-one counselling, creating an inclusive and safe space for all students to engage freely and without prejudice.

Looking ahead, we have some exciting projects planned for the wellbeing program, including group work, music therapy, and non-talking therapies and interventions that can assist and support healing. I look forward to engaging with and assisting all families at St Leonard's College.



Anneliese Hopkins,  
College Counsellor

I have worked with children of all ages in a variety of settings; from research developing whole-school bullying intervention programs through to serving as a provisional psychologist in a Western Australian primary school. My journey led me to complete my master's in psychology. Now, I am thrilled to be a part of the St Leonard's team after relocating to Melbourne.

I strongly believe there is no "one-size-fits-all" for counselling, which is why the diverse skills and backgrounds of each member of the counselling team are so important. At St Leonard's, students are now even more empowered to take control over their own wellbeing; they have the autonomy to choose who they want to see, and when they want to come into the Wellbeing Centre.

Alongside offering individual support, our new wellbeing model has a strong focus on whole school and targeted group interventions. This is an important element in early intervention and prevention, equipping our students with the strategies to support their mental health and wellbeing.



# “You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.” – Jon Kabat-Zinn



Peter Clague  
Principal

## “We’re All Going To Die”

Given my upbringing, I am mildly surprised to still be alive. Not that I was unduly reckless or my parents neglectful. But society in the seventies, and my school in particular, did a pretty good job of convincing young people that we were all destined to perish in a nuclear holocaust. The prevailing expectation was that the Cold War was soon to become a very hot and irradiated one. The question was never whether it would happen, just when?

This gloomy outlook extended well beyond the media who, it may be argued, have a financial incentive to forecast impending disasters. Bad news sells papers. Unfortunately though, the certainty of being obliterated in an instant because Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon finally got fed-up with each other was also being promoted in the classrooms of our schools.

I can still remember Humanities lessons in which we were earnestly instructed on how to build nuclear fallout shelters in our backyards (no great hardship for 13 year old boys I might add). We were taught a shorthand vocabulary of atomic annihilation: MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction), ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile), RAD (Radiation Absorption Dose).

In Science, we learned the difference between fallout and yield. In English, we were fed a diet of novels about the doomsday scenario and dystopian movies depicting life in a nuclear winter. I still have a cartoon given to me by a teacher which shows a sleepy President Reagan waking

up in the White House. His finger hovers uncertainly over two buttons above the bedside table – one labelled LUNCH, the other, LAUNCH.

Mushroom clouds over Auckland all seem a little bit silly now. However, the fact remains that my generation grew up with a fair degree of fatalism that the end of the world really was nigh. I look back now and wonder how that affected our subsequent outlook on life. Are we more cautious, less committing, perhaps even cynical and blind to some of the joys of life as a result of being raised in a climate of such pessimism?

My introspection might not really matter, were it not for the fact that mine was not the only generation to have been educated against a backdrop of global fear. Throughout my teaching career over the past four decades, successive generations of young people have grown up with a procession of fear-inducing global threats. We have taught them variously they were all going to die from either HIV/AIDS, SARs, Ebola, Mad Cow Disease, Zika, the Millennium Virus, ozone depletion, global financial crashes, terrorism, COVID-19, and now global warming and climate change.

I do not mean to be flippant; each of these crises undoubtedly held the potential for disaster. But my concern is the effect all this doom-saying has on impressionable young minds.

*Expectation is a powerful force, and children learn to accept what the adults in their lives expect.*

If we constantly portray the world as fragile, frightening and ultimately doomed, what impact does this have on their outlook and future state of mind?

## Sticking Plaster or Plaster Cast?

Which is why, to a degree, I applaud the modern-day focus on the importance of mental health. At least it addresses the natural human tendency to catastrophise, hopefully putting all those endless existential threats into perspective. Although that does rely on us all meaning the same thing when we say, “mental health”. The term itself suggests a comparison with the concept of “physical health”. Both can be good or bad, strengthened or compromised. Both can be improved by the way we choose to live our lives. But often talk about mental health lacks the degrees of distinction that everyone understands when talking about physical health. From a very early age, we quickly learn the difference between a stubbed toe and a broken bone. Both are immediately painful, but one requires far less treatment and leaves no lasting damage.

Yet we often don’t seem to apply the same degree of nuance when discussing mental health issues. Feeling sad or blue gets muddled up with severe depression. Short-term worry or natural insecurity get confused with chronic anxiety disorders. The normal stresses of life in the modern world morph into an amateur diagnosis of PTSD. Ironically, it sometimes seems that the more sensitive we become to mental health issues, the less able we are to clearly identify and address them. People don’t often say “I’ve got bad physical health”, they are more likely to say “I’ve got a cold” or “I’ve got cancer”. Yet all too often we hear the catch-all comment that somebody has “poor mental health”. That type of sweeping generalisation can inhibit people from offering the appropriate level of support, or even to avoid the issue altogether, for fear of not really knowing how bad the condition is. To treat it, we first need to name it.

## Like Cures Like

Once identified, mental health maladies can be treated with an appropriate level of intervention in the same way as physical illnesses are. Just as the best hospitals have the best doctors, St Leonard’s is blessed to have an outstanding team of counsellors, whose extensive training and experience allows for a clear diagnosis when a young person’s mental wellbeing is challenged. Serious illness calls for external specialists, moderate conditions need a monitored course of treatment, small knocks often just need some TLC.

But just as with our physical health, prevention is always better than cure. Most of us are careful about what we feed our body, but do we take as much care over what we feed our mind? We drag on the running shoes to exercise our limbs, but how often do we deliberately stretch our brains? Sometimes, just like our bodies, our

minds can benefit from the theory that underpins homeopathic medicine, “Like cures like”. That is, just like the way that vaccines work, small doses of the things that challenge our system help build immunity for the times when we are confronted with bigger versions.

*Our parenting and our teaching should include situations in which our young people are exposed to small, controlled experiences that will build resilience for all that life may later throw at them.*

Dealing with disappointment after a missed selection, battling nerves ahead of an assessment, the fickle tides of teenage friendships, these are not symptoms of “poor mental health”, they are the cure.

## A Centre in the Centre

Fostering an enduring sense of wellbeing in young people then, calls for three purposeful actions on our part:

1. Creating a climate of healthy optimism about the world,
2. Describing and discussing emotions calmly and openly,
3. Allowing a diet of experiences that build resilience and immunity.

All of which is the mission of the College’s newly opened Wellbeing Centre. Built, not by accident, at the very heart of the College, for its aims are at the core of all we do. Open to everyone, a space that is as much about positivity and optimism as it is about remedy and rehabilitation.

Our new Wellbeing Centre won’t necessarily protect our young people from nuclear fallout, acid rain, or the next pandemic virus. But it will instil resilience to cope when such fears arise, nurturing the mental fortitude and positive outlook to realise that most challenges can be overcome. Being well starts with the realisation that the world is full of far more good than bad, and that just like our bodies, our minds have been built to adapt to it.





# The Link Between Social Action, Personal Wellbeing and Thriving Individuals

Lucinda Malgas, **Director of Wellbeing and Social Action**

*“The secret to happiness is work worth doing.”*

– **Sandra Day O’Connor**

As parents and educators, we often seek ways to ensure that our young people are thriving. While providing a loving and supportive environment is crucial, it is also important that these young people experience a sense of positive purpose and achievement, a sense that they

have some control over what is happening in their lives and a sense of hope. Therefore, it is no surprise that there are strong links between the pursuit of social action and wellbeing. Engaging in acts of kindness and social action not only benefits the recipients but also has a profound impact on our students’ sense of self-worth and personal growth. St Leonard’s College is deeply committed to service to others. We are committed to empowering our students to be responsible local, national and global citizens – for the greater good and also for their own wellbeing.

**Fostering Empathy and Connection:** Service-oriented activities, such as participating in a College social action initiative, volunteering for Lennie’s Van, or visiting the Warruwi Indigenous community, expose our students to diverse perspectives and challenges. By immersing themselves in the experiences of others, children develop a sense of empathy and compassion. They gain an understanding of the struggles that people face and become more appreciative of their own blessings. This newfound empathy not only strengthens their connection with the community but also enhances their interpersonal skills, making them more understanding and supportive individuals.

**Boosting Self-Esteem and Sense of Purpose:** Contributing to the greater good through service provides a sense of purpose and accomplishment for children. Undertaking efforts to address and rectify the conditions that lead to unjust situations boosts their sense of hope, self-esteem and confidence. Engaging in social action empowers our students to recognise their abilities and potential, fostering a deeper understanding of their value as individuals. This newfound self-assurance becomes the foundation for greater happiness and contentment.

**Cultivating Gratitude:** Our social action programs expose students to different lifestyles and challenges on a local, national and international level. By gaining an understanding of the struggles others face, children develop a sense of gratitude for their own circumstances. This appreciation for what they have leads to greater contentment and a more positive outlook on life. Grateful individuals tend to focus on the hope available to them and others in any situation, which significantly contributes to their overall sense of happiness and fulfilment.

**Developing Resilience:** Immersion in social action and service activities can at times be challenging which presents an opportunity for growth. Engaging in social action teaches our students to confront difficulties with resilience and a problem-solving mindset. They learn that perseverance and compassion are powerful tools in making a difference in the lives of others. This resilience acquired through service extends beyond these activities, helping children navigate life’s obstacles with greater confidence and determination.

**Strengthening Social Bonds:** Engaging in service-oriented activities with classmates strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of belonging. Students who participate in social action and service-led initiatives at the College often develop close friendships based on shared values and experiences. These positive social connections provide a sense of support and happiness that is deeply fulfilling. Moreover, by working together to serve others, our young people can create lasting memories and shared experiences that strengthen their own relationships.

**Promoting a Sense of Social Responsibility:** Service to others instils a sense of social responsibility in our St Leonard’s students, motivating them to be active, engaged global citizens. As they witness the impact of their actions, children develop a deeper understanding of their role in creating positive change. This sense of responsibility extends beyond their immediate environment, encouraging children to think about broader societal issues and ways to contribute to a better world.

Building a strong sense of wellbeing through our social action program at St Leonard’s College is a powerful and transformative experience for our students. As parents and College community members, we can encourage our students to participate in service-oriented activities and lead by example. By incorporating service into our values, we empower young people to not only find happiness within themselves but also to share it with others, creating a ripple effect of positivity and compassion in the world. At St Leonard’s it is our intent to nurture a generation of kind-hearted and fulfilled individuals who understand the profound link between social action, personal wellbeing and thriving, and who will choose to act to make this world a better place for all.

Gretchen Rubin summarises this ideal brilliantly in quoting Sandra Day O’Connor (left), that happiness, per se, should not be pursued, rather it ensues. From doing work worth doing.



# Top 5 Tips to Support Your Child's Wellbeing

Dr Nathan Wilson, College Psychologist and Counselling Team Leader

Amidst the abundance of information parents are faced with on wellbeing, here are some practical tips for parents to nudge things along in the right direction.

## Tip 1. Sleep

My own research background was in sleep in young adults and sleep for new parents with tricky infants. Despite my own passion for the topic, I always find that promoting more sleep can be a hard sell. But please, do what you can.

Review the 'light diet' that exists in your house from all the screens and every other light source that can confuse our circadian system. Try to promote a wind-down routine and avoid children being on their devices all hours. Tell your adolescent who may be training hard in their sport that the body only rebuilds properly with deep sleep; if they want more muscle, they need enough sleep. Gently remind your young person who may be focused on their exams or assessments, that for knowledge to really embed in their memory they need good sleep.

## Tip 2. Build Mastery Through Small Real-world Tasks

In my role, I see young people sometimes struggling to get everyday tasks done. Despite being generally capable, they become unsure about the 'how' of doing some real-world tasks. Help them build that mastery and the sense that they can get by in the world by setting them some small achievable real-world

challenges. Get them to book their own appointment, go to the counter in the shop, email their teacher, and even get them to speak to someone on the phone. Help them build that sense that they can problem-solve the daily hassles that everyone must face.

## Tip 3. Find Ways to Shift The Comparing

It is unavoidable, but your young person will be comparing themselves a lot to their peers. This can lead to significant stress, anxiety, and a level of self-esteem built on peer comparison which can be somewhat fragile. While your young person is going to compare their current progress (often negatively), try to subtly bring up counterexamples that highlight their strengths. Endeavour to build the story within your household that your young person is on a journey, and they will get there (wherever that is) in their own way. It can be helpful to also highlight examples of people who find success a bit later than others or take sideways steps following their passions.

## Tip 4. Setting up Environmental Pull

Your young person wants to see and navigate life themselves, rather than just listen to parental advice on setting up their future trajectory. However, one of the things you can do as a parent is to involve your young person in environments, such as St Leonard's sporting clubs and cocurricular activities, where they see other young people grappling successfully with challenges. If they know their basketball coach (or some other slightly older young person whom they respect) is studying to go to university or successfully pursuing their passion, that can make more of an impression than any of your suggestions. Try to engage your young person in environments where they see others taking those steps forward in their life, it will help pull them along.

## Tip 5. The Autonomy/Responsibility Balance

Psychiatrist Dr Michael Gordon has been highlighting that parents and young people are consistently negotiating a balance between autonomy and responsibility. Your young person is going to want more autonomy to make their own choices. You need to make sure there is enough responsibility that comes with that, but also not overload that responsibility. When progress appears stagnant, it can be helpful to evaluate the situation through the lens of striking this balance. A middle road is what we are aiming for here, but it will be constantly shifting.

By prioritising sleep, fostering real-world mastery, shifting comparisons, creating supportive environments, and balancing autonomy with responsibility, parents will be on a positive path to enhancing their children's wellbeing.





*Participating in the Lennie's Van program promotes cultural competence by exposing students to diverse perspectives, whilst fostering empathy and understanding.*

# Lennie's Van: Driving Community Wellbeing in Bayside

In our bustling community of Bayside, Lennie's Van has become a well-recognised symbol of support.

This St Leonard's College social action initiative has made significant strides in supporting the wellbeing of the local community. Through the tireless efforts of our Senior School students, and our staff, Lennie's Van has evolved into an emblem of unity, delivering essential food services and fostering a feeling of belonging among those in need.

## Food Security and Nutrition

One of the fundamental aspects of wellbeing is proper nutrition. However, many individuals in Bayside face food insecurity and struggle to put healthy meals on their tables. Lennie's Van provides a range of breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea services to the local housing estates, distributing nutritious meals and groceries to those who are food vulnerable in our local community.

## Community Engagement and Social Connection

Loneliness and isolation can have a significant impact on an individual's overall wellbeing. At St Leonard's College we understand the importance of social connections and we actively foster community engagement. The Lennie's Van service is one such example as it brings people together. Whether it's at the bacon and egg breakfast barbeques or through a simple conversation, Lennie's Van creates opportunities for individuals to connect, form meaningful relationships, and combat social isolation.

## Empowering Through Experiential Education

Volunteering on Lennie's Van is an invaluable component of the St Leonard's College experiential education program, providing practical and transformative experiences for our students' learning and growth.

Participating in the Lennie's Van program promotes cultural competence by exposing students to diverse perspectives, whilst fostering empathy and understanding. It instils a sense of social responsibility, encouraging active participation in community and civic engagement.

Volunteering enriches experiential education by providing hands-on learning, skill development, social

awareness, introspection and a strong sense of responsibility. It empowers our students to make a positive impact, while also benefiting their personal growth.

Lennie's Van has become a vital force for community wellbeing in Bayside. Through its commitment to enhancing food security and nutrition, social support, community engagement and education, Lennie's Van has had a profound impact on the lives of countless individuals including our St Leonard's College students and staff.

As it continues to roll through the streets of Bayside, Lennie's Van remains a symbol of unity, driving community wellbeing and fuelling compassion and social responsibility.







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