

THE GOOD LIFE: EDSC

Working Within Wellbeing

BY SAMYUE

Upon my meeting with Maddie Sill, I couldn't help but notice her warm smile and bright complexion. The cosy room and pastel décor perfectly matched her but in reality, is quite contrary to her job. Maddie is one of our school counsellors at EDSC. A job involving listening to and finding solutions to emotional issues. The schools therapy dog Frankie accompanies her in counselling up to three students a day.



Maddie's office couch

Maddie reflected on her path to where she is today. She began with a Bachelor of Psychological Sciences and continued with her Masters of Social Work. "I don't think that my [Bachelor] [prepared me well], but my Social Degree definitely did," she said. She began her journey in England, working with young people who would disengage from school. Eventually, she returned to Australia to work in "education support, like a teacher's aid." Then in the midst of COVID, Maddie joined our East Doncaster community as the wellbeing team's "mental health representative." "It was a bit of a long run, ... but certainly always the goal to end up here," Maddie reminisced.

During the first half of lockdown, Maddie had worked in a homeless organisation. As she came in July of 2021, "Certainly it was a challenge ... because your message isn't conveyed the same way." But she then emphasised the importance of banding together to "support those clients really well." As she shared her story of transitions towards well-being, Maddie's empathy really shone through.

Working in wellbeing is all about working with and helping people get through difficult situations so it makes sense that certain challenges and problems arise within the staff. However, Maddie told us that it's a "very good team" to be working with and the only real problem she has working at EDSC is "just not having enough time in the day," she laughed. She continued saying the wellbeing staff are also well supported if a difficult problem does arise. Because the work of these staff is confidential Maddie explained how they could be PTO



Maddie and Frankie

supported. “So, we have what’s called supervision, and sometimes, if a student’s case is really tough or it’s quite a challenge, we’re able to ring our supervisors and have a debrief,” she explained. “We only talk about the case and not the student,” Maddie continued. But at the end of the Day, it’s just “acknowledging that you’re helping them, and making sure you did everything you can.”

Maddie is yet to face any difficult situations at this school but the team has a plan for those cases. “Gather the team and come up with a plan, so that includes coordinators, family and principal team,” but she emphasised the importance of the student taking that first step. “There is no shame in getting help if you need it.”

But sometimes even if they have the courage, “the challenges aren’t necessarily what they seem.” Although Maddie hasn’t faced any students with life-threatening situations, she still feels proud when they stop coming.

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I think it’s always good when students feel that they can use the skills that they’ve learnt.”

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I was curious to know the best and worst things about working in Wellbeing. She answered at once, “I can bring my dog to work two days a week.” However, Maddie stumbled to find a “worst” about working in well-being, before finally laughing, “People can see that I’m naturally untidy when you come into my office.” Maddie plans on staying within her role as a mental health representative, “I’ll leave [Leadership] to the people who like managing others.” “I like being able to see students most of the time and going on school camps,” she laughed. Maddie’s plans, for now, are to get a “whole school mental health program”, she wants to focus on “year-level specific ideas to help tackle any issues those year levels face.” She wants everyone to understand what students want or need from a well-being sense.

During the interview, we had the chance to meet Frankie, one of the school’s therapy dogs. Though Frankie and Kobe (Lisa T’s dog), are the first dogs to have been approved at EDSC, it wasn’t originally Maddie’s idea. “It was our previous head of wellbeing.” He had a boxer. Besides the dogs being a joy to work around, Maddie says there is a lot of

research that promotes dogs in schools because of the overall positive effect they have on students’ and staff’s mental health. Not only do students get excited



Frankie in front of the EDSC entrance

to see Frankie, but Frankie does too. “I know Frankie gets particularly excited when she gets to come to work with me on a school day.” Maddie shared with us that Frankie has a special ability, “when someone’s crying, she’ll sit on their lap.” Dogs have no judgement says Maddie, “they don’t judge... they just love you anyways.” Most of Frankie’s day comprises sleeping, but other than that she supports Maddie during counselling sessions. She lies on her back so that students can pet her. But other than that, she goes on walks around the school bringing joy to everyone.

We ended the interview by asking Maddie what she hopes students can learn from her. “I hope that they learn to know that they do have the skills to get them through problems, it’s just finding how to access those skills.” She continued by saying that “mental health doesn’t have to be a stigma or a big scary thing.” It’s just about teaching people how to manage bad days. “One of the main things we’re working towards in wellbeing is reducing the stigma of coming to wellbeing,” she shared. Everything in wellbeing is confidential*, so she urges anyone with any problem, “whether that be familial or friendship problems or stress and study related ones,” to come in and “get help if you need it.”

*Unless the student is in some sort of danger.