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Designing and Evaluating an Interactive Self-Compassion Exhibition as a Low-Threshold Student Well-Being Initiative in Thai Higher Education. *A Practice Report*

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Abstract

Student well-being is increasingly central to student engagement, belonging and success in higher education. Yet many students do not readily approach counselling or psychological services, especially when concerns are emerging or associated with stigma. This practice report describes and reflects on "SWU Heal Jai with Love," a three-day interactive self-compassion exhibition at Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. Designed as a low-threshold well-being initiative, the exhibition translated self-compassion, mindfulness, coping, grounding, brief counselling and future-oriented reflection into seven interactive stations. The report draws on programme documentation and post-activity evaluation data from 181 respondents among 197 participants. Findings show positive participant perceptions, particularly regarding enjoyment, relaxation, usefulness, convenience and overall satisfaction. Suggestions highlighted areas for improvement including continuity, publicity, flexible scheduling, quiet spaces and stronger links to professional support. The study does not claim clinical or sustained psychological impact. Instead, it offers transferable design principles for embedding approachable well-being support within the campus-based student experience.

Keywords: Student well-being; mental health; higher education; quality education; self-compassion; experiential learning; student support; low-threshold support.

Introduction

Student well-being has become difficult to separate from student success in higher education. A student may attend classes and complete assessment tasks, yet still struggle to participate meaningfully if emotional strain, loneliness, uncertainty or anxiety remain unaddressed. University study often coincides with transition: students manage academic expectations, new social relationships, financial pressures, identity formation and decisions about future work. These experiences shape more than individual mental health. They also affect engagement, belonging, help-seeking and the capacity to persist through difficulty.

The World Health Organization (2022) frames mental health as part of individual and collective well-being and calls attention to promotion, prevention, supportive environments and accessible care pathways. For universities, this broader framing

matters. Student well-being cannot be left only to counselling services after problems have become severe. It is also part of the learning environment and the institutional conditions that allow students to succeed.

Research on student mental health supports this concern. Auerbach et al. (2018) report substantial prevalence of common mental disorders among first-year college students across several countries, while Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) identify mental health problems and help-seeking as persistent concerns among college populations. These studies have implications beyond health services. Psychological distress may make it harder for students to concentrate, form relationships, use resources and remain connected to their studies.

Higher education scholarship has increasingly treated well-being as part of the student experience. Bowden et al. (2021) link tertiary student engagement and success with wider outcomes, including well-being and transformative learning. Baik et al. (2019) show, from the student perspective, that mental well-being is shaped by teaching, assessment, communication, student services, institutional culture and co-curricular activities. This view moves well-being beyond specialist provision and invites universities to consider how ordinary campus spaces and activities might also support reflection, coping and connection.

A practical difficulty remains. Students who might benefit from support do not always approach formal counselling or psychological services. Some may not see their concern as serious enough; others may feel embarrassed or uncertain about where to go. Stigma has been shown to influence help-seeking among college students (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Low-threshold well-being initiatives respond to this difficulty by offering support that students can enter without first naming themselves as distressed, ill or in need of treatment.

Within Thai higher education, student well-being is commonly situated at the intersection of student affairs, counselling provision, co-curricular learning and institutional support. This makes the design of accessible well-being initiatives especially important. Formal services remain necessary, but they may not be the first place students approach when distress is still emerging, uncertain or difficult to name. A low-threshold exhibition offers a different point of entry. It places emotional reflection within the ordinary space of the university and allows students to engage without appointment, diagnosis or direct disclosure. At the same time, it can remain connected to professional support through referral or brief consultation. This combination of visibility, voluntary participation and support linkage is significant for Thai higher education because it frames well-being not as an isolated clinical concern, but as part of the broader student experience.

Self-compassion provides a useful foundation for such initiatives. Neff (2003) conceptualises self-compassion through self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. These elements are relevant to university life, where students often encounter comparison, failure and pressure to perform. Mindfulness helps students notice emotions and bodily sensations without immediate judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), while coping theory distinguishes between emotion-focused and problem-focused responses to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Together, these ideas suggest a practical movement from emotional awareness to self-understanding, self-kindness and coping reflection.

The question is how these ideas can be made accessible within everyday university life. Workshops, counselling sessions and digital resources have value, but they may not reach students who are hesitant to join explicit mental health activities. An interactive exhibition offers another route. It allows well-being concepts to be encountered through space, colour, movement, sensory experience, written prompts and voluntary participation. This form of engagement is consistent with experiential learning, where learning emerges through the transformation of experience rather than information alone (Kolb, 1984).

This article examines the design and evaluation of “SWU Heal Jai with Love,” an interactive self-compassion exhibition implemented at Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. The study does not claim clinical or causal psychological effects. It asks how the exhibition was designed as a low-threshold well-being initiative, how participants perceived its emotional and practical value, and what design principles may be transferable to other student well-being and student success initiatives. By positioning the exhibition as a student experience initiative rather than a clinical intervention, the article contributes to discussions on how universities can support psychological well-being within the ordinary life of the campus. Its focus is not on proving therapeutic effect, but on showing how low-threshold, experiential and emotionally safe design may help students engage with reflection, coping and support as part of the broader conditions for student success.

Conceptual and Practice Context

Student Well-Being, Help-Seeking and Success

The literature on student success has moved beyond grades, completion and retention alone. These indicators remain important, but they do not fully explain how students experience university life or develop the capacity to stay engaged through difficulty. Bowden et al. (2021) argue for a holistic view of tertiary engagement and success, linking engagement with well-being, self-efficacy and transformative learning. In this framing, well-being is not external to student success. It is one of the conditions through which students participate, build relationships and use institutional support.

Baik et al. (2019) similarly show that students understand mental well-being as being shaped by the wider university experience, including course design, assessment, communication, services and campus culture. This is important because mental health services, although essential, cannot carry the whole responsibility for student well-being. If well-being is connected to belonging and learning readiness, universities need initiatives that make well-being visible in ordinary campus life.

Low-threshold support is one response to the problem of help-seeking. Eisenberg et al. (2009) and Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) show that stigma and help-seeking remain significant issues among college students. A low-threshold approach does not replace counselling, psychotherapy or psychiatric care. Its role is preventive, educational and developmental. It gives students an earlier point of contact with well-being resources, particularly when they are curious, uncertain or not ready to enter a formal support pathway.

Conceptual Basis for Low-Threshold Well-Being Design

The present study draws on self-compassion, mindfulness and coping theory as design resources. Neff (2003) defines self-compassion through self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. In a student context, these elements are useful because academic setbacks, social difficulty and emotional fatigue can easily be interpreted as personal inadequacy. A self-compassion perspective gives students another way to relate to difficulty: with greater balance, care and recognition that struggle is not unique to them. A recent meta-analysis also suggests that self-compassion-focused interventions can reduce depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress, although such findings must be interpreted in relation to intervention design and evidence quality (Han & Kim, 2023).

Mindfulness and coping theory add practical dimensions to this foundation. Kabat-Zinn (2003) describes mindfulness as present-moment, non-judgemental awareness. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) understand stress through appraisal and coping, including emotion-focused and problem-focused responses. In a student well-being activity, mindfulness can support noticing and naming emotions, while coping prompts can help students consider both emotional regulation and practical next steps. These concepts are not treated here as clinical treatment components, but as accessible design principles for student-facing well-being support.

Evidence on university student mental health initiatives also points to the value of accessible design. Nair and Otaki (2021) identify mindfulness, movement, meaning and moderator-based support as recurring elements in individual-level interventions. Conley et al. (2015) report that universal prevention programmes for higher education students may support adjustment outcomes, although effectiveness depends on programme quality and fit. These studies suggest that universities should not only provide support; they should design it in forms that students find approachable and meaningful.

Experiential Learning and Campus-Based Well-Being Spaces

An exhibition-based initiative is relevant because well-being education is not acquired through information alone. Kolb (1984) argues that learning emerges through the transformation of experience. In a well-being context, this means that students need opportunities to recognise their own experience, give it meaning and connect it with possible responses. An interactive exhibition can make abstract concepts concrete: self-awareness becomes an emotional check-in, coping becomes reflective prompts, self-kindness becomes a message to oneself and help-seeking becomes a visible pathway to further support.

For student success scholarship, this expands the range of practices through which universities may support students. Well-being is often discussed in relation to services, policies or individual resilience. Exhibition-based design suggests another

possibility: well-being can be built into the cultural and spatial life of the campus. The present study is therefore positioned as a descriptive evaluation of how one Thai university made student well-being visible, accessible and experiential within campus life.

Programme Context and Design

SWU Heal Jai with Love was organised as a three-day interactive exhibition at the G23 Exhibition Hall, Professor Dr. Saroj Buasri Innovation Building, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. It was open to students and staff and was designed to create an accessible space for emotional reflection, self-compassion, coping awareness, grounding and connection with further support. According to the programme record, 197 participants attended the exhibition and 181 completed the post-activity evaluation.

The exhibition was not presented as a clinical intervention. It was framed as an open, walk-through experience where participants could engage with well-being concepts at their own pace. This design choice mattered because it allowed the exhibition to function as a low-threshold point of contact for students who might be interested in well-being support but hesitant to join an explicitly mental health-focused activity. The programme followed a deliberate pathway: emotional awareness, reflection, coping, self-kindness, grounding, support and future orientation.

Table 1 summarises the seven stations. The table is central to the article because it shows that the exhibition was not a loose collection of activities, but a design-based well-being pathway. Each station translated a conceptual basis into practical experience and an intended student well-being outcome.

Table 1

Programme Design of the SWU Heal Jai with Love Exhibition

Station	Conceptual basis	Activity process	Intended student well-being outcome
Emotional check-in	Mindfulness/self-awareness	Participants selected a colour representing their present feeling and wrote a brief reflection on a heart-shaped card.	Emotional awareness
Reflection sky	Mindfulness	Participants moved through reflective questions about where an emotion came from, how it felt and what it might be communicating.	Understanding emotional triggers
Coping wall	Coping theory	Participants engaged with prompts related to emotion-focused and problem-focused coping, including soothing activities, support and practical next steps.	Coping literacy
Caring mirror	Self-compassion	Participants considered what they might say to themselves from a kinder perspective and wrote a caring message.	Self-kindness
Returning to the body	Grounding/somatic awareness	Participants used a multi-sensory space involving touch, sound, scent and stillness to bring attention back to the present moment.	Calmness and regulation
Heal room	Brief counselling	Participants who wanted deeper reflection could access a short consultation and, where appropriate, referral to university support.	Help-seeking pathway
Future projection	Positive visualisation	Participants used sand art to express a desired future or direction after the exhibition.	Hope and future orientation

Design Principles Underpinning the Exhibition

Four design principles shaped the exhibition. The first was voluntary and flexible participation. Participants were not required to register for a counselling session, disclose a personal problem or move through the exhibition in a highly controlled manner. They could enter the space, pause at stations, skip elements if needed and decide how deeply they wished to engage. This was important because low-threshold well-being support depends not only on what is offered, but also on how safely and easily students can approach it.

The second principle was low disclosure demand. The exhibition began with private and symbolic forms of reflection, such as choosing a colour, writing on a card, reading prompts or engaging with sensory materials. These activities allowed participants to recognise emotions without being required to explain them verbally to another person. This design choice was intended to reduce pressure and protect emotional safety, particularly for students who might not yet be ready to speak directly about their concerns.

The third principle was experiential translation. Psychological concepts were translated into simple actions rather than presented as abstract explanations. Mindfulness became emotional check-in and sensory awareness. Coping became reflective prompts about emotional care and practical next steps. Self-compassion became a written message of kindness to oneself. Grounding became attention to touch, sound, scent and bodily stillness. This approach reflects the logic of experiential learning, in which participants learn through situated experience rather than information alone (Kolb, 1984).

The fourth principle was connection to support. Although the exhibition was designed as an informal campus experience, it was not separated from professional student support. The Heal room created a bridge between self-guided reflection and brief consultation. This was essential because low-threshold initiatives should not leave students alone with difficult emotions once reflection has been prompted. The exhibition therefore combined emotional accessibility with a visible pathway to further help.

Together, these principles explain why the exhibition was designed as a sequence rather than as isolated activity stations. The aim was to move participants gently from awareness to reflection, from reflection to coping, from coping to self-kindness and grounding, and finally towards support and future orientation. This sequence allowed well-being to be approached gradually, while preserving participant choice and emotional safety.

The pathway began with a modest act of self-awareness rather than direct disclosure. Participants first chose a colour and wrote a short reflection, then moved into questions that helped them stay with the feeling long enough to consider its source and meaning. The middle stations shifted from awareness to response. The Coping wall made emotion-focused and problem-focused coping visible as a set of options, while the Caring mirror translated self-compassion into a simple act of writing to oneself with care.

The later stations moved towards regulation, support and future orientation. Returning to the body recognised that stress is also bodily and sensory, not only cognitive. The Heal room, developed in collaboration with SWU Smile, connected informal engagement with brief consultation and referral where needed. Future projection closed the experience with sand art, allowing participants to leave with a forward-looking image rather than with distress alone. The design therefore placed emotional safety at the centre: participants could engage privately, control how much they disclosed and decide how deeply they wished to participate.

Programme Evaluation Approach

This programme evaluation used a descriptive case study design with post-activity evaluation data. A case study approach was appropriate because the exhibition was a bounded programme situated within a real university context. Yin (2018) notes that case study research is suitable when a contemporary phenomenon is examined in relation to its real-world setting. In this study, the meaning of the exhibition depended on the university environment, the spatial design of the stations, voluntary participant movement and the connection with existing student support services.

The evaluation was descriptive rather than experimental. The programme evaluation did not include pre- and post-participation psychological measures, a comparison group or follow-up assessment. The findings are therefore interpreted as participant-

reported perceptions rather than evidence of psychological change. This boundary is important because the exhibition was evaluated as a low-threshold student well-being initiative, not as a clinical treatment programme.

The programme evaluation drew on two data sources. The first was programme documentation describing the exhibition, its conceptual design, the seven stations and the intended well-being outcomes. The second was the post-activity evaluation form completed after participation. The form collected demographic and status information and asked participants to rate their experience using five-point response items. Participants rated each item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = lowest to 5 = highest. It covered perceived feelings after participation, satisfaction with programme organisation and open-ended suggestions for improvement.

A total of 197 participants attended the exhibition, and 181 completed the evaluation form. Respondents were mainly university students, with smaller numbers of staff members, external participants and demonstration school students. Because participation was open and voluntary, the sample is best understood as a convenience sample of exhibition participants rather than a representative sample of the university population.

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Following Sullivan and Artino (2013), Likert-type items were interpreted cautiously and used only as descriptive indicators of participant perception. Open-ended suggestions were reviewed thematically to identify recurring areas for improvement, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) flexible approach to identifying patterns across qualitative responses.

This programme evaluation used aggregated and non-identifiable programme evaluation data from the project Developing Mechanisms to Promote Well-being among Students and Staff of Srinakharinwirot University, which received ethics approval from Srinakharinwirot University under approval number SWUEC-672638. No individual participant is identified in the analysis. Private consultation content from the Heal room was excluded from the research data, and any personal consultation provided during the exhibition was treated as part of student support practice.

Participant Feedback and Evaluation Findings

The respondent group was predominantly female: 138 respondents identified as female (76.2%), 40 as male (22.1%) and 3 did not specify gender (1.7%). Students accounted for 170 respondents (93.9%), while staff members and external participants each accounted for 5 respondents (2.8%). One respondent was a demonstration school student. The exhibition also drew participants from several faculties and colleges, with the largest groups from the Faculty of Business Administration for Society (n = 53), Faculty of Social Sciences (n = 45) and Faculty of Humanities (n = 33). This profile indicates that the activity was primarily student-facing, while still reaching beyond a single academic discipline.

Participants reported positive immediate perceptions after joining the exhibition. All three post-participation feeling items received mean scores of 4.75 or above. The highest score was for feeling more comfortable and relaxed after participation (M = 4.83), followed by enjoyment of the activity (M = 4.80) and the perception that the content and activities were healing and personally useful (M = 4.75). These results suggest that participants valued the emotional tone of the exhibition and experienced it as more than an informational activity.

Participants also rated the organisation of the exhibition highly. Overall satisfaction received the highest mean score (M = 4.87), followed by convenience of participation (M = 4.82), appropriateness of the venue (M = 4.79), perceived psychological benefit of the activity (M = 4.77) and diversity and attractiveness of the activities (M = 4.75). The strong rating for convenience is noteworthy because a low-threshold initiative depends on whether students find the space easy to enter and worth their time.

The distribution of participant ratings across the evaluation items is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Evaluation

Evaluation item	Highest rating (n)	High rating (n)	Moderate rating (n)	Mean
Enjoyed and had fun participating in the activity	146	33	2	4.80
Felt more comfortable and relaxed after participation	153	26	2	4.83
Found the content/activity healing and personally useful	140	36	5	4.75
Appropriateness of the venue	150	24	7	4.79
Convenience of participation	154	22	5	4.82
Diversity and attractiveness of the activities	139	38	4	4.75
Psychological benefits of the activity	142	36	3	4.77
Overall satisfaction	158	22	1	4.87

Note. Data are drawn from the post-activity evaluation of the SWU Heal Jai with Love exhibition.

The open-ended suggestions added practical detail to these ratings. Participants wanted the activity to be organised more often, promoted more widely and offered at more flexible times, including lunch or evening periods. They also suggested more activity variety, quieter areas for private reflection, adjustments to the physical environment and stronger access to psychological or psychiatric support. These comments indicate that the exhibition was not seen only as a one-off event. Participants appeared to recognise potential for continuation and deeper integration with university support services.

The findings should be interpreted carefully. They show positive participant perceptions, especially around relaxation, usefulness, convenience and satisfaction. They do not show clinical or sustained psychological impact, sustained well-being improvement or changes in help-seeking behaviour over time. Their value lies in documenting how students responded to a particular design of low-threshold campus well-being support.

Practice Reflections and Transferable Principles

Low-Threshold Well-Being Access

The findings suggest that the exhibition format helped make well-being support approachable. Participants did not need an appointment, a referral or a declaration that they needed psychological help. They could enter, move at their own pace and choose how much to engage. This matters because student help-seeking can be affected by stigma and uncertainty (Eisenberg et al., 2009; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). The exhibition did not replace counselling services; rather, it created an earlier and less formal point of contact with well-being.

The Heal room strengthened this design by connecting informal reflection with professional support. Students who wanted deeper conversation could access brief consultation and, where appropriate, referral. For practice, this suggests that low-threshold initiatives should not stand apart from formal services. They are strongest when they create a bridge between ordinary student life and available support pathways.

Experiential Self-Compassion Design

The case also shows how psychological concepts can be translated into simple, student-facing activities. Self-compassion was not delivered as a lecture; it appeared through the Caring mirror, shared messages and the invitation to speak to oneself with

care. Mindfulness was made practical through colour choice, reflective questions and sensory grounding. Coping was presented through prompts that allowed students to consider both emotional care and practical next steps.

This translation is important because students may not engage deeply with abstract well-being language. They may, however, respond to small acts: choosing a colour, writing a message, sitting quietly, touching sensory materials or drawing in sand. The positive ratings for enjoyment, relaxation and usefulness suggest that this form of experiential design was meaningful to participants. It also aligns with Kolb's (1984) view that learning develops through experience. Well-being, in this sense, becomes something students practise within campus life rather than something explained to them from a distance.

Student Success and Campus Culture

Although the exhibition did not teach academic skills directly, it addressed capacities that support student success. Students who can recognise emotions, calm the body, reflect on coping and locate support may be better positioned to participate in university life. Bowden et al. (2021) argue that student success should be understood holistically, while Baik et al. (2019) show that well-being is shaped by multiple dimensions of the student experience. The present case supports that view by showing how a co-curricular and spatially designed activity can make well-being visible within the everyday life of a university.

Several practical implications follow. Universities should place well-being activities in visible and ordinary campus spaces, while preserving privacy and emotional safety. Activities should allow flexible levels of participation, so that students can engage quietly, write privately or seek support if ready. Psychological ideas should be translated into concrete experiences rather than presented only as technical language. Finally, communication should frame well-being in accessible terms such as reflection, rest, self-care and student experience, rather than relying on language that feels overly clinical.

Continuity also matters. Participants' suggestions for more frequent activities, wider publicity, flexible scheduling and quiet spaces indicate that well-being support is more likely to become part of campus culture when it is repeated and visible. A single exhibition may create interest, but recurring initiatives at key points in the academic year could help normalise well-being as part of student life.

Contribution to Student Success

The contribution of this case to student success lies in its treatment of well-being as part of the conditions that allow students to participate in university life. The exhibition did not aim to improve grades, retention or academic performance directly. Its value is more foundational. It addressed the emotional and relational conditions that may shape whether students feel able to engage, belong, seek help and remain connected to the institution. From this perspective, student success is not understood only as an academic outcome, but as a broader experience in which students are supported as whole persons.

The case also extends student success practice by showing how psychological well-being can be embedded in co-curricular and spatial design. Rather than asking students to approach support through a formal service pathway, the exhibition placed reflection, coping and self-compassion within an ordinary campus setting. This matters because some students may need a less formal point of entry before they are ready to seek individual support. A visible and voluntary well-being space can therefore contribute to student success by normalising care, reducing the emotional distance between students and support services, and making help-seeking feel more approachable.

For universities, the implication is that student success work should include environments that help students recognise difficulty early and connect with support before problems become more serious. The SWU Heal Jai with Love exhibition offers one example of this approach. It does not replace academic advising, teaching quality, counselling or retention strategies. Rather, it complements them by creating a campus experience through which students can pause, reflect and locate support within the everyday life of the university.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. It relied on post-activity evaluation data and did not include pre-participation measures, a comparison group, validated psychological scales or follow-up assessment. The findings should therefore be interpreted as immediate participant perceptions rather than evidence of sustained psychological or clinical outcomes. The evaluation

measured enjoyment, relaxation, perceived usefulness, satisfaction and suggestions for improvement; it did not measure mental well-being, mindfulness, self-compassion, resilience or coping in a psychometric sense.

The sample was also based on voluntary participation. Students who were already interested in well-being activities, had available time or felt comfortable with reflective activities may have been more likely to participate. The study was conducted in a single institution, and the open-ended suggestions were limited in depth. The findings therefore cannot be generalised directly to all Thai universities or to other national contexts without adaptation. Future studies should use stronger mixed-method designs, including validated measures, pre- and post-participation assessment, follow-up data and qualitative interviews.

Conclusion

This article examined SWU Heal Jai with Love as an interactive self-compassion exhibition and a low-threshold student well-being initiative in Thai higher education. The case shows that student well-being can be supported not only through formal counselling or specialist services, but also through carefully designed campus experiences that allow students to pause, reflect and approach support in a less intimidating way.

The exhibition translated self-compassion, mindfulness, coping, grounding, brief counselling and future-oriented reflection into seven interactive stations. Its design was grounded in voluntary participation, low disclosure demand, experiential learning and connection to professional support. These principles allowed well-being to be approached gradually, beginning with emotional awareness and moving towards reflection, coping, self-kindness, grounding, help-seeking and future orientation.

The evaluation findings indicate that participants perceived the exhibition positively, particularly in relation to relaxation, usefulness, convenience and overall satisfaction. These findings do not demonstrate clinical or sustained psychological impact. They do, however, provide evidence of programme feasibility and perceived value within a real campus setting. For this reason, the contribution of the study lies less in proving therapeutic effect and more in showing how universities may design approachable well-being support as part of the broader student experience.

The wider significance of the case is its relevance to student success practice. Students' capacity to engage, belong, seek help and remain connected to university life is shaped not only by academic provision, but also by the emotional and relational conditions of the campus. SWU Heal Jai with Love offers a practical example of how psychological well-being can be made visible through co-curricular and spatial design. While the model should be adapted to local contexts, its core principles may be useful for other universities seeking to embed well-being support into everyday campus life.

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