



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

ANZSSA 2015 conference presentation

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Background & Rationale

This video was the result of our 2012 mental health awareness initiative – “what messes with your head at uni, and how do you clean up the mess”. This initiative involved a ‘diary room’ style booth set up 24/7 for one week in the student hub on North Tce campus. Students were encouraged to make a recording talking about the difficulties they face at university, and more importantly, any strategies they used to deal with these difficulties. We had an overwhelming response and from a broad range of students. At the Counselling Service we see a range of students who will feel ok about or think to access counselling, but many of the students who recorded messages we suspect would not have considered counselling as a first point of contact. And often may not really need that level of support.

This led us to think about how we could support these students by ‘adding on’ to their existing resources and offer an early intervention approach. We know we have brilliant strategies to offer, but how to reach these students.

The students also had some great ideas and pointers for the sorts of strategies that other students might find useful and it would be ideal to have a platform to share some of these ideas.

We were also looking at ways to maximise our resources and develop creative ways to complement the existing traditional Counselling Service (CS) model of practice and to think about post counselling support strategies.

And we need to do all this without adding extra pressure on our already stretched one to one support which was not likely to receive more dollars.

We set about looking at what type of resource would be best positioned in our university context to do this.

Interestingly around the same time Martin Seligman was the South Australian Government’s ‘Thinker in Residency’. His Positive Psychology approach fit well with our idea to develop a resource that was not a problem based information resource, but rather, to try to engage students who might not consider they needed counselling as an option, and who would benefit from ideas, resources and information as a positive add-on to their own skills, resources and resilience.

Development

Having identified our rationale and framework we needed to work out what sort of 'platform' such a resource should use. Should it be part of the counselling service website, should it sit within the teaching and learning online platform – should it be exclusively be for our students with a login?, should it be a mobile app? After significant consultation with the key university services we had a clearer idea of the extent of support we should expect both in development and ongoing maintenance and we settled on a publicly available stand-alone web resource that we could manage mostly ourselves.

Now that we had decided on a platform we needed to find out from students the look and feel they would connect with. To gain insight from the broadest range of students possible we engaged in a range of feedback opportunities, both organised and ad hoc. That's where the Learning Hub was excellent. We had a number of ad hoc lunchtime free pizza 'come and tell us' workshops. This proved to be quite successful so we used this strategy throughout the development – to get feedback at various stages.

We also did a review of what other unis and services were doing and used these images to get feedback from our students.

Some of our feedback was surprising, and some as we had anticipated.

Students wanted something that had a calm and relaxing feel - with greens and blues. We had mistakenly assumed they would want a busy groovy style of site! It also seemed important for it not to be overtly connected to the Counselling Service. And they felt it would be good to look different from the generic university web 'style' yet at the same time have enough to feel 'safe' that it was endorsed by the Uni. This proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the project. The university branding guidelines are pretty limiting. It took quite a few months of discussion to help the web team to understand what we were trying to achieve.

We were lucky to have an illustrator on our staff and as a whole service we brainstormed key aspects of the look. We were all clear from the start we wanted to use a symbol that was unique to University of Adelaide – and that is its beautiful setting of trees.

The content was developed and written by the team. As I mentioned we used the Seligman Positive Psychology framework – drawing on PERMA and using the 'thrive and flourish' language. This is how we came about the name – UniThrive, as the University IT portal is Unified.

Launch

The launch coincided with Mental Health Awareness, and we chose a positive theme – random acts of kindness. Again, students really engaged with this idea, and the Hub proved invaluable. Students submitted their random acts of kindness on cut out leaves, capitalising on the tree theme, and we gave out random gifts – little staplers stuck randomly under chairs in the hub with announcements to check.

Website overview

Front page – positive psychology

Thrive – PERMA

- Engagement
 - Flow state
 - Find strengths – based on 24 character strengths

Revive – looks at major issues

- Anxiety
- Stress

Engage – mediation videos and breathing.

Blog and App

Next we launched a UniThrive blog at beginning semester 2 with two blogs per week.

Finally on RUOK day this year we launched our UniThrive wellbeing app. This has received quite a lot of attention, not the least from staff. Its designed to help students develop an awareness of their mood and incorporates positive messages, and some of the tools – such as gratitude lists and self care notifications in a fun way.

Usage

The uptake was good with a steady increase.

The blog has been getting consistent views after the initial launch. We need to find ways to keep it in people's consciousness – any ideas welcome

The App launch had a pleasing first few weeks of :

- iOS = 157 downloads
- Android = 37 downloads

Where to next

The design was deliberate to be easily able to be continually updated with new resources and information which will be our project focus next year.

We will check in with students again to review all 3 resources and get some feedback. Counsellors really like using it to support their practice. Generally staff at the uni has been really supportive. Its also one of the few posters around campus that doesn't seem to get removed and people seem to really engage with the unique imagery – something we like to feedback to Marketing !