

Sweet As: helping first year students transition with peer education and resiliency training.

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In 2013 Victoria University of Wellington measured student wellbeing using the WHO-5 inventory. The results revealed that 43% of students rated their wellbeing as poor. Moreover, the Tertiary Student Health Survey 2013 revealed up to 20% of the participants experienced moderate-severe levels of depression, and, up to 45% of students experienced a level of anxiety that met the criteria for “other anxiety syndrome”.

To address these results the Student Counselling Service desired to take an active rather than reactive stance through providing education on the skills of resiliency and wellbeing for first year students. It was the vision of the Student Counselling Service to provide students with a skill set that they can draw upon during their university careers, and in the future.

Research supported the development of a resilience/wellbeing peer education program for first year students at Victoria. Educating students on the skills of resiliency and wellbeing can assist in reducing depressive/anxious symptoms, and helps students create and manage flourishing lives (Seligman, Ernst, Gillman, Reivich & Linkins, 2009). Furthermore, literature suggests mentoring programs have a positive impact on students through creating a sense of belonging, peer tutoring, encouraging help seeking behavior and enhancing self efficacy (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). As this program required the education on specific skills, it was embedded in peer education, ensuring it met the characteristics of effective prevention programs: theory driven, delivered using a variety of teaching methods with well trained volunteers/staff (Nation, Crusto, Wandersman, Kumpfer, Seybolt, Morrissey-Kane & Davino, 2003).

The peer education program known as Sweet As was launched as a pilot in 2014. The peer educators taught four sessions in trimester one: goal setting, overcoming procrastination/taking action, reframing negative thinking/communication skills/conflict resolution, and stress management. An evaluation of the program rated each session and the peer educators highly, with wellbeing scores increasing by at least one rating score. Sweet As was launched in alignment with a university wide approach to wellbeing promotion.

Key Words

Peer Education
Mentoring Program
Transition Program
Resilience
Wellbeing
University Students