

MODULE 4.1

CASE STUDIES

Case study 1: School of distance education

Planning ahead for individual support

This school of distance education has created a wellbeing plan to support the needs of students currently enrolled who are experiencing mental health concerns. These plans are created with the student and carer at the time of enrolment, or when the need arises. Students aged 16 and above are able to complete their plans independently.

A wellbeing plan enables greater communication between the teacher and the student and identifies the student's current support network. The increased communication and knowledge of support networks enables the teacher to engage the student more effectively in their learning.

The wellbeing plan includes the following questions and prompts for the student to complete:

- What do I do well?
- What makes me feel stressed?
- When I'm feeling unwell or down I do the following _____
- The things I can do to keep well are _____
- People in my network I can talk to or make contact with are _____
- Medications
- Mental health care plan details
- Mental health professionals used for support
- What happens if I am feeling unwell?



The plan is a visual map that includes telephone contact numbers of local mental health services that can provide phone counselling and a referral system for further help. It also includes the Kids Helpline number, which can provide immediate support for those students currently without mobile phone credit to call other services.

The plan was developed to provide support to the student as well as the teacher, who can use it as a starting point for a conversation about how the student is coping, as well as a reminder to the student about how to take care of themselves. With an increasing number of students identified as having mental health concerns, it was imperative that we increased the level of support that we provided them within their education.

Case study 2: Religiously affiliated community college

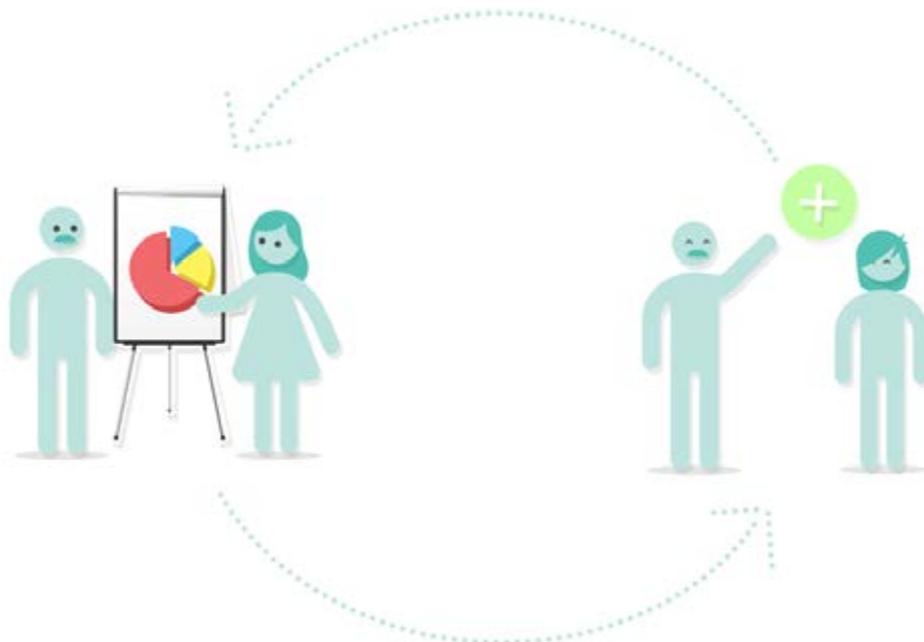
Using data and policies to support student mental health and wellbeing

Effective use of data from MindMatters and other school surveys has enabled the pastoral care committee at this college to identify students, groups and year levels who could benefit from support to promote their mental health and wellbeing. The surveys help identify the types of issues of concern and a range of programs are then developed, including student programs such as Cool Kids and Seasons. Parent education also forms a key part of this support with sessions regularly held on topics such as anxiety and parenting skills as well as more structured programs such as Tuning Into Teens.

New ways to engage staff, students and families are continually explored and most recently a Digital Dialogues program based on Creating Conversations has been developed resulting in a lot of interest from the college community. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the school programs through the family contribution scheme set up when parents enrol, where their contribution is expected and hours can be gained for attending events as well as working bees and joining in other activities.

Policies are regularly revisited to ensure that they align with the programs and needs identified by the data. The language and approaches of the policies are consistent with the core messages promoted throughout the college. For example "Taking responsibility" is the title of the behaviour management policy. The pastoral care committee has recently reviewed the attendance policy and developed actions for preventative and early intervention focus on students who data reveals are missing classes.

This approach is consistent with a mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention World Health Organisation model where data and policies are used to inform and support the programs and initiatives developed by the school to meet the various needs of students and families.



Case Study 3: State high school

School processes for supporting students with mental health difficulties

1. Learning Support Team (see below for list of team members)

A learning support team (LST) meets fortnightly and minutes are kept and forwarded to the executive and head teachers (HT) of each faculty. Smaller meetings are held with the principal, deputy and counsellor as required to discuss issues and provide updates on progress. Members keep in regular email contact with each other.

Case meetings are held with students, parents and outside agencies when required. Teachers can refer students who need support with their learning or who are experiencing behavioural difficulties.

Students are referred to the school counsellor and/or year advisor. Professional development needs are identified for staff or educational needs for students, which can be met through productive living skills (PLS). Outside agencies are contacted to deliver programs to meet these needs.

2. Process when a student is identified as needing support

- Behaviour plans are developed (in consultation with principal, deputy principal, counsellor, teachers and year advisor), which identify student's triggers and offer strategies to assist teachers in the classroom and playground.
- Contact is made and meetings held with parents to discuss their child's needs and provide support where possible through outside agencies or within the school. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in developing plans to support their child within the school and to be informed of their progress.
- Access requests for additional funding support and/or alternate placements for students are completed as appropriate.
- Students are referred to outside agencies including: Mission Australia, headspace, Aboriginal Regional Centre and other local support agencies.
- Students are also referred to in school programs including: counsellor, Girls Group, Transition Careers or engagement advisor, Football United, Financial Assistance and other programs.
- Health care plans and individual education plans (IEPs) are developed when necessary. Out of home care support staff members are liaised with as appropriate. Information is provided to teachers as appropriate in relation to individual students.



3. Benefits of the team

Individual students and student groups who need support and access support from within or from outside of the school are identified early. Staff members are regularly updated on students' needs, strategies and professional development. Information is provided to parents so they can be involved in their child's experience of school.

Roles in the team:

The learning support team (LST) is supported by: deputy and principal, english teacher and literacy co-ordinator and HT of the support unit. Their support offers perspectives on how the school is currently dealing with students in need and help in the process of gathering information pertinent to each individual case.

Year 7-10 year advisors are also invited to join the fortnightly meetings in order to shed more light on students in their care.

The learning and support teacher - Supporting students who are struggling to access the curriculum with individual tutoring, referring to LST and updating teachers of changing needs and dynamics, assisting in the implementation of whole-school programs (for example Super Six). Liaising with LST, counsellor, student learning support officers (SLSOs) and senior executive re: support of students learning

Year 8 advisor - Teaching PLS program to year 8 to increase their understanding of how to communicate, socialise and emote effectively, appropriately and safely, listening to student issues and communicating with parents to support student success at the school. Update students on school rules, keep abreast of student attendance patterns, welfare issues and have regular year meetings.

Student diagnostician - Using literacy (decoding, comprehension, writing), numeracy, multiple intelligence diagnostic testing to assess student understanding and ability of core areas and then looking at relevant programs, classes and possible outside agency support

Assistant junior transition coordinator - Liaising with local primary schools to access information on incoming students to the school, work on transition programs to support smoother transition of junior students into high school



English as a second language (ESL) - Accessing support for ESL and students with learning needs. Creating Behaviour plans, IEPs and access requests.

Transition advisor - Advocates for students 'at risk' to create alternative learning pathways and to support students to remain at school.

Student engagement officer - Creates opportunities for students to engage in the educational experience and supervises the productive Living Skills program.

Case study 4: Hospital special school

Embedding wellbeing in school policies and procedures to support students with mental health difficulties

The secondary school's enrolment typically includes 80 per cent of students experiencing a mental health difficulty. The school's strategic plan has three focus areas – engagement, support and resilience. Each of these areas becomes the structural base for all of the school's meetings (staff, team and performance). In every meeting the team discusses, plans and reviews how to maximise student achievement and engagement with a focus on broad 'ownership' of students.

Teachers are also members of wider medical teams. As such, teachers are involved in case conference meetings. Each morning all staff at school meet for 20 minutes for a handover meeting. At this meeting all relevant information about each student who will attend the school is shared, the level of detail varying depending upon the students' needs. Decisions regarding staff deployment for the day are then made so that the students' needs can best be catered for.

Useful in-service for school staff is provided by hospital medical staff on pertinent issues relating to the students on a needs basis such as low mood, eating disorders, psychosis and so on.

As students are isolated from their home communities and home schools, staff members search for strategies that create a sense of community and student cohesiveness. This enables students to feel not only connected to each other but to the school as well. One strategy is the classroom mascot, which helps to create a team atmosphere that builds positive communication and relationships and belonging and inclusion. Dino, the plastic diplodocus, from Dijon, France, heads the secondary team. Students can choose to be part of Dino's team by taking a 'selfie' and putting themselves on the selfie wall. The wall provides a visual reminder that each student is part of a larger secondary team and relieves the feelings of isolation that often occur when students are removed from their school communities. Dino also serves as an integrating device for curriculum areas.



Highly structured reintegration plans for students who have a mental health difficulty are developed to assist students' return to their usual school. These plans are developed collaboratively between teachers, medical staff, home school staff, parents and the students themselves.

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools developed by *beyondblue* with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health.

See more MindMatters resources at www.mindmatters.edu.au