

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING SERVICES

2008 ANNUAL REPORT

1.0 Introduction

2008 has seen the consolidation of the multi campus Counselling Services through the formal alignment of the Shepparton campus counselling service with Bundoora and Bendigo counselling services and strengthened linkages with counselling at the Albury Wodonga campus.

Counselling Services maintained its commitment to primary care, secondary consultation and community development strategies with the aim of enhancing the wellbeing of students and staff, optimising opportunities for academic success and supporting the University's strategic direction.

Our primary care services consist of one to one counselling, small group counselling, and group programs aimed at assisting students in their transition into University life, and promoting psychological and social development. In the past year a total of 2504 students accessed these services across the Bundoora, Bendigo and Albury Wodonga campuses. Services to staff include counselling, training and secondary consultation, with a total of 475 staff accessing these services across the three campuses in 2008. Results from all sources of program evaluation (i.e. Partners for Change Outcome Management System - evaluation of counselling process and outcomes; evaluation of group and training sessions) provided a very strong endorsement of the Service.

In the past year the Service has responded to the urgent and complex needs of the University community, such as those involving risk of self harm and/or risk of harm to others, through intervention and collaboration with Community Crisis Assessment and Treatment Teams, Police and Ambulance Services, and membership of the University Threat Assessment and Crisis Response teams. We have also provided debriefing and counselling to staff members and students dealing with the aftermath of violent incidents and death, including suicide.

In 2008 Counselling Services undertook a VicHealth funded project aimed at the prevention of sexual violence against women by encouraging young men to actively explore consent in sexual relating and to challenge gendered beliefs that condone violence against women. Resources developed during the project will be used in a range of orientation, training and health promotion activities within and beyond La Trobe University. The Service has also implemented a number of HEESP funded projects including key recommendations from the 'Meeting the Needs of Students with Mental Health Issues' project report launched early this year; and the research phase of 'Migrating to Uni: Enhancing support for local students from NESB.'

As part of our commitment to strengthening linkages with the broader community and sharing ideas and innovative practices, counselling staff members wrote a number of articles and participated in several professional forums and conferences.

2.0 Staff

Bundoora

Our thanks to John Laidlaw for his hard work as Acting Director during Joanne Barlow's Long Service Leave and to Magio Konidaris, Monica Lederman and Susan Cuthbert who provided excellent support to the Service as locum counsellors during this period. A warm welcome to Rhonda Boucher who commenced as locum Administration Officer following the resignation of Jill Brown. Our heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Jill who has moved to regional Victoria.

Bendigo

Our thanks to Lynda Evans who has provided outstanding leadership and service delivery as acting Senior Counsellor at the Bendigo Counselling Service during Chris Kirwan's extended absence. Thanks also to Lorraine Meades and Rob Gordon who provided invaluable support to the Service as a locum counsellor following the resignation of Elizabeth Griffiths.

Shepparton

A warm welcome to Judy Weavers who commenced as part time Senior Counsellor at the Shepparton campus in late 2008. Judy has a wealth of experience in the community and tertiary education sectors and has worked for many years in the Goulburn Valley.

3.0 Service delivery

The sections presented under this heading show the activities of Counselling Services.

3.1 Contacts

Bundoora

A total of approximately 7,000 telephone and "in person" contacts were recorded within the reception area. This serves as a good indicator of the overall volume of contacts within the Service for the year.

3.2 Individual Counselling

Individual counselling is the primary activity of the Service. A total of 1231 individual clients (1200 students and 31 staff) were seen for a total of 3437 sessions across the Bundoora, Bendigo and Albury Wodonga campuses. This is an average of 2.8 sessions per client. This represents a balance between short-term counselling and the medium term support that enables students to maintain their enrolment.

Bundoora campus

807 individual clients were seen for a total of 2549 sessions. The majority of clients were students (788), female (534), aged between 20-29 (519) and undergraduates. Overall, these figures reflect the demographics of the university community. A total of 172 international students accessed the service for counselling in 2008 - a significant increase from the 113 international students who attended in 2006.

The most common presenting problems were: relationship issues with family or partners; study related concerns including motivation, organisation, and time management; and anxiety and depression.

Bendigo campus

374 individual clients were seen for a total of 794 sessions. The majority of clients were students (362), female (257), aged between 20-29 (229) and undergraduates.

Albury Wodonga campus

50 individual clients were seen for a total of 94 sessions. All the clients were students; the majority of clients were female (36) and undergraduates with many aged between 20-29 (25).

3.3 Crisis Response and Secondary Consultation

Our responses to the urgent and complex needs of the University community included collaboration with Community Crisis Assessment Teams and other emergency services in response to those at risk of harm to self and/or others; membership of the University Threat Assessment and Crisis Response Teams; and debriefing and counselling staff members and students dealing with the aftermath of serious accidents, violent incidents and death, including suicide.

The Service recorded a total of 343 secondary consultations across the Bundoora, Bendigo and Albury Wodonga campuses, of which 182 were deemed to be urgent and/or complex.

Bundoora campus

Of the 290 secondary consultations recorded in 2008, 176 involved urgent and/or complex situations. Most frequently the nature of the consultation was concern about the well-being of a particular student (85), odd and concerning behaviours (54), a student at risk of self harm (44), and staff wellbeing (15). Other consultations included queries about enrolments, special consideration and show cause; requests for information about our range of services, including staff training; and information regarding mental health issues.

The majority of the consultations occurred with staff and students within the La Trobe University community. Of these, consultation occurred most frequently with academic staff (65), La Trobe International (37), residential colleges (26), and the Equality and Diversity Unit (20). Most external consultations occurred with mental health agencies (54) including Community Crisis Assessment Teams, Community Mental Health Services and private psychiatrists/hospitals, followed by external counselling/health agencies (13) and parents of La Trobe University students (11).

Bendigo campus

A total of 40 consultations were recorded in 2008. Most frequently the nature of the consultations was concern about the well-being of a particular student (11), odd and concerning behaviour (6) and more general concerns about student welfare (6).

Consultations occurred most frequently with La Trobe University students (10) and academic staff (8). Most external consultations occurred with parents of La Trobe University students (5) and external mental health services (4).

Albury Wodonga campus

A total of 13 consultations were recorded in 2008. Most frequently the nature of the consultations was concern about the well-being of a student (5) and staff wellbeing (3).

Consultation occurred most frequently with La Trobe University students (4), and academic staff (4).

3.4 Group Program

Across the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses a total of 212 hours of group programs were attended by a total of 1405 participants. Of these, 1304 group participants were students and 101 were staff members.

As can be seen below, Counselling Services offered an extensive range of group programs in 2008.

Bundoora Campus

Orientation and Adjustment

Semester One

Mature age Group Orientation Programs (4 x 1 day, 3 x 2 day, 67 participants).

Welcome Festival, February 11th (1x 30 minutes session, 250 international students).

An introduction to the Counselling Service, February 22nd (1 hour, international students from the Division of Nursing).

Visit to Art Therapy Class, February 11th (1 hour session).

Semester Two

Welcome Festival July 9th (1x 30 minute session, 250 international students).

Study Skills and Life Skills

Semester Two

Relaxation group, October 8th (1 hour session, 6 post-graduate students from the School of Public Health).

Stress Management group, December 8th (1 hour session, 2 post-graduate students from the School of Public Health).

Training for Students

Semester One

Residential Assistants' Training, Glenn College, February 8th (1 x 7 hour session, 16 participants).

Residential Assistants' Training, Menzies College and Waterdale Road Apartments, February 11th (1x 6 hour session, 15 participants).

Residential Assistants' Training, Chisholm College and University Lodge, February 12th (1 x 6 hr session, 17 participants).

Residential Assistants' Training: Mental Health Session, February 13th (1 x 2 hour session, 39 participants).

Semester Two

Faculty of Health Sciences Pilot Peer Mentor Program Training, July 16th (1 x 2.5 hour session, 10 participants).

Residential Assistants' Training, Menzies College, November 24th (1 x 6 hour session, 12 Residential Assistants from the 2009 intake).

Residential Assistants' Training, Glenn College and Graduate House, November 25th (1 x 6 hour session, 22 Residential Assistants from the 2009 intake).

Residential Assistants' Training, Chisholm College and University Lodge, November 27th (1 x 6 hour session, 16 Residential Assistants from the 2009 intake).

Training for Staff

Semester One

Responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours Level 1, February 6th (1 x 3.5 hour session (20 staff members from the Division of Nursing and Midwifery).

Responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours Level 1, April 22nd (1 x 3.5 hour session, 19 academic and general staff members).

Responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours Level 1, June 17th (1 x 3.5 hour session, 8 academic and general staff members).

Relax @ Midday, Feb 27th – October 29th (29 x 1 hour sessions, average 3 or 4 staff members per session).

Semester Two

Responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours Level 1, October 7th (1 x 3.5 hour session, 12 staff members from the International College) and pre-training consultation, August 26th (1 hour consultation, 5 participants).

Other groups

Semester Two

An introduction to the Counselling Service, June 4th (1 x 2 hr session, including communal lunch, international students from the Division of Nursing).

Placement debriefing, July 24th (1 hour session, physiotherapy students).

Focus group with administrative staff from International College, October 7th (1 hour session, 3 participants).

Bendigo Campus

Orientation and Adjustment

Semester One

Returning to Study Program: Managing your time effectively, February 15th (1 hour session, 35 participants).

Mature Age Orientation Program: Setting sail as a student again, February 20th (1 hour session, 40 participants).

Managing change, February 25th (1 hour session, 16 international students).

Semester Two

Advantage Program (orientation program for students commencing Semester Two): Making connections with the university community (co-facilitated with transition co-ordinator) August 12th (1 hour session, 23 students); and Managing your time effectively, August 28th (1 hour session, 13 students).

Study Skills and Life Skills

Semester One

Preparing for exams, May 22nd (1 hour session, 12 participants).

Strategies for success in the exam room, May 29th (1 hour session, 8 participants).

Semester Two

Better Sleep Workshop, September 17th (1 hour session, 18 participants, attended by students and staff).

Strategies for managing stress, October 8th (1 hour, 15 participants).

Strategies for success in exams, October 16th (1 hour session, 4 participants).

Training

Students

Semester One

Mental health first aid for Residential Assistants (1x10 hour session, 18 participants).

Residential Assistants' Training: listening and attending skills, February 7th (1x3 hour session, 18 participants).

Information Technology Mentor Training: listening, attending and referral skills, 18th February (3 hour session, 4 students).

Residential Assistants' Training: loss and grief, May 14th (1x1.5 hour session, 15 participants).

Semester Two

Residential Assistants' Training: Review of semester one using S.W.O.T. analysis, July 17th (1x1.5 hour session, 18 participants).

Residential Assistants Training: Mediation Skills, July 17th (1 hour session, 18 participants).

Faculty of Health Sciences Pilot Mentor Program Training: listening and referral skills, July 17th (1x3 hour session, 7 participants).

Faculty of Health Science Pilot Mentor Program Training: Managing Stress, August 20th (1x1.5 hour session, 7 participants).

Staff

Semester One

Principles of Mediation, May 14th (1 hour session, 12 participants).

Semester Two

Mental health: what do you know? October 7th (1 hour session, 6 participants).

Supporting the Diverse Needs of Mature Age students: is it them or is it us? The post modern challenge for adult education, October 16th (1 hour session, 12 participants).

Other Groups

Semester One

Understanding and dealing with stress, March 5th (50 minute lecture, 120 first year education students).

Understanding and dealing with stress (50 minute lecture, 40 first year outdoor education students).

Semester Two

Mental Health and Suicide Awareness, July 30th (1x3 hour workshop, 30 third year Outdoor Education students).

A day in the life program: preparing for life as a tertiary student and awareness of university support services (5 visits to Year 11 and 12 students and their parents, minimum 20 participants per session).

3.5 Supervision

Bundoora

A total of 80 hours of individual clinical supervision and 22 hours of group supervision were provided to intern counsellors. The 2008 intern group was somewhat reduced in number from previous years for reasons which should not impact on the 2009 intake.

Peer Supervision (fortnightly group of 2 hours duration for all counsellors on staff) continued to utilise a reflecting team format. Based on the use of reflecting teams in contemporary competency based approaches to Family Therapy, this model has been adapted for use in group supervision. The process continues to evolve alongside our practices.

3.6 Community Development and Health Promotion

Counselling Services undertook the following community development and health promotion projects:

This Place Nurtures Good relationships: Preventing Sexual Violence Against Women.

In an endeavour to increase resources for community development and health promotion, Counselling Services sought external partnerships and funding. In 2007 Counselling Services successfully applied for a VicHealth grant to undertake a project aimed at the prevention of sexual violence against women by encouraging young men to actively explore consent in sexual relating and to challenge gendered beliefs that condone violence against women. The project was supported by an advisory group with representatives from the Northern Centre Against Sexual Assault (NCASA), No to Violence (NTV), Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE), the La Trobe University Division of Residential Services, and the La Trobe University Mother and Child Health Research department.

In 2008, Brendan Fitzgerald, the project coordinator, worked with student leaders to develop ways that they could act as public advocates against violence to women. This approach recognises the effectiveness of focusing work to prevent violence against women on influential members of the community rather than on victims/survivors or perpetrators.

Students from the general population at Bundoora were also invited to participate in a range of creative and reflective processes to consider their own attitudes and commitments, and develop a range of health promotion resources. Drawing on existing student groups and targeting their specific skills and interests proved the best way to engage students in the project. The resulting multimedia resources included:

- A poster series entitled 'This Place Nurtures Good Relationships' developed with Residential Assistants/Seniors from the Colleges;
- A magazine style survey and information resource developed by students from the International College who met to discuss how relationships are negotiated in English;
- A powerful short film created by students from La Trobe University Student Theatre and Film with the aim of preventing date rape.

These resources will be used in a range of orientation, training and health promotion activities in the 2009. A number of local and interstate universities have requested consultation and access to the project resources for use in their student communities. With the support of a La Trobe University HEESP grant and encouragement from VicHealth we will build on this work to ensure that La Trobe University continues to play a leadership role in promoting respectful and equal relationships.

Meeting the Needs of Student with Mental Health Issues through Community Capacity Building.

In 2006 University Counselling Services initiated the HEESP grant funded project 'Meeting the Needs of Students with Mental Health Issues' to improve opportunities for participation, success and retention for students with mental health issues. In 2007 a comprehensive project report was developed including recommendations based on student and staff experiences. In early 2008 the report was formally launched by the Chancellor, Mrs Sylvia Walton, and Vice Chancellor Paul Johnson at a gathering of La Trobe academic and general staff, and external representatives from community and tertiary education groups. Key recommendations from this well received report took the form of a series of modules that together comprise a comprehensive program. It has been proposed that the modules be implemented within a co-ordinated settings approach which is consistent with the broader aim of supporting La Trobe University's commitment as a health promoting organisation.

- Module One: Increase awareness of services and supports among students through targeted campaigns that aim to address external and internal (personal) barriers to accessing services.
- Module Two: Develop, pilot and review a comprehensive faculty or school based 'best practice' system to enable staff to appropriately assist students with mental health issues.
- Module Three: Develop a peer mentor system for students with mental health issues to assist with transition, retention (and where applicable resumption) of study through the reduction of social isolation and increased support to access services and navigate university systems and processes.

In 2008, work on Module Two was undertaken with the Division of Nursing and the School of Public Health. This included consultative meetings, academic and general staff training, and the development of guidelines and a flow chart to assist staff in supporting students with mental health issues. Distribution of the flow chart and implementation of Modules 1 and 3 are scheduled for 2009.

Migrating to Uni: Enhancing support for local students from NESB

HEESP funding supported the initial phase of this interdisciplinary project aimed at identifying and enhancing supports for local students from NESB. Project activities included a review of University practices and a consultation process with students from this equity group. Recommendations from this research include: intercultural information and training for staff to enhance awareness of the unique challenges faced by this equity group; an orientation kit and workshop for commencing NESB students; the development of a flagging system to assist faculties to identify and support NESB students; and specific mechanisms to assist students with continual improvement in English language proficiency. Further funding will be sought to support NESB student engagement through initiatives such as student peer mentoring groups to undertake LTU community projects; support for NESB students to create

their own student association; and the development of a NESB student domain/portal within the University website. The final project report will be released in early 2009.

Faculty of Health Sciences Academic Peer Mentor Pilot Program

In 2008, Counselling Services supported the faculty's multi campus pilot program through the development and implementation of an experience based helping skills training module for mentors. Feedback from participants and staff support this as an ongoing and integral component of the peer mentor training.

Supporting LTU Residential Communities: A Collaborative Partnership between LTU Counselling Services and the LTU Division of Residential Services

The objectives of the program are as follows:

- To continue to strengthen the relationship between the division of residential services and counselling services;
- To facilitate access to counselling and other supports for residents experiencing difficulties. This is intended to maximise the opportunity for early intervention, especially where barriers exist and residents are less likely to visit the Counselling Service e.g. international students and identified equity groups;
- To strengthen the Seniors/ Residential Assistants Program through specialised training programs designed to enhance the capacity of the Seniors to undertake and sustain their pastoral care role within the college, and ongoing support and supervision responsive to the needs of each college; and
- To strengthen the capacity of the college communities to undertake effective crisis management.

Services in 2008 included the expansion of our onsite drop-in counselling and consultancy to all residential colleges at the Bundoora campus (Menzies, Chisholm, Glenn, Graduate House and University Lodge), and training, ongoing support and supervision to all Residential Assistants. Training was also provided to Residential Assistants on the Bendigo campus. Feedback regarding the new expanded training programs developed by the Counselling team has been very positive.

3.7 Staff Information Sheet and Newsletter

The annual Staff Information Sheet was produced and distributed to all staff on the Bundoora Campus outlining services for students, our availability for secondary consultation to staff (responding to students exhibiting disturbing behaviours, concern about significant changes in behaviour, advice regarding referral), our role in crisis response and debriefing, and options for staff training workshops.

Our 2008 edition maintained the Vichealth 'Together We Do Better' slogan and highlighted a range of the Services' projects and activities that support La Trobe University's commitment as a Health Promoting University. These included key recommendations from the recently launched report on the project Meeting the Needs of Students with Mental Health Issues; This Place nurtures Good Relationships: the prevention of sexual violence against women; and Migrating to Uni: Enhancing support for local students from NESB. The Information Sheet also provided information about the availability of staff training in responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours, and the Relax at Noon series. Feedback indicated that the information was well received, relevant and timely.

3.8 Research and Evaluation

“Client-Directed, Outcome-Informed Clinical work.”

Our research and evaluation focus for 2008 included the Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS) as utilised for some years by the Service. Participating students/clients agreed to complete an Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) at the beginning of each session to enable individual change in the course of psychological counselling to be monitored. Completion of the Session Rating Scale (SRS) at the end of each counselling session provided real time feedback to their counsellor about how well the therapeutic process was working for them. Data from this system of feedback and monitoring informs our work with individual clients and enables us to generate an overview of counselling in the Service.

Once again, our thanks to Scott Miller, one of the developers of the PCOMS system, for enabling us to introduce an electronic version of the system known as ASIST to university counselling services both locally and internationally. This new server based system enables all outcome information to be stored in one secure location. It provides SRS and ORS data ‘at a glance’ by plotting scores for each client on a chart that also contains research based trajectory predictions to aid monitoring and review. ASIST also calculates effect size by campus, program and clinician, thereby enabling comparison of outcomes with local and international benchmarks.

Since the introduction of ASIST in 2007, PCOMS data for 1117 participating clients on the Bundoora campus have been entered into the system. Fifty five percent of these clients were classified as having a successful outcome based on international benchmarks. An average standardised change score of 0.07 for the Service indicated that client outcome scores were above average relative to the international normative sample.

Group Programs Evaluation

Bundoora

All group programs were evaluated using instruments developed within the Service. Examples of responses to student groups include the Mature Age Group Orientation Programs where participants rated the program as highly relevant (mean 4.5/5), interesting (mean 4.3/5) and well presented (mean 4.2/5), with an average increase in confidence of 36% in relation to being a new La Trobe student. In 2008 the written comments again followed the same consistent pattern of previous years, with many respondents confirming that the program had aided their transition and helped them feel more ‘relaxed’ about beginning their studies.

Since 2000, staff training in ‘Responding to Distress and Challenging Behaviours’ (Level 1) has been successfully delivered to hundreds of La Trobe staff who consistently rate the program as highly relevant, very interesting and well presented. As an outcome of the 2008 training sessions, staff reported an increase in confidence of up to 60% resulting in a 79% (average) level of confidence in responding to distress and a 70% (average) level of confidence in responding to challenging behaviours. Examples of written feedback received include:

“Great opportunity to increase awareness at the personal and systemic level.”

“Good balance between talking and doing.”

“Now I have more knowledge of the options available to students and staff.”

3.9 Other Activities

La Trobe University Committees and Advisory Groups:

- Equality, Diversity and Wellbeing Committee (Joanne Barlow)
- University Threat Assessment Team (Joanne Barlow)
- University Crisis Response Team (Joanne Barlow)
- International Students Advisory Network (John Laidlaw)
- Working group for the “Migrating to Uni” NESB student project (Maria Nichterlein, convener).
- Advisory Committee for the ‘Prevention of Sexual Violence among University Students’ project (Joanne Barlow, Brendan Fitzgerald, John Laidlaw and Lynda Evans).
- Health Promoting University Steering Group (Joanne Barlow)

Memberships, External Committees and Activities:

- Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA)(all staff members)
- ANZSSA Counsellors’ Special Interest Group
- Australian Psychological Society (APS) (Joanne Barlow; John Laidlaw; Maria Nichterlein; Jeanette Shopland)
- APS special interest groups: Women and Psychology (Jeanette Shopland)
- APS Counselling College (Joanne Barlow)
- Victorian Association of Family Therapists (VAFT) (Joanne Barlow, Jeanette Shopland, Maria Nichterlein);
- Gestalt Australia and New Zealand (GANZ) (Phoebe Riches)
- Australian Society of Hypnosis (ASH)(Chris Kirwan)
- Australian Association of Social Workers (Lynda Evans).
- Organising committee for the 2008 ANZSSA sponsored tertiary counsellors’ conference (Joanne Barlow)
- Psychologist Registration Board Of Victoria (registration held by Joanne Barlow; Bruce Jenkins; John Laidlaw; Maria Nichterlein; Jeanette Shopland; Chris Kirwan; Phoebe Riches; and Judy Weavers)

Professional Development Activities:

- Supershrinks: Learning from the Field’s Most Effective Practitioners. Two day training with Scott Miller (November 19th and 20th) (Lynda Evans; John Laidlaw).
- Interviewing and reflexive questioning” 1 day training with Karl Tomm (April 9th) (Maria Nichterlein).
- Psychotherapy and Liberation, 3 day conference (May 4th – 6th London) (Maria Nichterlein).
- PhD candidature through UNSW (2008 academic year) (Maria Nichterlein).
- Peer Supervision Group: Consultation Meeting with Rosemary Geer (April 21st) (Phoebe Riches).
- Reconsidering Trauma: Treatment Advances, Relational Issues, and Mindfulness in Integrated Trauma Therapy, Assoc. Prof. John Briere (May 16th and 17th) (Phoebe Riches).
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Introductory Workshop, Dr R Harris, June 30th and July 1st (Phoebe Riches).

- Partners for Change Outcome Management System and its application within a University Counselling Service. Joint session with counsellors from R.M.I.T. Counselling Services.
- Youth Intervention Program: presentation to the Bundoora Counselling Service (December 10th).
- Primary Mental Health Team: presentation to the Bundoora Counselling Service (December 10th).

Papers and Presentations:

“This place nurtures good relationships: the prevention of sexual violence among university students.” Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Tertiary Counsellors Conference, Melbourne, December 5th (presentation by Joanne Barlow and Brendan Fitzgerald).

“Ritornellos on May 1968: Deleuzian ideas as a practice of liberation.” Psychotherapy and Liberation Conference, London, May 4th (presented by Maria Nichterlein).

“The personal is political: the search for health in the midst of seeking asylum” (in Press, to be published in December 2008), Context: the magazine for family therapy and systemic practice in the UK (Maria Nichterlein).

“A journey with no maps: A case study on psychologists’ social responsibility.” APS conference, September 24th (Jeanette Shopland, La Trobe University with Emma Sampson and Heather Gridley, Victoria University).

“Feminism and Counselling.” Swinburne Counselling and Clinical Masters Seminar Series, November 28th (presented by Jeanette Shopland).

4.0 Conclusions and Future Directions

At the conclusion of 2008, I am very pleased to report that the University Counselling Services has maintained a high level of service provision, delivered on an array of goals and objectives to meet our strategic plans, and undertaken innovative project work with applicability within and beyond our own university community. This has occurred within the context of significant staff changes and shortages at both the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses.

In 2009 the Service will undergo an interim restructure aimed at beginning to create the structure, roles and distribution of resources necessary to support the strategic and proactive direction of our multi campus division. The Service will maintain its commitment to primary care and secondary consultation while pursuing primary prevention and health promotion projects that underscore the University’s commitment as a health promoting organisation and advance its standing as a Health Promoting University.

With the support of a La Trobe University HEESP grant and encouragement from VicHealth we will build on the work of the ‘Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Women’ project to ensure that La Trobe University continues to play a leadership role in promoting respectful and equal relationships.

Counselling Services will continue to implement the key recommendations from the HEESP funded project “Meeting the Needs of Student with Mental Health Issues through Community Capacity Building.” In early 2009 we will distribute a flowchart and guidelines to assist staff in supporting students with mental health issues. These resources draw on UK best practice standards adapted to local needs in consultation with La Trobe University academic and general staff. We will also commence a promotional campaign aimed at addressing external and personal barriers for students in accessing support services; and research and develop a peer mentor program for students with mental health issues.

In 2009, we will augment our existing suite of services with an interactive Online Peer Support Program for students who experience mental health issues or self identify as vulnerable to stress. We will model this program on those used in successful overseas trials and integrate this with a substantial upgrade to our multi campus Counselling Services website.

Counselling Services will maintain its strong commitment to proactive service delivery and continuous quality improvement and accountability. Participation in the upcoming La Trobe University functional review and the Australian Universities Quality Audit (AUQA) will provide further opportunities for review and renewal in 2009.

JOANNE BARLOW
Director
January 2009