Unfinished business: student perspectives on disclosure of mental illness and success in VET — support document

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This document was produced by the author(s) based on their research for the report *Unfinished business: student perspectives on disclosure of mental illness and success in VET*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER’s website: <[http://](http://www.ncver.edu.au/pubs.htm)www.ncver.edu.au>.

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This document should be attributed as Venville, A & Street, A 2012, *Unfinished business: student perspectives on disclosure of mental illness and success in VET — support document*, NCVER, Adelaide.

This work has been produced by NCVER under the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation (NVETRE) Program, which is coordinated and managed by NCVER on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments. Funding is provided through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The NVETRE program is based upon priorities approved by ministers with responsibility for vocational education and training (VET). This research aims to improve policy and practice in the VET sector. For further information about the program go to the NCVER website <http://www.ncver.edu.au>. The author/project team was funded to undertake this research via a grant under the NVETRE program. These grants are awarded to organisations through a competitive process, in which NCVER does not participate.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER.

Published by NCVER, ABN 87 007 967 311

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Table 1: Student participants by site, course and diagnosis

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name, gender/age | Diagnosis | Site | Course |
| N-F -21 years | Depression | 1 | Cert IV in Hospitality management |
| S-F-24 years | Schizoaffective disorder | 1 | Bachelor of Digital Media |
| C-F-29 years | Depression | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| J-F-34 years | Depression | 1 | Diploma in Welfare |
| E-F-22 years | Anxiety | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| A-M-29 years | Depression and Anxiety | 1 | Bachelor of Communication and Design |
| C-F-24 years | Depression, PTSD | 1 | Bachelor of Hospitality and Tourism Management |
| SJ-F-27 years | Depression and anxiety | 1 | Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy |
| D-M-29 years | Asbergers, Anxiety | 2 | Certificate III in Network Administration |
| M –F-57 years | Depression, PTSD, Anxiety | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| M-M-55 years | Psychotic depression | 2 | Certificate IV in Welfare |
| B-F-52 years | Anxiety and depression | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| A-F-55 years | Depression | 2 | Certificate III in Visual arts |
| B-M-26 years | Anxiety, Substance Use disorder | 2 | Certificate III in Retail |
| K-M -36 years | Schizophrenia | 2 | Certificate IV in Information Technology |
| M-F-45 years | Depression | 3 | Certificate IV in Welfare |
| K-F -22 years | Depression and Anxiety | 4 | Certificate IV in Disability Work |
| F-F-35 years | Bi polar disorder | 4 | Diploma in Library Services and Information Technology |
| V-F-24 years | Psychotic depression | 4 | Certificate III in Visual Arts |
| J-F-27 years | Depression | 4 | Certificate III in Animal Companion Service |

Table 2: Staff participants by site and position

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Site 1 | Site 2 | Site 3 | Site 4 |
| Position |  |  |  |  |
| Teacher | 2 | 3 | 4 |  |
| Counsellor | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Specialist disability staff |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Student support staff | 2 |  |  | 1 |

# Research interview questions

## Students

1. Tell me about the course you have enrolled in? What prompted you to enrol in your course?
2. How long do you think it will take to complete your course?
3. What might help you pass and complete your course? (prompts— self, others) Tell me about these.
4. What might prevent you from passing and finishing your course? (Prompts—self, others). Tell me about these.
5. Tell me about your mental illness and the influence it has on your experience of study at XXXX.
6. Have you told staff at XXXX about your mental illness? Can you tell me how and when you did this? Can you tell me how you decided who and how much to tell?
7. What difference, if any, has this decision made to your experience of study at XXXX?
8. Has this been a decision you have been pleased with? Tell me about that?
9. The next time you enrolled in a course, what factors would influence your decision to tell or not to tell?

## Staff

10 What are the factors you believe contribute to successful course completion for VET students with a mental illness?

11 What is your view on the role/place of disclosure of mental illness in VET?

12 What has been your experience of students disclosing a mental illness?

13 What has been your experience of students not disclosing a mental illness?

14 We are looking to develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist them in responding to students with mental illness. In thinking about these, what kinds of things would be helpful for you to have in the guidelines?

15 Thinking more broadly, what kinds of things might be helpful to some of your colleagues?

# Participant information

**Summary statement:**Researchers from La Trobe University are investigating the factors affecting successful course completion for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students with a mental illness. This research which has been funded by the National Council for Vocational Education, Research (NCVER) forms a major part of a PhD thesis for the chief investigator, Annie Venville.

**The research aims to:**

* Increase our understanding of the factors contributing to successful course completions by students with disclosed or non-disclosed mental illness in the TAFE and private VET provider sectors
* Explore the factors influencing decisions about disclosure or non-disclosure of mental illness and their implications for successful or non-successful TAFE course completion
* Understand the role of disclosure of mental illness in the experience of successful and non-successful TAFE course completion
* Develop a set of guidelines for VET staff to assist in managing key aspects of the student experience, including disclosure.

**Who can participate in the interviews?**You are eligible to participate in this study if you are 18 years or over, enrolled at TAFE at Certificate 3 and above, and you have a diagnosed mental illness. You also need to be willing to talk about your experience of student life, mental illness and disclosure or non-disclosure.

**How will the information be obtained?**Students will participate in a semi-structured telephone or face to face interview during which they will be asked to answer questions about their experience of mental illness and learning, their experience of disclosure of mental illness or non-disclosure and the role of disclosure in assisting with successful course completions. It is expected that this interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Students will also be asked to take part in a follow-up telephone interview close to the end of their course. This second interview is likely to take no more than 45 minutes. Both interviews will be tape-recorded.

**What about confidentiality?**Because we are interested in gaining a better understanding of the factors affecting successful course completion for students with a mental illness, students’ words will express this better than we can. Students may therefore be quoted but names will be changed through transcription and stored separately from the audio recording. It is possible that you may recognize words you have used but because all information will be de-identified before being used in any report or publication your anonymity will be protected.

**Are there any possible risks if you choose to participate?**While it is unlikely, it is possible that you may experience some emotional distress while talking of your experiences. All care will be taken for this not to occur however you should not participate if you are anxious about this happening. If you do experience any distress, or if you simply want to talk about the process of being interviewed, you may choose to speak with the counsellor at your campus or a counsellor at a local community health service. You will be provided with contact details for these counsellors before the first interview commences and these services are free of charge. You have the right at all times to interrupt or withdraw from the interview and the study and there will be no effect on any of your relationships with VET staff or access to educational or support services whether you decide to participate or not.

**What are the benefits of the study?**We cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from your participation in this project, but it is possible that the telling of your story may be useful in itself. It is also possible that you and other VET students who have a mental illness will benefit from the greater understanding this study hopes to provide of the factors affecting successful course completion. It is also expected that findings from this study will educate teachers, counsellors and other professionals, ensuring as many people as possible gain benefit from your participation.

**What do I do if I am interested in participating?**Simply email Annie Venville at La Trobe University [a.venville@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:a.venville@latrobe.edu.au) or call or SMS her on 0418711409. Annie will email or post you a detailed information sheet that will help you decide if you wish to take part.

Important points to remember:  
**Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw will in no way affect your studies.**

If you have any complaints or queries that the investigator has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the secretary, Human Ethics Committee, Research and Graduate Studies Office, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, (Ph: 03 9479 1443 or email humanethics@latrobe.edu.au).

Table 3: Student disclosure patterns by site

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Site | 1 Private  Inner city | 2 Public  Outback/rural | 3 Public Regional | 4 Public Outer metro |
| Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and tick box for help  Help provided? | 1/8  No | 0/7 | 0/1 | 2/4  Yes x 1- referred by external agency and disclosure encouraged. Student not comfortable with the reasonable adjustments offered  No x 1 (distance education student) |
| Disclosure of mental illness at enrolment and not seek help |  | 2/7 |  |  |
| Disclosure of other condition at enrolment and tick help  Help provided? | 1/8  Issues of chronic pain-non visible  Not from point of enrolment but from in class discussion with teachers | 1/7  Severe and visible physical disability.  Access issues accommodated | 1  Language difficulties  Note taker provided | 2/4  1 Significant hearing loss- referred by external agency.  Provision of note taker assisted non-disclosed mental illness and led to later informal disclosure of mental illness  2 Learning disability-insufficient support offered |
| Later disclosure of mental illness and effective reasonable adjustment provided | 1/8  Assistance to reapply for VISA | 3/7  Altered and extended assessment tasks | 0 |  |
| Later disclosure of mental illness and ineffective reasonable adjustment provided | 2/8  Insufficient time allowed |  | 0 |  |
| Non disclosure of mental illness at end of study period | 4/8 | 1/7 (contact lost with 3 students, 2 of whom had not disclosed at time of first interview) | 1/1 | 0/4 (contact lost with one student who had not disclosed at time of first interview) |

Table 4: Timing, reasons and outcomes of disclosure for students

| Name, gender, age | Diagnosis | Disclose at enrolment & request help | Disclose at enrolment & not request help | Later disclosure & help received | Later disclosure & no help received | Reason for disclosure | Reason for non disclosure | Course completion or effective progression | Would disclose in future? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| D-M-29 years | Asperger’s  Anxiety | No |  | Yes – extension |  | Obligation – “I need more time” |  | Yes  Completion  Required longer time | Maybe |
| M-F  57 years | Depression  PTSD, Anxiety | No |  | Yes – extension | Yes | Obligation (had to tell something) |  | Yes  Completion | Probably |
| N-F  21 years | Depression | No |  | Yes  Opportunity to re-apply for visa |  | Desperation (visa) |  | No  Fail most subjects | Prefer not to |
| S-F  24 years | Schizoaffective disorder | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | Yes  Progression | No |
| K-F  22 years | Depression and Anxiety | No |  | Yes –  extension |  | Obligation  Explain absence |  | Yes  Progression | Probably |
| F-F  35 years | Bi polar disorder | Yes |  |  | Yes | Advocacy – integration of illness into self |  | Yes  Progression | Probably not |
| M-M  55 years | Psychotic depression |  | Yes | Altered assess tasks |  | Advocacy |  | Yes  Completion | Yes |
| C-F  29 years | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk- and regret what do you say? | Yes  Completion | No |
| J-F  34 years | Depression | Yes |  |  | Yes | Desperation |  | No  Fail most subjects | Probably not |
| E-F  22 years | Anxiety | No |  |  |  |  | Risk – not serious enough | Yes  Progression | No |
| M-F  45 years | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | Yes  Progression | No |
| A-M  29 years | Depression and Anxiety | No |  |  | Yes  Extension but too little | Desperation –fear of failure |  | No-fail one subject | No |
| V-F  24 years | Psychotic depression | Yes |  |  |  | Desperation – fear of failure |  | Yes  Completion  But took 2 years instead of 1 | Probably |
| B-F  52 years | Anxiety and depression | No |  |  |  |  | Regret – ‘what could anyone do?” | No  Fail most subjects | No |
| C-F  24 years | Depression  PTSD | No |  |  |  |  | Disclosed physical condition | Yes  Completion  But took 6 years instead of 3 | No |
| SJ-F  27 years | Depression and anxiety | No |  |  |  |  | Protection of self  Risk to reputation | Yes  Progression | No |
| A-F  55 years | Depression | No |  | Yes |  | Desperation |  | Lost contact |  |
| B-M  26 years | Anxiety, Substance | No |  |  |  |  | Risk to reputation | Lost contact |  |
| K-M  36 years | Use disorder Schizophrenia |  | Yes |  |  |  | Honesty – “most people already know” | Lost contact |  |
| J-F 27yrs | Depression | No |  |  |  |  | Risk of rejection | Lost contact |  |