Fit for Study Lived Experience Project – Sharing Stories to Build a Mentally Healthy Campus Culture

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Since 2002, the University of Western Australia’s Fit for Study program (FFS) has been available to support and improve learning, and facilitate the personal growth and development of students. This collaborative program recognises the value of engaging students and providing learning opportunities that enrich the student higher education experience. The Fit For Study Lived Experience Project established in 2015, initially explored the benefits and risks of tertiary students sharing lived experience stories with peers, reviewed training models and identified opportunities for students to share their story in the most safe and effective way.

In exploring the risks and benefits of sharing lived experiences stories in a tertiary environment we found that; research consistently demonstrated that hearing purposeful experiences of mental illness from peers in a face-to-face setting improves positive help-seeking behaviour, makes the issue relevant for them, reduces stigma associated with mental illness and reduces feelings of isolation; Peer to peer contact not only benefits the person hearing the story but the person sharing the story and there were opportunities for students to share their stories with their peers on campus and in residential colleges.

Evaluation demonstrates that the majority of participants agreed that as a result of the training they felt better prepared and more confident to share their story with their peers. Feedback from students hearing stories consistently indicated that they found it valuable to hear about another student’s experience.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this session participants will be able to

− Recognise that peer to peer sharing of lived experiences of mental health and other challenges in a tertiary setting is feasible, acceptable and of value to both the storyteller and audience
− Understand the risk and benefits storytelling for speaker and the audience
− Identify the process for developing a lived experience project in a tertiary setting

Presenters

Emma Boyne, University of Western Australia

Emma Boyne has Post Graduate Qualifications in Health Promotion, with 20 years experience working with government, not-for-profit organisations, universities and community groups to deliver health promotion programs. She currently works within the Health Promotion Unit’s Fit for Study program at the University of Western Australia. Emma is passionate about creating a mentally healthy campus culture and health and wellbeing and programs that enhance wellbeing among individuals and the community.

Emma will be presenting on behalf of all authors of this presentation.