Addressing sexual violence on campus: Building opportunities for student growth, professional development and well being
Tarn Felton, Melanie Beres, Rachel Shaw, Jordan Dougherty, Callum Gilbertson & Renee Dixon, University of Otago

Talking about sexual assault within any context is challenging and even more so for a University that offers exceptional experiences for students overarched by a motto that encourages ‘have courage to be wise.’ Ultimately the wisdom and courage necessary to challenge ideas that ‘implementing a sexual assault centre would insinuate there was a problem’ shows the ingenuity of the University and revolutionary desire to create an institute that is working towards a zero tolerance to sexual violence. The commitment to challenging the narratives around sexual assault and encouraging students’ voices and stories further strengthened and informed the process. Subsequently, the first centre of its kind within NZ Universities, Te Whare Tāwharau Sexual Violence Support and Prevention Centre was implemented, created by uniquely weaving together different strands of knowledge from experienced leaders and the experiences of students to help create and deliver a cutting edge sexual assault centre. Unique in its approach of combining qualitative research methods, further supported by information hidden behind the indifferent contributing factors found in the database, are unique stories of resilience, recovery and personal growth. Furthermore, the strength of the centre lies with the knowledge that students are important collaborators in the development and evaluation of both the prevention and support offered at Te Whare Tāwharau. This is demonstrated by empowering the voices of students to help build the community they want to see, and is not only achieved by delivering our education programmes to students, but also having our programmes delivered by students.

Learning outcomes
- Understand how students are integral to the success and delivery of sexual assault support and prevention efforts.
- Understand the potential learning and professional development opportunities that can be created as part of the university’s response to sexual violence.
- Understand the benefits for survivors of having peer led support in key roles related to the response.

Presenters
Tarn Felton, University of Otago

Tarn Felton (Ngāti Paoa, Ngati Whanaunga) is the Support Manager for Te Whare Tāwharau and is committed to providing best practice for people who have been effected by sexual violence. Tarn has a deep passion for advocating for people’s rights to feel safe, nurtured and supported within their communities. A career in the community development sector has helped Tarn to continue this passion and she has spent the last 20 years addressing local needs, working with young people, and collaborating with whānau and different communities. When not at work Tarn likes to throw her self into nature and the elements with her dog Blue.

Rachel Shaw, University of Otago

Rachel Shaw is the Prevention Coordinator at Te Whare Tāwharau. Her role involves working closely with residential colleges and other university departments at Otago to engage students in attending various sexual violence prevention programs. She is also completing her Masters in Gender Studies.
Melanie Beres, University of Otago

Melanie Beres is the Academic Director of Te Whare Tāwharau, the University of Otago’s sexual violence support and prevention centre. She worked closely with students and staff at the university in the development phases of Te Whare Tāwharau. She is also a Senior Lecturer in sociology researching sexual consent and sexual violence prevention. When she’s not working she enjoys spending time with her whanau, quilting and going for walks.

Jordan Dougherty, University of Otago

Jordan Dougherty is the Student Engagement Advocate at Te Whare Tāwharau, which includes supporting survivors, advocating for them through University and external systems, providing leadership to our volunteers and engaging students in our service and prevention programs. While studying Sociology and Gender Studies here at Otago she spent her time volunteering both at OUSA’s Queer Support and Rape Crisis Dunedin. The skills she learned from those experiences along with two summers at camp in Texas, USA have given her a passion for empowering people.

Callum Gilbertson, University of Otago

Callum Gilbertson is a student and volunteer and facilitator at Te Whare Tāwharau, he is currently studying a degree in Psychology with a minor in criminology. The intersections between his study and work as a prevention facilitator and a support volunteer at Te Whare Tawharau are salient in many ways and he firmly believes that the best approach to eliminating sexual assault is by directly addressing cultural and social scaffolding through education and a grass roots change in culture. As a prevention facilitator he has had an opportunity to demonstrate the involvement of men in an area that many men have traditionally not seen a role for themselves. Callum has had a varied work life, including the New Zealand Army, flight training and working as a pilot and flight instructor in the West Australian Outback. In his personal time, he is a passionate outdoorsman as well as being an engineering, vintage aviation and 3D printing enthusiast.

Renee Dixon, University of Otago

Renee Dixon is a social work student and peer support volunteer/facilitator at Te Whare Tāwharau. Her decision to pursue this path is founded on her desire to empower marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Many of her core values align with both social work and Te Whare Tāwharau such as her strong sense of social justice and an ability to genuinely empathise with people. She also values hope. Hope for change, hope that we can be and do better for all our members of society, and that we can be a part of that process and all it takes is for people to stand up and stand together.