Supporting students in the digital space: the Monash Counselling Help online experience
Andrew Fitzpatrick & Andrea Jackson, Monash University

It begins with an invitation to tell their story. For many students telling their story face-to-face in a counselling appointment may seem like the hardest thing to do, and we know many do not take that step at all. The Monash University Counselling Help Online (CHO) program allows students to tell their story in the digital space where many feel more comfortable, and this often becomes a transitional space to allow them to take further action or may indeed meet their need.

Our presentation outlines the history and experience of the successful CHO program that was established in 2014. It addresses considerations when setting up such a service and maintaining it. The rationale for clearly defined boundaries and limits will be described. CHO program was not an attempt to imitate or replace face-to-face counselling/therapy experience (it is text based, not “in real time”, does not use video/audio, also not an “off the shelf” program). We will define what CHO “is” and “isn’t”, strengths of the program and working in the digital space to provide student support.

The structure of a typical text response to a concern/issue will be analysed, highlighting aspects such as: clarifying statements, validation of concerns, affirmation around help-seeking, psycho-education, key university services information, community resources, e-health tools such as Apps, websites, therapy programs.

Practice issues we have encountered will be shared, with reference to recent research findings on what young people want from digital support, and there will be time for Q&A interaction with the audience.

Learning outcomes
- Participants considering working with tertiary students online in a counselling setting will receive useful background information on setting up their own program.
- “Demystifying” text based supportive communication with students.
- Increased knowledge – “practice wisdom” – for face-to-face counsellors to build their skills for working with students online in a counselling setting.
- Reference to Gibson's (2019) research "What do young people want from digital support?" in the mental health setting.
- Opportunity for Q&A / networking.
Presenters
Andrew Fitzpatrick, Monash University

Counsellor/Social Worker
Coordinator of Counselling and Mental Health programs at the Parkville campus of Monash University

In his role at Monash Andrew sees both staff and students for counselling, provides online counselling help for students and facilitates on campus Mental Health Literacy Programs safeTALK and Mental Health First Aid; he has recently qualified to deliver Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) courses. He has been working at Monash University for the past 12 years, and at other tertiary education Counselling Services since 1995. Andrew enjoys the arts, travel and is a beginner level student of Italian.

Andrea Jackson, Monash University

Psychologist
Coordinator of Counselling and Mental Health programs at the Peninsula campus of Monash University.

In her role at Monash Andrea sees both staff and students, coordinates an online counselling help program and facilitates Mental Health Literacy Programs safeTALK and Mental Health First Aid; she has recently qualified to deliver Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) courses. For 8 of her 10 years at Monash she has coordinated the LivingWorks safeTALK program across all Monash Campuses, Parkville, Clayton, Caulfield and Peninsula (Berwick). Prior to Monash Andrea has worked in a Community organisations and Employment Services. When not working Andrea enjoys travelling, dancing and painting.