



Men's Wellbeing Program

La Trobe University

Amplifying Narratives for Student Success

ANZSSA Conference 2019

Authors: Jason Campbell, Leah du Plooy & Martin Gladman

Presenters: Leah du Plooy (she/her) & Martin Gladman (he/him)

La Trobe University

- 38,639 enrolled students (2017)
- 7 Campuses –
Bundoora, Bendigo,
Albury-Wodonga,
Shepparton, Mildura,
Melbourne City, Sydney



Student Wellbeing

- Office of Deputy Director:
 - Respect at La Trobe portfolio
 - Prevention & Health Promotion
 - Complex Case Management
 - Men's Wellbeing Program
 - Misconduct Investigation (to be recruited 2020)
- Counselling Services
- Equity & Diversity
- Speak Up
- La Trobe University Crisis Line – After Hours Mental Health and Wellbeing Support



Terminology

- Throughout this presentation the terms 'male/men/man' are used to describe the program and it's participants, this term is inclusive of:
 - Cis-gendered men
 - Transgendered men
 - Masculine identifying people

Men's Wellbeing at University – Why taking a gendered approach is important?

- Men account for an average of 6 out of 8 suicides every day in Australia, which is nearly double the national road toll (BeyondBlue, 2019).
- Suicide rates increase for males in Indigenous, LGBTIQ and lower socio-economic communities, with an Australian survey reporting trans-men experiencing one of the highest level of distress within LGBTIQ communities (Private Lives 2, 2012).

Men's Wellbeing at University – Why taking a gendered approach is important?

- According to the ABS (2016) men are less likely to seek help with only 27 per cent of men seeking professional help, compared to 40 per cent of women.
- Further reports show that over 70% of men with a mental disorder do not access services (BeyondBlue, 2012, p.6).
- Lower rates of men (less than 20%) see their general practitioner for mental health problems compared to women (BeyondBlue, 2012, p.6).
- These often increase when a person has single or double intersections such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, income-poverty ratio etc. (Parent et al, 2016).

Men's Wellbeing at University – Why taking a gendered approach is important?

- The La Trobe University Counselling Service also engages with less males than females. With 50% more female students seeking counselling services, compared with males students, over the last three years.

Men's Wellbeing at University – Why taking a gendered approach is important?

- Research suggests the internalising of dominant masculinity ideals is related to less favourable mental health, help-seeking attitudes and higher levels of mental health stigma (Vogel et al 2011) as well as lower psychological wellbeing (Alfred et al, 2014).
- A major study by The Jesuit Services Men's Project found that men adhering to masculine norms were more likely to sexually harass women (70% compared to 3%) and have greater incidence of bullying (71% compared to 5%) than men with non-confirming masculine norms (The Men's Project & Flood, 2018).

Men's Wellbeing – The story that holds men back

- Gender narratives affect all of us us, some of the ways it specifically affects men is:
 - Hearing stories throughout their lives that is not helpful for themselves or others. Particularly at times of struggle or adversity. Such as needing to “man up”, “work it out yourself” leading guys to feeling: “I should have the answers “.
 - A strong narrative is that “Men don't talk about problems” or seek support from others.
 - Pressure to adhere to a constructed concept of strength.

Our new role and program seeks to alter these narratives

New Role & Program at La Trobe University Melbourne

A new and exciting pilot program is being trialled at La Trobe University, Melbourne Australia.

The Men's Wellbeing Coordinator role will be one of the first in the country to focus solely on the specific needs and wellbeing of male students in the university setting.

- This pilot is set to run for a year with the potential to extend to a permanent ongoing program and dedicated Men's Wellbeing role.
- It has wide support and interest from students and staff (including the VC himself).

Purpose and Philosophy – Developing stories of success and wellbeing

The purpose of the Men's Wellbeing role is to research and facilitate a range of supports for male students. A key focus will be to encourage and normalise men's wellbeing and the concept of guys supporting themselves and their mates.

The core philosophies of the program includes:

1. To affirm strengths while challenging less helpful masculinity norms.
2. To help students develop their own, more flexible, concepts of masculinity.
3. The core narrative of the program centres on male students connecting, talking, listening and “providing support for each other”.

The Men's Wellbeing Program – Four Pillars of support

The program will open multiple avenues for the men of La Trobe to have conversations and share their stories. The role will also help other staff in the university to support the young men of La Trobe.

The four pillars of support (from a narrative perspective):

- 1. Counselling – Individual stories.**
- 2. Groups – Sharing stories/witnessing storytelling**
- 3. Men's wellbeing promotion – Spreading the story**
- 4. Secondary consultation – Helping others to help men tell their story**

Counselling – Individual stories

The counselling component is designed to work with male students from a strength-based perspective. The counselling model has a particular focus on:

1. A strong person-centred approach focusing on building trust, rapport and shared language/understanding.
2. Strength based practice - (e.g., elements of the Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity (PP/PM) approach); emphasis is placed on strengths over deficits highlighting what the client is doing well and how he can regain his truer strengths again.
3. Use tools such as the VIA-IS (Values in Action Inventory of Strengths – Peterson & Seligman, 2004) work to identify non-gendered ‘character strengths’ as an alternative conceptualisation of “strength”. This serves to highlight the range strengths clients already utilise that could help them today.

Groups – Sharing stories/witnessing storytelling

As a lead in to the program the Tomorrow Man foundation were brought in to deliver workshops for male student accommodation leaders, the LTU Sports centre, the LTU Hockey club and a university wide seminar. 'Tomorrow man' delivers workshops with a focus on "disrupting masculine stereo types" and helping to develop young men's "emotional muscle". These sessions were very popular among all attendees.



Groups – Sharing stories/witnessing storytelling

Focus groups were held male students following the 'Tomorrow Man' sessions to explore and brain storm what they got from the sessions and what they would like more of to support them on campus.

- A number of ideas were enthusiastically discussed and raised by students.
- All feedback to date has unanimously involved creating opportunities for hearing stories from other men.

Groups – Sharing stories/witnessing storytelling

Based on these feedback sessions:

- The program is developing a men's wellbeing group model for 2020 consisting of a "TED talk" like presentation on a set topic from guest speaker (e.g., Football player, industry leader etc) or a student themselves. This will focus their stories and experiences (e.g., "My experience with mental health").
- This will follow up with group discussion on the topic where the stories will be explored and the opportunity for further individual stories to be shared.
- The group will be facilitated by the Men's Wellbeing Coordinator and co-facilitated with student/peers.

Groups – Sharing stories/witnessing storytelling

Ad hoc groups and independent groups on request for example designing groups/workshops/presentations for:

- Rural campus accommodation students (e.g., presentation on “How do we support each other?”)
- Sports centre and “activity based” men’s supports (e.g., Yoga for men/Men’s mindfulness).
- Student veteran’s association (e.g., workshop/support for returned service personnel)

Men's wellbeing promotion – Spreading the story

The program will regularly promote men's mental health and wellbeing through a number of targeted promotions via student communication channels and a men's wellbeing blog.

This will include:

- Regular updates of men's health tips, awareness of men's mental health strategies, and male targeted self care.
- Sharing news and individual stories on men's wellbeing.
- Using existing community campaigns such as RUOK? Day, Men's mental health week and Movember.

Men's wellbeing promotion – Spreading the story

An example Movember

- This year Movember was promoted across the university in student media (including social media MyLatrobe on Facebook etc) and staff communications.
- The Men's Wellbeing Coordinator Jason started a team (called "La Trobe MoBro's") inviting staff and students to join the team and growing a Mo for men's mental health.
- The campaign was styled as a "call to action" with an awareness competent of men's mental health and highlighting the story of supporting others.

Secondary consultation – supporting others to help men tell their story

Another part of the role is to provide secondary consultation to staff members.

- Development of a staff training package for both academic and wellbeing staff.
- The purpose will be to provide information on working with young men, engaging young men, helping them communicate their story and to continue a strength-based approach.

Why discourse and narratives are important to the program (A student perspective)

Giving men an opportunity to talk about how they feel and what they experience.

- In a recent focus group of male student leaders it was reported that hearing and sharing stories in the 'Tomorrow Man' workshop with other men was highly valued.
- Witnessing that "others struggle too" was important to the students and appeared to challenge the narrative that "men don't talk".

One example given was:

"I would like to hear more experiences...like what is one of your most difficult challenges and how you got through it?"

Why discourse and narratives are important to the program (A student perspective)

Providing an opportunity to explore complexities of being a man in 2019 and adhering to masculine norms.

- Topics such as confusion around the #metoo movement, “what is toxic masculinity?”, “the pressure to be masculine” all were raised in focus groups.
- It is considered that creating a safe space where sometimes challenging ideas can be discussed, context given, alternative narratives explored, all in a safe environment, has the opportunity to lead to better understanding and more respectful relationships and attitudes toward others.

One participant recounted:

“I wasn’t told how to act...the facilitators were open to all ideas”

Why discourse and narratives are important to the program (A student perspective)

Improving social contact and cohesion amongst men on campus.

- Our focus group indicated that hearing stories and witnessing vulnerability was welcomed and participants noted they felt more connected and benefited from knowing more about each other.
- However they seemed to want to hear others vulnerability first to feel safe to contribute.
- They also expressed a wish to improve skills on helping other guys and how to ask questions that were helpful

One student said:

"I'd like to know how to start a conversation and check in if they are traveling okay".

Goals for a Men's wellbeing in the university setting 2020 and beyond.

1. Increased help seeking behaviours. For example, increasing numbers of men seeking out wellbeing services including counselling support, support via Equity and Diversity (disability and inclusion support).
2. Increase in respectful behaviours
3. Instilling the importance of “care for self and others”
4. Normalising deeper communication and emotional awareness



Why discourse and narratives are important

A word from Jason our Men's Wellbeing Coordinator:

"I want the young men of La Trobe to graduate with more than a degree"

"Hearing stories, open communication and creating opportunities for connection has the ability to change dominant narratives of masculinity and create new stories that highlight":

- "Flexibility in our concept of masculinity"
- "New stories on how we look after ourselves as men"
- "A new chapter on how we relate to ourselves and the people we value and love".



LET IT GROW
MOVEMBER.COM



Thank you

latrobe.edu.au