

How do we use story telling in casework to empower students in financial difficulty, and to develop our best practice?

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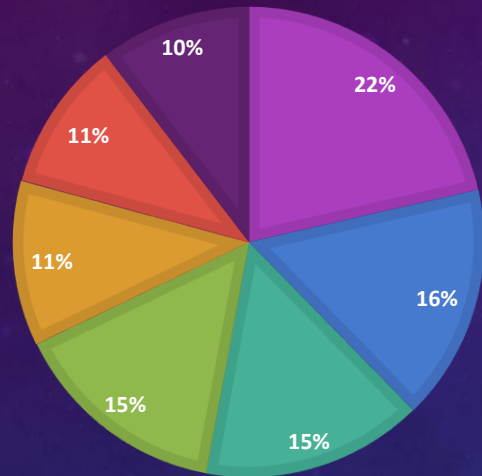
La Trobe University, Australia

- Established 1967 as a university accessible to students from diverse backgrounds including low SES
- 8 campuses, most in the state of Victoria
- 36,000 students, 27,000 undergraduate, 9,000 postgraduate

La Trobe University Student Union (LTSU)

- Key services include: student advocacy, clubs and activities to engage students.

Using data to inform our casework



■ Inadequate income

■ Changed personal circumstances

■ Budgeting

■ Family issues

■ Cultural / language difficulties

■ Credit / debit issues

■ University fees

- 93% had an income less than AUD\$20,000 p.a. Youth Allowance of \$14,000 p.a is inadequate to cover living costs.
- Financial issues often associated with social, cultural and health issues.
- Financial problems have a substantial negative impact on academic performance

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over 50 percent of students are **worried about money** ¹



30 percent of students **defer or reduce their course load** for financial reasons ²



70 percent of students will graduate with a **student loan** of more than \$20k - a loan many don't understand ³

Using student stories to inform our casework?

Student Story – Sue is in financial difficulty – de-identified:

- 22 year old science student, on Centrelink benefits, seeking p/t work. Income \$500 fn
- Car loan debt \$15,000. Can not afford repayments \$50 fn
- Rent, food, utilities and transport expenses. \$450 fn
- Sue can not afford health services.



What is the “story” behind this situation ?

How can Sue’s story of struggle inform our casework ? (click title)

- ✓ Sue’s parents are farmers on low income, can not support Sue, who is clearly in financial difficulty.
- ✓ How did Sue qualify for this loan she can not afford ?
- ✓ Sue requires support for her anxiety and depression.



Sue worked with the financial counsellor to:

- ✓ Seek p/t employment
- ✓ Gain rent assistance
- ✓ Commence personal counselling
- ✓ Find academic support
- ✓ Develop financial literacy skills
- ✓ Apply for reduced repayments for Bank loan.

How can stories inform our best practice?

How can Positive Psychology and use of character strengths assist our casework for this student struggling to continue her study ?

Positive Psychology, developed by Prof Martin Seligman at VIA, research has been concerned with what strengths we possess to manage our problems, instead of concentrating on undoing the negatives. VIA is Not for Profit, developing practical strengths-based tools for individuals and professionals, such as therapists, managers and educators.

Read *Foundations of Strengths-Based Practice* -, and undertake a VIA Survey yourself for free. It will reveal your signature strengths, from the 25 listed. For example:

Gratitude, hope, resilience, love of learning, bravery, honesty, humility, judgement etc



Sue requires support: social, emotional and financial. But can we identify some character strengths that Sue has already called on to manage her financial and other difficulties ?

Discuss in pairs again ?

By identifying the Student's character strengths, we can give authentic affirmation to the client, and encouragement to move forward.

WISDOM	CREATIVITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originality • Adaptive • Ingenuity 	CURIOSITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest • Novelty-Seeking • Exploration • Openness 	JUDGMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • Thinking Things Through • Open-mindedness 	LOVE OF LEARNING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastering New Skills & Topics • Systematically Adding to Knowledge 	PERSPECTIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wisdom • Providing Wise Counsel • Taking the Big Picture View
COURAGE	BRAVERY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valor • Not Shrinking from Fear • Speaking Up for What's Right 	PERSEVERANCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence • Industry • Finishing What One Starts 	HONESTY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity • Integrity 	ZEST <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitality • Enthusiasm • Vigor • Energy • Feeling Alive 	
HUMANITY	LOVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both Loving and Being Loved • Valuing Close Relations with Others 	KINDNESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity • Nurturance • Care & Compassion • Altruism • "Niceness" 			SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of the Motives/ Feelings of Self/Others • Knowing what Makes Other People Tick
JUSTICE	TEAMWORK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship • Social Responsibility • Loyalty 			FAIRNESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just • Not Letting Feelings Bias Decisions About Others 	LEADERSHIP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing Group Activities • Encouraging a Group to Get Things Done
TEMPERANCE		FORGIVENESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mercy • Accepting Others' Shortcomings • Giving People a Second Chance 	HUMILITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modesty • Letting One's Accomplishments Speak for Themselves 	PRUDENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful • Cautious • Not Taking Undue Risks 	SELF-REGULATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Control • Disciplined • Managing Impulses & Emotions

Can we identify our own character strengths in that story ?

What were some of the Counsellor's strengths used in this situation with Sue's story ?
Let's look back at the character strengths.

For example: perspective, patience and hope.

How can we apply this when we return to our practice?

- Can we share student stories with our peers to identify best practice?
- Can we reflect on the story, seeing which character strengths we used in this casework, and what we need to develop further.
- Hopefully this can encourage us to recognise our skills and strengths, and develop them further.
- To consider our work practice as building our own character strengths ?

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