

# Rethinking Student Mental Wellbeing

## Summary

Rethinking Student Mental Wellbeing was a three year project that ran at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) from 2007 to 2010, in partnership with Rethink, as part of the national Time to Change programme. Time to Change is a portfolio of 35 national projects jointly led by Mind and Rethink and funded by the Big Lottery Fund and Comic Relief. Rethink North West funded a project worker to work with UCLan to develop a range of resources and services to support student wellbeing and retention. In response to UCLan's own research with staff and students in 2006 and Time to Change objectives, the project has challenged the stigma around student mental health through awareness raising campaigns and enhanced mainstream services and systems within the university setting.

## Aims

- To strengthen internal and external partnerships related to mental health through stakeholder development.
- To audit current referral pathways for mental health and develop a more co-ordinated approach.
- To develop activities for students to promote positive mental health, with links to physical activity.
- To run anti-stigma campaigns targeting students.
- To identify and develop training for staff and students.

## Overview

### What was the context / background?

As part of the Healthy University (HU) initiative UCLan had run a number of small events and campaigns targeting student wellbeing. In 2006 the HU conducted research with students and staff on issues related to mental health. From this research a number of recommendations were made e.g. staff development, additional services, promotion of services and disclosure. In addition, the Comensus project at UCLan had built up partnership links with Rethink. Rethink is the leading national mental health membership charity working with people affected by severe mental illness to recover a better quality of life by providing services, support groups and information on mental health problems. The Comensus Project is a service user and carer involvement project that aims to find ways of involving service users and carers in the work of health schools at UCLan. HU, Comensus and Rethink came together to fund-raise for an anti stigma event aimed at students. While working on this bid the opportunity arose for Rethink North West to identify a regional project as part of the Time To Change Programme bid. The UCLan work was developed further and became part of the subsequently successful bid.

### What were the drivers and levers for change?

The completion of the mental health research with recommendations for actions within UCLan linked very well with the development of the Rethink project. The development of the stakeholder group was an additional driver for change and supported the need to take the research recommendations forward. The Rethinking Student Mental Wellbeing project was also seen to support retention initiatives, student experience and student support systems at UCLan.

## Who led the work internally and externally?

Healthy University, Comensus and Rethink

## Who was the strategic lead, who was the operational lead?

Ian McMillan, Director of Student Support Services chaired the project steering group.

Diane Miller, Rethink and Sharon Doherty, HU, UCLan were operational leads.

## How are you set up (working / steering groups)?

Within the current HU structure two additional groups were formed;

- A project steering group
- A Stakeholder Group

## How does the work fit within your organisational structure?

The stakeholder and project steering group feed into the HU steering group. The HU steering group then reports to the Safety, Health & Environment Committee.

## What resources did you need (financial and human)?

Approximately £100,000, over 3 years, funding came to Rethink from Comic Relief and the Big Lottery, the project was part of the Time to Change national programme.

A full-time Project Co-ordinator was appointed within Rethink North West.

Non-pay budget of £10,000 was also available for campaigns, materials, training, resources etc.

UCLan and SU staff time.

## What did you do?

A whole system approach was developed throughout this project which meant a range of actions were developed to address key issues identified by research, working groups and further consultations.

**Referral pathways** were developed in conjunction with the Mental Health Procedures.

**Services** were developed after research identified that students wanted a wider choice in mental health services:

- Exercise on Prescription was piloted
- M and M Mentoring programme was extended to include Wellbeing Buddies
- UCLan became a community site for Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Students were supported to develop Mind Matters SU society which has organised a number of social events, offered support and run campaigns
- Community services drop-in in the SU is being piloted by Preston Community Mental Health Forum to keep staff and students up to date with local services.

**Policy and procedures** were developed to support staff in responding to students with mental health issues. The procedures were developed in consultation with UCLan staff and students.

**Training** was developed to support the dissemination of the procedures for staff, awareness raising sessions on mental health.

**Personal skills** were developed through anti-stigma campaigns encouraging students to access information and services sooner. Stress Busting & Relaxation sessions were offered to students.

**Curriculum links** were made and involved students in the development of the mental health campaigns and videos for the SU website as part of their final year assessments.

## What methods of communication did you use?

Various methods were used:

- Project leaflets to promote and recruit to Stakeholder group
- Anti- Stigma campaigns - posters, postcards, pens, bookmarks, plasma screens, exhibition stands,
- Mentoring

- Events
- Training
- Printed materials for staff
- Web based materials, new web site to bring together all services for easy access by students
- Videos

## Monitoring and Evaluation

### What were the outcomes /outputs?

The project set a target numbers of 'beneficiaries' to work with and progress on these were feedback at regular monitoring intervals to the Big Lottery funders. The project reached 8700 beneficiaries within 2 years across the university setting and the wider community. Exceeding the original project target of 6300 beneficiaries by year three; a summary of the project outputs and outcomes are as follows:

### Delivered a range of mental health awareness training

Improved the knowledge and skills of 400 staff and 850 students to recognise mental health indicators and signpost students to help; supporting early intervention and aiding recovery.

*"I encounter students who self harm and a wrong word or action can be critical...this training gave me clear guidance and the confidence to interact appropriately with students"* (Personal Tutor)

### Policy and procedure development

Produced Student Mental Health: Procedural Guidelines for Staff; embedded into operational policy, and incorporated into workforce development. Disseminated to 3,000 staff across academic and front line services and supported with training opportunities.

*"A long awaited resource which wouldn't have been produced without the focus and the drive of the 'Rethink' project, well done!"* (Personal Tutor)

### Challenged the stigma and discrimination around mental health

Delivered 4 anti-stigma campaigns using materials and ideas developed by 150 student participants.

New SU 'Headroom' webpage for discrete signposting to campus and community services and information – average 500 unique visitors per month.

'Headroom Road Show' unstaffed exhibition stand providing information and self help resources – engaging 722 students per week.

### Improving referral pathways and early intervention

Providing new interventions on campus:-

- Wellbeing Buddy peer mentoring and befriending service within the existing Mentoring Programme – 75 student volunteers recruited and trained as Wellbeing Buddies; supporting and improving the mental and emotional wellbeing of mentees. System of support for Buddies developed with student counselling service.
- Headroom Drop In Surgery – provided by Preston Mental Health Forum an external independent advice providing local referral information into community services.
- Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (operational Sept 2010).
- Stress management workshops – 67 student participants
- Exercise Referral scheme – peer supported exercise sessions; improving social inclusion and mental wellbeing.

*"When students have plucked up the courage to get help, immediate practical help is vital"* (Nurse practitioner)

### Creating a positive shift in staff and student knowledge, attitudes and behaviour around mental health

88% of staff reported 'an improved awareness of student mental health' following project training.

*“My personal tutor has been fantastic, I was terrified of telling him about my eating disorder, but he understood and didn't see me as a problem! I've been able to cope and stay on my course and manage my treatment” (1<sup>st</sup> year student in recovery with an eating disorder)*

## Key Learning Points

### What were the challenges or barriers?

- Developing partnerships internally and externally was a challenge and was prioritised throughout the project.
- Working and balancing different priorities across UCLan.
- Exploring and clarifying boundaries and expectations within staff groups, especially the personal tutor roles.
- Communicating and disseminating the mental health procedures to staff to ensure a good level of awareness of the document and use of it. This was done at university level and school/service level.
- Although Rethink has been required to monitor project targets, the style of the national evaluation of the Time to Change programme was not suited to the activities taking place within UCLan. The national evaluation focussed more on people accessing services, their experience of services and improvements due to services. Therefore, UCLan has become a case study within the national evaluation.
- Continuation of project now funding has ended. Rethink and UCLan have been active in applying for further funding internally and externally. However, no funding was identified and the current situation is that the HU Co-ordinator is picking up key priority areas but reducing HU work in other areas. The stakeholder group remains strong and many of the activities have already been embedded within UCLan.

### What helped you achieve success?

- Commitment and support from Rethink to work with UCLan
- Being part of a national programme
- Having an external perspective from Rethink supported UCLan in developments and changes, it also acted as a driver to make changes within a timescale linked to the project
- There was a recognition and agreement from staff that the Rethinking Student Mental Wellbeing project would be positive and there was interest and enthusiasm for the work
- The length of the project (2 ½ yrs) allowed time for partnerships and activities to develop and become embedded

## How did the work contribute to the three key focus areas of healthy universities?

### 1. Create healthy and sustainable learning, working and living environments

The mental health procedures have provided staff with guidance on how to respond to a range of issues related to mental health. Through these procedures and training, staff are more confident in their role in responding to these issues. Services have been developed and existing ones enhanced so students can access a wider range of options in response to a mental health issue. Mental health and wellbeing has become more visible within the UCLan environment through campaigns and new services.

### 2. Integrate health and sustainability into core business

While the project was running PR and Video Production courses were involved in the work and there are future opportunities for this to be repeated. The initial research in 2006 was repeated in 2008 with journal articles currently being written. This project has been used with Health and Social Change (BA) as a case study for research, healthy settings approach and as an example mental health interventions tackling stigma.

### 3. Contribute to the health and wellbeing and sustainability of local, regional, national and global communities

Throughout the project community links were developed to. Much of the early focus was how the students could know about and access existing local services where appropriate. Towards the end of the project UCLan worked with Central Lancashire PCT to become an access point for the community for computerised cognitive behaviour therapy.

#### Thematic Categories

Method		Topic		Population Group	
Campaign / Event	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alcohol / Substance Misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	Built Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Project	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Food / Healthy Eating	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wider Community	<input type="checkbox"/>
Policy / Procedure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whole System Approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Physical Activity / Active Transport	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Health	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Sustainable Development	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		Other	<input type="checkbox"/>		

#### Contact Details

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