

The Strategic Value of a Student Mental Health Framework

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Outline

- Thinking Strategically about Mental Health
- Why should Mental Health be a strategic focus for universities
- How to ensure the strategic importance of mental health and wellness
- Conclusion



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Thinking Strategically about Mental Health

- We have all been part of strategic planning sessions
- That is when the university, departments, faculties and units think about
 - how to direct resources
 - make specific plans and efforts
 - wish to achieve specific goals
- Strategic planning guides the mission, long term development plans, academic programmes, research agendas, and **student services** at universities



Thinking Strategically about Mental Health

What do we hear when someone says
Organizational Strategy...

- “Vision and Mission” statements we hardly understand?
- Business models that has little to do with our work?
- Something that senior management sees to, and does not concern us?

Yet:

As professional service departments, we should be involved in thinking how we can place mental health and student wellness on the main agenda



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Thinking strategically about Mental Health

Many theoretical frameworks explain strategic planning

Most involves an understanding of ...

- The larger society in which we operate
 - specific threats and opportunities
- The customers (students, parents) we serve
 - have specific needs, shortfalls, expectations and strengths.
- The (human / physical / financial) resources to our disposal
 - may pose strengths or weaknesses, competencies, and capabilities.
- The values, purpose and culture of the university
 - the history, future, leadership visions and priorities, where resources are directed

Q: How do we bring these elements into our operations?



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Why mental health support should become a strategic focus of universities

Academic Success

- Student wellness has a positive impact on academic performance
- A “well” student can ...
 - respond to academic challenges proactively
 - cope positively and adaptively with stressors >> demonstrate resilience
 - generate solutions to academic and life challenges
 - negotiate relationships with peers and authority figures, handle conflicts or disappointments
 - tolerate and regulate negative emotions and distress
 - practice self- and other care
 - achieve goals

Retention and Graduation rates

- Students with poor mental health are more likely to have lower GPAs, take longer to complete a degree, or drop out entirely
- Mentally well students are less likely to drop out / more likely to stay the course
- Those who drop out for mental health reasons, often do not access support services
- If the support is timely, students will persist and graduate
- Completion vs completion-in-record time or retention

Why mental health support should become a strategic focus of universities



Creating a Culture of Care

- Mental health and advising services signals a certain message to students
- Certain cultures can be harmful and need intervention – harsh, critical, discriminatory
- Importance of connection, communication, specifying behaviors of care, addressing power relationships and driving the transformation agenda through whole univ.
- Ethics culture: Students should be not just a means to an end (throughput, graduate), but an end in themselves

Client Satisfaction

(Students and Parents)

- Well-established student support structures can be the competitive advantage for an institution
- Students who are supported, feels a sense of belonging
- Positive customer service ratings and reviews adds reputational value
- Attracts more students / parents at ease
- Helps the institution to grow in the long-term

How?

Suggest Two-Pronged Approach



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1. Advocate for an organisational mental health policy / framework

- Ensure communal understanding and person-centeredness
- Standardize approaches to difficult to manage or ambiguous situations – protect rights
- Allocate resources - funding / staff
- Ensure “whole university” approach to mental health
- Consultation and adoption process

2. Adopt a system that improves access to mental health care and enhances student wellness

- Be innovative and agile – no more business as usual
- Consider student service needs – who are they?
- Allow for improving mental health literacies and psychoeducation on resilience, emotional intelligence, emotional regulation and coping
- Adjust to short term interventions without compromising quality
- Leverage technologies
- Ensure crisis presentations are managed

A Student Mental Health Framework - Issues to consider

- Importance of mental health management in student population
- Theoretical frameworks: resilience and holistic wellbeing
- Definitions: Mental health / Mental Illness / Wellbeing / Resilience
- Who owns, introduces, & reviews the framework
- Who is consulted, what are the roles and responsibilities (also outside the unit)
- University wide scope of mental health awareness and promotion in campus community – roles of faculties, administrators, student leadership, various departments
- Consequences of non-compliance – risks associated with ad-hoc management of mental health presentations
- Associated documents – other policies and protocols
- Where is it published and how will it be disseminated
- Life cycle / review



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A Student Mental Health Framework - Issues to consider

- Describe availability of mental health and wellness services, initiatives and inputs offered
- Both “Prevent and Manage”: Restorative care and preventative campaigns
- Referral procedures (standard and emergency procedures, after hours services)
- Management of crisis presentations
- Reasonable accommodation and concessions due to Psychiatric illness and/or Learning difficulties
- LOA, exclusions and readmission – conditions and procedures
- Mental health as it pertains to disciplinary matters
- Mental health and wellness management in Residences
- Student practitioners registered at the HPCSA
- Academic development and support



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Improved Access to Service

-consider innovative strategies

- Digital interventions and telehealth
- Data-driven approaches
- Peer support structures
- Harm-reduction approaches
- Understand student perspectives and needs
- Brief intervention models
- Reduce stigma
- Ensure good crisis response
- Screening services
- Education and awareness
- Leadership structures and advocacy by influential students
- Media representation

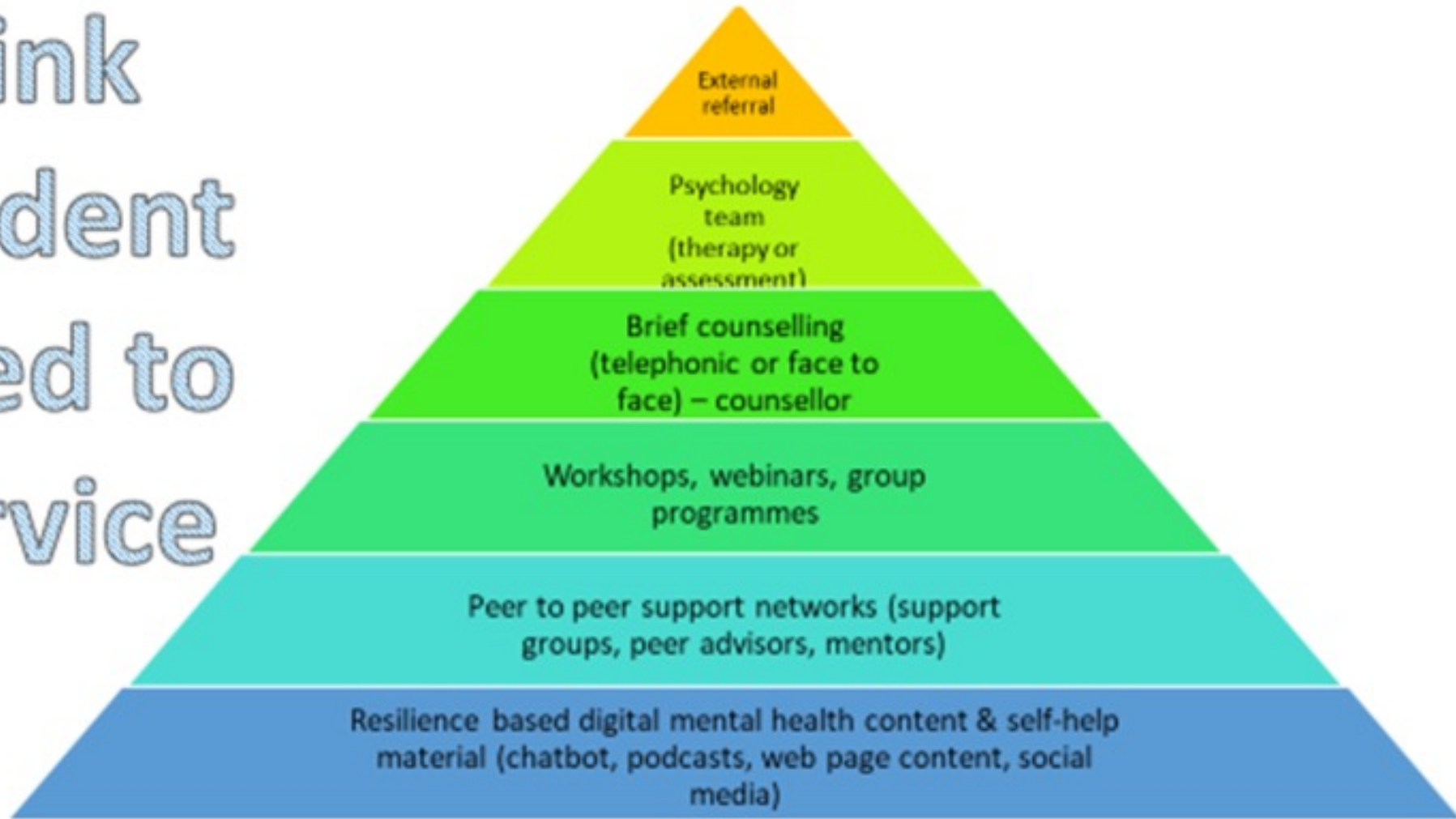


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Link student need to service



Kirkcaldy, 2022



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**We all wish only the best for our students.
We need to continuously strategize for success.**



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MENTAL *matters* HEALTH

<https://ditalgo.com/product/mental-health-matters-svg-png-pdf-therapist-shirt-svg/>



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THANK YOU



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