



INSIGHT

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Themed group interventions to enhance resilience

University of Stirling

AMOSSHE Insight project summary

The University of Stirling's AMOSSHE Insight project piloted and evaluated the impact of a programme of themed interventions (group workshops / support groups) targeted at students living in university accommodation, with the aim of building their resilience.

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In the 2016/17 academic year **AMOSSHE**, in collaboration with **Unite Students**, supported a series of member-led projects related to the theme “student resilience in an accommodation setting”.

These projects extend sector knowledge about how Student Services professionals can develop student resilience, specifically within a student accommodation setting, and contribute to the development of a sector-wide student resilience toolkit.

**UNITE
STUDENTS**

Enhancing student resilience through the provision of themed group interventions

Project leader

Erin Russell, Head of Student Guidance & Wellbeing, University of Stirling

Completion date

August 2018

Total AMOSSHE Insight award

£3,500

Full report

www.amoshe.org.uk/insight-2016-17-group-interventions

Overview and project aims

The project aim was to pilot a programme of themed interventions (group workshops / support groups) targeted at University of Stirling students living in university accommodation, with the aim of building resilience. Students who agreed to participate were consulted on the themes of the intervention workshops, and these were carried out between November 2017 and April 2018.

Methodology

Following investigation into the availability of well-established tools, the project team received recommendations from two other institutions of the applicability of the **MTQ48 psych test** in measuring resilience. The project team engaged with Retinent Ltd, an organisation that was working with approximately 12 other universities operating a similar model, and agreed that they would run the MTQ48 in partnership with AQRI, the organisation that provided the software and hosted the data. The Stirling team had a total of 32 respondents to the original promotional campaign. Of those 32 students who expressed interest, 19 students provided consent to participate. The

majority of participants were first year full-time undergraduates and female. The participants were emailed the MTQ48 questionnaire before the series of intervention workshops began.

Using the feedback from the original 32 students who expressed interest in participating, the six lead practitioners developed a series of intervention workshops. The intervention workshops focused on the following themes:

- Initial transition to university life and dealing with change.
- Stress reduction and management.
- Using the power of positive psychology and mindfulness.
- Managing procrastination.
- Managing relationships and social anxiety.

Although 19 students had confirmed attendance prior to the first intervention workshop, only 10 students actually attended the first session. Numbers fluctuated slightly over the course of the sessions, but there were never more than 12 students in attendance at any one workshop.

Key findings

Key findings originated from the results of the MTQ48 questionnaires, verbal feedback provided by both the lead practitioners and participants, and participants of a Survey Monkey survey.

Following the final workshop in April, all participants were invited to undertake the MTQ48 questionnaire again, and a 'Distance Travelled' report was emailed to the eight participants who completed the retest. Of those eight participants, 50% obtained the same score in their 'Distance Travelled' report for their 'Mental Toughness' factor as they did in the original MTQ48 report, with the other half of participants improving their 'Mental Toughness' factor by at least one point.

The lead practitioners advised that they noticed significant signs of cohesion within the group from the first session in November, to the final session in April. They noted that some participants began to arrive together, suggesting that friendships may have been formed during the course of the workshops, and reported a noticeable shift in the willingness of participants to open up and discuss their own experiences from the earlier sessions to the final sessions.

Participants responding to an evaluation Survey Monkey survey advised that they would have liked the workshops to have occurred more frequently, and be less spaced out. All respondents advised that they would attend again if the university were to run the sessions in semester 2018/19.

Recommendations

This project was not without its challenges in terms of volume of students willing to participate and evaluate the workshops, and the format of the workshops. The project was, however, very interesting for practitioners to lead, and has informed and influenced a shift in the direction of the Counselling and Wellbeing team at the University of Stirling. Furthermore, despite the challenges outlined above, the students who participated did derive benefit from the workshops. To that end, rather than solely focussing upon reactionary, traditional forms of support such as one-to-one counselling, the University of Stirling's counsellors are now exploring developing group work – both group therapy and workshops.

The Counselling and Wellbeing team will use the feedback and experience of running these workshops to inform practice, and will take consideration of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the workshops are less spaced out over the course of the year.
- Conduct the initial transitions workshop as early as possible in the academic year.
- Chart retention and progress outcomes against the overall performance of the comparable student population.
- Focus questions on students' motivations for participating or for engaging with alternative support provided by the university (for example, were first year students attracted to the project to help them manage transition to university life? Why did participants register with Counselling during the series of interventions?) This would strengthen future evaluation and improvement.
- Make sure to effectively target postgraduate, undergraduate and international student cohorts in general with similar but targeted advertising campaign themes running in parallel.
- Consider a blended approach to the delivery of the course.

Conclusion

It is clear that support services within higher education are now required to provide multifaceted support. While more dynamic digital forms of support should be embraced and encouraged, it is important to note that many students value human contact and more traditional forms of support like one-to-one counselling, so these should not be forgotten or dismissed – especially for those who have experienced trauma.

In summary, our results show that it is difficult to both build and measure resilience over the course of a year. Our participants' 'Mental Toughness' did not appear to dramatically improve over the course of the project, however their ability to manage procrastination, and their general levels of confidence did increase, so the project was not without value.