



LA TROBE
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Building an allied health workforce in mental health

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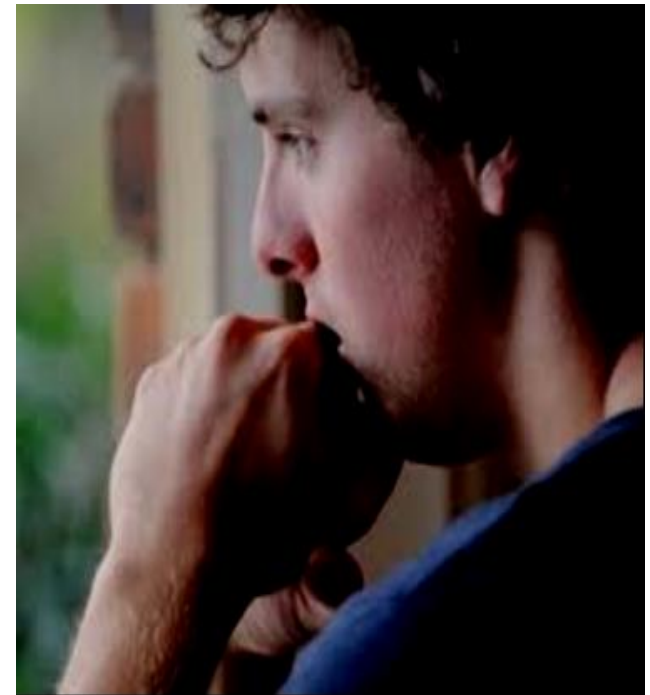
La Trobe Rural Health School Occupational Therapy Program

- Program was established in 2009 to address workforce shortages in regional Victoria and provide educational opportunities to regional students.
- Areas of particular shortage were in paediatrics, mental health and occupational rehabilitation
- Approximately 90% of OT students are from rural and regional areas
- Vast majority of fieldwork placements in rural/regional areas
- 95% of graduates employed in rural and regional areas.



Rural Mental Health in Australia

- **Lack of services, particularly specialist services in rural areas** (Levine and Coupey, 2003; Welch 2007).
- **Stigma of mental health leading to reduced uptake of services by rural people, particularly young males** (Caldwell, Jorm, Dear, 2004; Quine et al., 2003; Quinn, 2003; Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).
- **Higher incidence of mental illness, including substance abuse and youth suicide** (Boyd 2006; CMHA 2009).



Occupational therapists working in mental health?

- **Facilitating meaningful occupation – the things that are important to people**
- **Occupations are the things we do – self-care, productive and leisure**
- **We work with people to achieve their goals**
- **Recovery-oriented care**
- **Person-centredness**
- **Roles and routines**
- **Groups and individuals**
- **Acute to psychosocial rehabilitation**
- **Multidisciplinary teams where everyone has a role to play**

The story

- **Many people are surprised to find out that occupational therapists work in mental health – parents at open days, first year students, mental health managers**
- **Attitudes of our students towards mental health placements**
- **Tracking our graduates employment destinations**
- **Lack of OTs in rural mental health services so lack of placements**

Strategies to promote mental health practice to students

- **Public lecture / forum on youth mental health – guest speaker Professor Patrick McGorry, OA.**
 - **Over 150 attended – local mental health clinicians, school principals and welfare teachers.**
- **Project placements sought from local mental health services**
 - **Half of the 2014 graduating cohort had mental health experience**

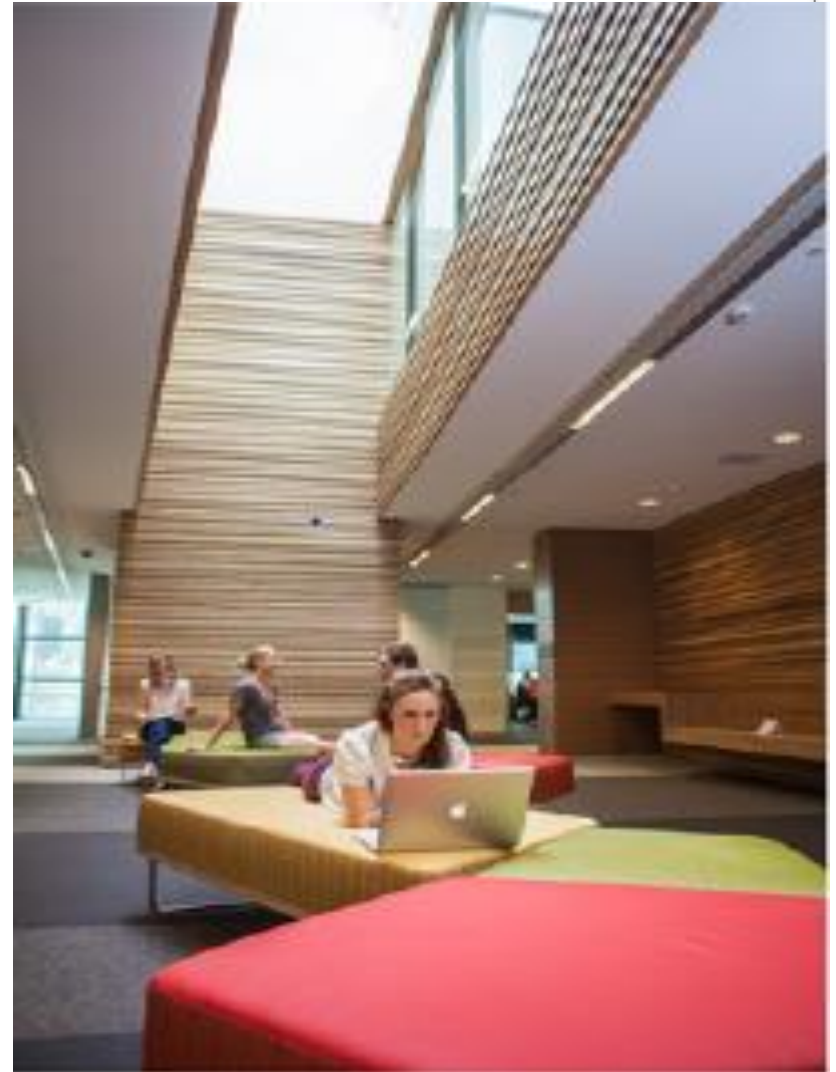
- **Role emerging placements**
 - **No occupational therapists in the setting therefore supervision/support by LRHS academics.**
 - **Examples of settings : Righteous Pups, Netschool**
- **Visits to mental health services with OTs for first year students**

Outcomes so far

- **More students requesting mental health placements**
 - **Increased number of graduates going into mental health:**
 - **2013 – four graduates from a total cohort of 24**
 - **2014 – eight graduates from a cohort of 28**
 - **2015 – ten graduates from a cohort of 35**
 - **These graduates are working in a variety of areas: inpatient rehabilitation, youth (child and adolescent mental health teams, community agencies such as headspace) and community support teams.**
 - **LRHS OT graduates now assisting with teaching students on fieldwork placements.**
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Issues to overcome

- **Continued lack of student fieldwork placements**
- **Availability of graduate positions**
 - **Lack of awareness of occupational therapy role in mental health – more published evidence.**
- **Retention of graduates**
 - **Lack of career pathway**
 - **Graduate support and supervision**



Thank you

Questions and discussion

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