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DARLENE MC LENNAN: Welcome, everyone. It is Darlene here. I'm the manager of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training. ADCET I would like to welcome you all. It is wonderful to have Dr Annie Venville and Professor Ellie Fossey present to us on Supporting Tertiary Students with Disability: Exploring the use of institutionalised and institution-level approaches in practice . 300 people are registered. Before we begin, I would like to go through a few housekeeping items. This webinar is being live captioned by Bradley Reporting and will be recorded. The recording will be placed on ADCET after it has been captioned. This may take up to a week. The GoTo webinar platform is not as accessible as we would desire. If you are a screen reader user and if you have any questions or comments, you're able to email Jane.Hawkeswood@utas.edu.au. You have been muted so there is little background noise. The presentation will run for around 50 minutes and we will have a few minutes for questions at the end. Please feel free to enter your questions in the question pod or screen reader user send your questions to Jane. I would choose a few at the end. Presentation to ask the presenters. With so many registered for this webinar, we won't have a chance to answer all your questions, but Annie and Ellie have said they can answer questions off line. We will also include the questions that have come through on the registration form. Also if you have any difficulty, technical difficulties, during the webinar, please email Jane. I will throw it over to Ellie an Annie.

ANNIE VENVILLE: Thank you. Thank you to all of you who have given up your time to listen to Ellie and I today. This is an important area of work and as you all know, we were work and you work in an area of increasing complexity. We are struggling with a reduction in resources and that's at the same time there's increased participation in our educational environment by students with more complex learning needs. I am tell you nothing new when I'm telling you that there is a greater need for us to adopt and use evidence‑based practice. So simply put, what we need to be able to do is demonstrate why we do what we do and how we know what we do works. Next screen.

When we think about the current approaches to supporting tertiary students or post‑secondary students with learning ‑ mental illness or chronic health conditions or disability, we all know that access to support services is reliant on self‑disclosure. Now, what this means is that some students will elect not to disclose and, therefore, they will not have access to some of the supports and opportunities for adjustment that they would had they elected to disclose. Students also tell us, and you tell us too, I might add, in our research, that there is a lack of clarity around what to do with students, what to do for students, who has responsibility for negotiating, implementing reasonable adjustments and also students tell us that despite the best efforts of universities and training providers and individual staff to promote the support services available, students still tell us they don't know who to go to, when to go to and how do they know what will work, which leads us then to asking that question which is what actually works.

So I'm now going to talk to you about two pieces of research that we've undertaken. I'm going to talk with you about the one piece that we named unfinished business and then Ellie will talk to you in more detail about the institutionalised and individual level supports.

Next screen. The unfinished business study, it had its focus on students with mental illness only. The supporting students in tertiary setting study looking individual and institution‑wide supports was a much broader student cohort.

The unfinished business study was designed to improve understanding of the factors influencing successful course completion for vocational education and training students with a mental illness. We could say, of course, this matters, but why did you do this. The key reason we did this is that students who had disclosed a mental illness to their training provider had the lowest course completion rate of any other student group. We thought what's going on here because as we all know, disclosure is the key to support often and to reasonable adjustment and yet here we are finding that students that did disclose had the lowest rate of course completion. So we ran a case study over a 12‑month period and again funded fully by the NCVR, for which went intensely grateful, and we ran this over four research sites. So we had a private VET provider in a city location and we had three public VET providers across different locals. So remote, regional and outer metropolitan. 20 students with a mental illness joined the study and 20 teaching and speciality disability staff were our participants.

Just briefly to just capture the findings here in terms of the factors for course success, again these are things that I'm sure you won't argue with me about, and students and staff all agreed on this, they all agreed that students should be reliable. They should be able to manage themselves and to take responsibility for their educational experience. Students thought that every bit as much as the staff thought that. They all agreed that students should be in the right course, that they should have clear goals, that they should have external supports, access to study support and that they should attend regularly and that they should submit their work on time and receive timely feedback from teaching staff. Where they disagreed was on the place of disclosure, and this is important for us, again, because as you all know, unless people declare a condition, it largely excludes them from a range of services.

Next slide. When we think about why students or what are the different understandings of disclosure, and this was key to it, students thought differently than did staff.

Next slide. Students are continually engaging in what they describe as a cost benefit analysis. They are continually weighing up the benefits against the costs of disclosing, and in this case it was disclosing a mental illness, but this is just as relevant for students who have conditions that are largely invisible or hidden. So we can think about conditions like raw traumatic brain injury, chronic fatigue, so other things that are not necessarily visible. Generally, the cost of disclosing had to be less than the cost of not disclosing in order for people to do so. A good question for you to ask me here, and I will is it for myself, is why, then, did students disclose? Three key reasons. One was desperation and it was a desperation not to fail again, and so it was often the costs that people were worried about. Some students spoke about an obligation to disclose. They described terrific supportive, generous staff that somehow they then thought they needed to give them something to justify staff's ‑ what students described as "kindness". Staff were doing what they thought was appropriate. A very small minority of students made the decision to disclose as an act of advocacy for self and others. I need to underscore that that really was the minority.

Next slide. I think what it is really important for us to remember in the VET sector and increasingly in the higher education sector, where it is more common for students to be taught by someone with whom they may end up getting a job or someone with whom they may be on an interview panel. So what students tell us that they're particularly aware of is the need to present the best self. That notion of putting our best foot forward, and I would just like to read a quote to you from one of the student participants in this study which I think captures so eloquently that notion of putting forward the best self. So this is from a student, a participant that I've named Elaine, and she was about a 32‑year‑old international student, and he said if I talk openly with my teacher, I fear if they're to offer me for a job or take part in a project they will think 'Oh, that's the guy who was depressed. He didn't cope with his previous job so he quit". I just fear that kind of information may escape. I know it is just a phase and not something that's going to last forever, so I want to keep it for myself. I don't want to be perceived as depressed. As a depressed person, a sad person. What is spoken to very clearly there is the fear of losing control of information, and as one other student said to me, once I disclose this information about myself, it's no longer mine to control, I then have to trust that other people will deal with in a respectful manner. As certainly many students' experience would suggest, that is not always the case.

Next slide. Again, just thinking about disclosure because it is so central to gaining support, we do need to pay particular attention to staff perspectives of disclosure. For the staff in this study and certainly in my experience in both the VET sector and the higher education sector, most staff think that student explode sure is the rate way to go because it opens wait for support services. None of us would argue with that at face value. However, there's a really interesting incidental finding out of this study. I asked each around every one of the staff participants who were advocating student disclosure, that if they had a mental illness, would they disclose that. To a person they said no. They were unwilling, they said, to risk the social stigma potentially created by disclosure of mental illness. Each and every one of them had a story of a staff member who had disclosed and who the organisation had not treated in their eyes well. So it's just an interesting thing for us to think about when we're asking students to disclose when staff won't trust the organisation that they work for with that information. So I think that's worth keeping in the back of our minds.

Just as I wrap this up, it is really important to locate student and staff values and beliefs about the disclosure within its context, and the context here is VET and it is just as relevant to higher education.

Organisations are mandated by the disability discrimination act to provide reasonable adjustments. The pathway to reasonable adjustments is disclosure. We know that at the point of enrolment students are provided the opportunity to disclose a disability or a health condition and this is sometimes tricky ground for students. It is often not clear, students tell us, what happens to that information once they disclose. There is generally a belief students hold that if they disclose that services will follow disclosure. You know, and I know, that that does not just happen. In most of our services the responsibility for help seeking lies firmly with the student. I'm not arguing with that; I'm suggesting that that's not always clear to students.

What this study did was prompt Ellie and I and our other colleagues to think about what exactly, what are the adjustments that are happening in our institutions, in our educational institutions, what are the ‑ and also the ‑ I'm sorry, what are the adjustments that are dependent on disclosure that are being offered in our institutions and then what are the other types of supports. So the system level supports that are not dependent upon disclosure and that may, in fact, make a difference to a student's educational trajectory.

I will pass you over to Ellie. Next slide.

ELLIE FOSSEY: Thank you. Hello everybody. I will be talking through the next part of the presentation. Following on from what Annie has been saying, this is a study I'm talking about in which we have looked more intentionally at the issue of the provision of supports to students. In particular, we were interested in three things. First of all, what are the range of supports being offered to students who experience disability or a health condition, and what are the ‑ how are those supports implemented, and then, thirdly, how useful are those in relation to students' learning. This is a qualitative study. It was guided by a reference group of expertise from within the VET sector and the university sector, a mix of teaching staff, student and support staff. We provided this together. Our main focus was qualitative interviewing and we chose to interview students, disability support staff and course leaders in order to understand these issues at the range of supports, how supports are implemented and the usefulness of supports for students learning from these perspectives.

Next slide. You might wonder why did we choose to look at all these three different perspectives all in the one study. From my point of view, if I looked at the evidence at the time, what we knew, as Annie has been describing, is that there are a number of students who enrol in tertiary education who might either have registered or not for support. The sector collect some data about how many students with ongoing health can be and disabilities enrol in the sector and it collects information about completion rates. As Annie indicated there are higher levels of students not completing from these cohorts.

What neither of those pieces of data collection tells us about is what happens between when a student enrols and whether the students are successful or not or the case may be. It is like a black box, if you like. There are a number of players who contribute to what I'm calling is a black box, and they include the students itself. Inter connected with the students are the people who are involved in teaching the people who are involved in the disability support. There are probably others you might name as well, but we chose to focus on those three perspectives with the acknowledgment that they interconnect with each other and each play a role in the provision this group of students.

So this describes for you what we mean by "reasonable adjustments", which are an individualised kind of students learning support for which students who suffering a disability or health condition are eligible provided that they register with the tertiary provider's disability service, and the other kinds of supports that we've described as institutional level learning supports, are the sorts of support that are available to all students within the particular institution. So those might include the kinds of studies, skills support, library supports, information and technology supports that institutions provide. Those are accessible to students without needing to disclose any particular health‑related or disability‑related issues. In comparison to the reasonable adjustments which are provided to enable students who experience disable or ongoing health conditions with access and the means to participate in educational training on cool equal footing on other students. We look at these kinds of support within this particular study. Next slide.

Here I'm going to sort of briefly summarise for you, if you like, the main headlines from our findings. Then I will talk to you in a little more detail about some of these individual findings. Probably the main finding from both the student and the disability support staff and from the course leader perspectives is the process of actually supporting tertiary students through disabilities is complex. Often we were told that people assumed that once a students' learning support need was recognised this would solve the issue of putting the supports in place. In fact, what students themselves said and what staff said was the process of putting the supports in place is not kinds of straightforward as merely identifying what's needed and then that fixes the problem. There's actually a set of processes not only around learning support needs but also around negotiating and implementing supports which are complex. Part of why they're complex is because there are multiple people to engage in that, the teachers, disability support staff and sometimes for particular sorts of reasonable adjustments there might be other technical staff involved in creating the necessary adjustments for students. That's probably the main message, is that the process of implementing support is complex.

Secondly, it was quite striking that students themselves described quite a wide range of individualised reasonable adjustments that they were accessing. These reflected very much the diversity of students own learning needs and also the diversity of the particular learning activities, assessments and learning environments in which students were engaged. To put that another way, for particularly for those of us who are academic staff, it's not always easy to know that students in the different courses or the different units, they might be engaged in are actually experiencing quite different kinds of learning activities, assessments, learning environments. So the adjustments that they sometimes need across those can be quite diverse.

The third main finding was that the institution level supports that students were using and finding particularly useful were those around information and communication technologies and also those around inclusive teaching practices. So I will come back to that in more detail in a minute. We concluded from these findings that, in fact, those learning supports that are, if you like, institution‑level learning supports available to all students could, in fact, be more actively used to enhance the learning support for students with disability rather than as relying on the pathways solely of students going through disability support services. In fact, this might be one of the ways in which we, if you like, adjust in organisations to the recognition that not all students choose to disclose the issues that they have for the kinds of range of reasons that Annie was describing.

Next slide. On this slide I've tried to illustrate for you the four processes involved in providing disability support for students that were described in our study. The four boxes refer to the four processes, so the first box finding and accessing a disability service. Students particularly talked about both their choices around when to register and variability in their awareness of both of there being a disability service and the processes by which you might register. What was apparent from particularly from a student perspective is that not everybody starts a course with a pre-existing health condition or disability. Sometimes these arise during your course and so relying on enrolment as the time for us to ask students to register for these kinds of services can't be our only strategy. Because it is not necessarily the relevant time to register for every student. In addition, some students don't know whether they need to register at the beginning of a course or even at the beginning of a semester and describe what they referred to as a wait and see approach. You know "I'll wait and see how I go with the course or unit, and if I find I need assistance, then I will go to the disability service and ask for that assistance".

So there are some issues for us around how we make students aware of the services available to them. So that's the first process.

The second step in the provision of disability support is to identify the suitable supports for a particular student when they seek help. Both the disabilities staff and the student talked about the collaboration between them in this process. From both points of view collaboration was necessary to gather sufficient information about the students' learning needs and about the requirements of the particular course the student was in. The while stability staff have a lot of knowledge about the support for students, they have knowledge about their own challenges, but also what they've tried previously and what did or didn't work, and students varied in their view about how much that knowledge of theirs was taken into account in the sort of recommendations that were made for learning supports for them.

The third step, having identified whatever supports might be suitable for an individual student, the third step, then, is to negotiate the implementation of those learning supports. There were quite varied views amongst the group of people that we interviewed about what the best way to negotiate the implementation of learning supports was.

Some of the people talked about talked about disability support staff being the people who negotiated directly with teaching staff on behalf of the student, so that was one way that learning supports could be implemented. The second way, many of the students particularly talked about this, they felt that it was assumed that it was their responsibility to, having got a support plan, that it was their responsibility to go back to the teaching staff and say "This is the learning support I need". Then there was a few examples with a collaborative effort with staff and students together met with teaching staff to work out what would be the best way to implement the learning supports that a particular student needed.

Overall, whichever of these methods were being used students expressed varied preferences between those methods, but their overall message was that they wanted a say in which approach was used, so some of the time students described it as much more stressful for them to do the negotiating and they wished that the disability support staff would be more actively involved with them. Other times the students preferred to talk with the teaching staff themselves. Underpinning these preferences often was the nature of the relationships that the students felt they had with both the disability support staff and with the teaching staff. So when those relationships were better in either or both cases, then the students were more comfortable with the involvement of those particular staff in sorting out how to implement supports for them.

The fourth process here in ‑ so we've ‑ if we assume that we've found a service, if I'm a student and I found the service was the first step. I've collaborated with the disability support staff member to work out a plan, then that person and I have worked out how to negotiate with the teaching staff to implement those learning supports. So then the fourth piece of it is actually using those learning supports in practice. Here the students talked about learning supports as being particularly useful to enable them to participate in learning more fully and, specifically, they describe learning supports as effective when they achieved one of three of four things. First, when they enabled the students to better understand their own learning needs, when they enabled the students to cope better, when they enabled the students to like their learning better and when it enabled them to do their best in their studying.

Those are a wider range of benefits, if you like, for learning support than merely about getting good marks or getting through the course which tended to be the emphasis that disability support staff and course leaders focused on. There is variation there in how learning supports are perceived.

From the student's point of view the individualised types of supports, or reasonable adjustments, were not always easily applied in practice. So they had recommendations, there had been some negotiation with their teachers about how to put these adjustments into practice, but the reality for some students was that the reasonable adjustments were actually hard to implement. So a range of reasons. Some students identified physical barriers that were not so much at the level of between the teachers and the students and the course. So things like there wasn't parking in an area that was convenient to the buildings that the students needed to access. It could be a physical barrier. There were problems with lifts or other sort of physical facilities that some students relied on and, therefore, if those weren't in place or were unreliable in some way, then that created a barrier to students even getting to their classes to then access the adjustments that were put in place for the learning itself. There was some kind of wider, if you like, barriers sometimes. Some students felt that there were attitudinal barriers to adjustments in the classroom. In particular, they described sometimes feeling that the mere implementation of an adjustment singled them out in some way. So it made them more noticeable. An adjustment like having a note taker present or an assistant present to sign for you sort of for some students, whilst they were valuable supports on one level, they were also things that would single a student out sometimes from their peer and limited the interaction between them and their peers. What they were suggesting that in some ways there needed to be more thought given to the rest of the class and how the rest of the class could engage with a student in that situation to be more exclusive. So less of an adjustment focused on the individual student as the problem, if you like, more an adjustment made to the teaching of all the students to be more inclusive.

Next slide. What does this tell us about good practice? This is certainly a relatively small qualitative study about in, as I described this earlier, as the sort of black box of what happens in relation to learning support, but I think it gives us some clues to what might be good practice and/or best practice in relation to how we offer support to students. Certainly there's a key message that our processes for and decisions about the implementation of support and adjustments need to be student‑focused but they also need the student to be at the centre of the process. So they need to be student‑centred, not just focused on the student's needs. I think that means collaboration is key in the whole process of how supports are selected, how supports are implemented and in getting feedback about whether and how those supports are working. So that's probably the key message, I think, is to think about how we can be student‑centred in the process not merely in the finding the solutions to students' problems.

Next slide. On this slide I'm not going to go through all of these, and probably many of them are familiar to you, but on this slide we have a list of the reasonable adjustments that students described in this particular study. They range from the flexibility in assessments meaning extended assessment due dates or choices of assessment format ranging from ‑ if you've got a presentation that you could, perhaps, do it orally instead of doing it in written form, that you could submit an assignment electronically instead of in person if the travel or mobility issues were getting in the way. Changes to assessment conditions around using computers or recorders rather than handwritten, allowances that probably many of you are familiar with around extended exam times being located in quiet rooms, allowances to have food or beverages available. Obviously, these are adjustments that suit people with different kind of learning issues, but they give you the sense of the range. There were some students who are specialist‑adapted equipment of one sort or another. There were other students who in ‑ I've called it adaptive equipment, but it's equipment that is relatively easily available, like having an audio recorder, having an iPhone that you use for your recording. So it is not necessarily specialist, but it's given you another way to capture information. There were fewer students who were using in‑class supports, but of the sort like note takers or participation support in terms of the teaching aid or assistance, but there were a lot of students who talked about the value of having study materials and recordings made readily available on line and that this seemed to accommodate quite a number of learning challenges that were both mobility‑related and mental health related and related to learning disabilities, so that some of these supports have quite broad application, they're not tied to particular disability types. Then there were a range of other, if you like, academic supports around having materials available in varied formats, printed online screen reader‑accessible audio books and so on, and for a much smaller number of students' individual tutoring and study skills development.

As you can see, quite a wide range of support were being used by the students, and these were all support that the students had negotiated through disability support services.

Next slide. So this slide provides you with some examples of supports that students with disabilities were making use of, that, if you like, were institution level support. So these highlight some that students with disabilities found particularly useful. Certainly flexibility in learning activities and assessment formats were something that many students talked about as being useful. So when there was a choice of either presenting orally or presenting in written form or when there was a choice between demonstrating something physically or describing how to do it in instructing somebody else. So those kinds of choices were helpful for some students. Other things that students talked about that were useful was when there was teaching if in class around time management, stress management, coping strategy that would be useful for a particular class, and so they're quite light when those sorts of issues were addressed in the group as a whole. They were helping to them as students with disability but were also helpful to the wider group of students. Certainly the making available of course materials online so that students could go back and revise, could review material before a class, could access them in a more easily because they didn't have to navigate travel and parking and those kinds of things. Certainly that online method of delivering material, not necessarily as the form of teaching, but as the back up to the face‑to‑face teaching. That was valued by the students.

I've also lived on this slide a number of things that students talk about that were not really institution‑level learning supports and not really reasonable adjustments in the sense that they were not provided, but through the disability service, but they were things that students had initiated or discovered for themselves as being helpful to them in managing their learning challenges. So a range of non‑specialised equipment around carrying materials, around particularly mobile devices for managing schedules, study skills, recording, watching, listening to lessons. The online world clearly makes it a lot easier for many students with disabilities to access information and resources that assist them with their studies. Some students talked about using time and stress management, such as reducing their studying times. Students themselves are quite a good resource for identifying what it is that might help them with their learning support needs. When I say that, the students themselves, I mean both the student who experiences a particular challenge, but also their peers who have experienced this before them so that one of the things that was striking in the interviews was that there wasn't a great deal of institution level support for creating peer groups or fostering peer contact in order for students with disabilities to learn from each other about the kinds of strategies that they find helpful. I think that is something that we could do better in tertiary education.

My final slide. I'm aware that we're going to need time for questions. I'm not going to talk about this except to say that our conclusion about enhancing the supports for students that we need to take into account three inter connected sets of issues. I've drown them as three inter connected circles here. There's the fact that we have a divide verse group of students, a wide range of difficulties and experience around being a student. Then I have a circle for thinking about the learning context. What are the learning tasks or activities, the assessment tasks, the teaching approach, on the styles of interaction that are part of the learning context. So that's a second set of factors. Then the third set of factors is more about the institutional structures. So it's what is the campus environment like, what are the available learning supports within a particular campus or do the disability supports available in this campus, and what did the IT infrastructure that we can draw on in this campus. So thinking about the interactions between those three sets of factors can enable us to identify three ways or three strategies, if you like, for enhancing can include learning support. One is how we can think about strengthening the inclusiveness of our curriculum design and curriculum practice. Another is to think about how we recognise and respect difference. When we focus very much on individual reasonable adjustments, that's helpful for that particular student but it doesn't necessarily encourage the recognition for the range of difference we might have within a cohort of students but it doesn't necessarily encourage.

The third way is thinking about how we make campuses and online spaces welcoming, safe and accommodating of differences as well. If you are interested in it, there is more information about the strategies that sit around this picture in report that Annie myself and others wrote for NCVR. The reference to that on the next slide. The reference I'm referring to is Fossey, Chaffey, Venville, Ennals, et cetera and that is available on the website if you wish to look at that. There is also a brief good practice summary guide from our study on that same website. There are a range of other resources I've listed on this side that is helpful to you.

I will hand over to Darlene for some questions.

DARLENE MC LENNAN: Thank you. That was actually very informative. We've in some quite good questions emailed into our student pod. I'm concerned that they may run over time because we're kind only got four minutes to go. If we can answer very quickly, but just to remind people who were not there at the beginning, we will be putting the questions to Annie and Ellie after this presentation and we will post the answers on the website with the video of this session as well. One of the questions was asked are we able to share your PowerPoint on the website for people to be able to access after the presentation?

ELLIE FOSSEY: I would than happy with that if Annie is also.

ANNIE VENVILLE: Certainly.

DARLENE MC LENNAN: Somebody has written to say thank you for such a comprehensive and informative webinar and they have learned a lot, which is fantastic, and I say that as well. Thank you to you both for your time and also for the support for NCVR for putting this webinar on. It is fantastic for all of us to sit down for an hour, even if we're eating our lunch and listening to some wonderful research. Also for a lot of us in the disability space and the further education space, there isn't a lot of this research. So it is great to be able to share with the sector. Just a reminder that the next presentation next webinar is 7 April. The topic for that will be supporting students with autism disorder in higher education. That will be a design on the built environments and how it affects people on the spectrum. That will be another interesting topic and hopefully we will get as many people registered. If people would like to ask any more questions, you can keep putting the questions up in the room or you can email Jane Hawkeswood or myself and we will get the questions to Annie and Ellie. Thank you once again. It's fantastic. I really appreciate your time. It's wonderful to have been able to share your wisdom and learning with the sector.

ANNIE VENVILLE: Thank you. An additional thanks to your colleagues who have done the captioning and assisted us with making the PowerPoint more accessible for people. I really appreciate that assistance as well.

DARLENE MC LENNAN: Not a problem. Thank you everybody. We look forward to seeing you at our next webinar. Bye.

ANNIE VENVILLE: Thank you.

ELLIE FOSSEY: Thank you.