

30 January 2018

Web Counselling trial overview

Youth Focus works with young people aged 12-25 to help them overcome issues associated with mental health concerns and for the prevention of suicide, through the provision of free, unlimited and professional individual counselling and other mental health services. We are an early intervention and suicide prevention service. It is important to note that Youth Focus are not a crisis service and are unable to accept referrals for individuals who are best supported by the health system.

We are currently implementing a Web based Counselling program, funded by WAPHA until December 2018, to provide evidence based counselling services to young people in regional WA locations via secure web link. An evaluation of this program will occur in order to determine the effectiveness and suitability of web-based counselling in regional and remote areas.

We intend that the service will provide greater accessibility and availability of a valuable early intervention clinical support service to young people that need support in areas where there are barriers to accessing early intervention, youth specific clinical support.

Web Counselling - What the research says

National surveys indicate it is rare to find anybody under the age of 35 years in Australia who does not use the internet (Ewing, van der Nagel & Thomas, 2014), and young people are increasingly going online to find information, contact relevant health organisations, and reach out to others in need. With a burgeoning research field in online interventions demonstrating this modality to often be as effective as face-to-face therapy (King & Bickman, 2010; Rice et al, 2014), the mental health and



broader human services sector has been slow to adopt this technology into patient care.

For those experiencing mental illness, the strategic use of technologies by professionals to enhance engagement and support treatment is critical, along with new service models of online therapy. In particular, the delivery of evidence-based psychotherapy via personal computers, mobile phones, and tablets provides an opportunity to increase its uptake in rural and remote communities, where over 30% of Australia's population resides (Baxter, Hayes & Gray, 2011). This is expected to help minimise the impact of inadequate numbers and unequal distribution of registered clinicians, the subsequent long wait times, as well as the financial demands of treatment, travel times, and stigma associated with accessing mental health services.

Site Partnership

Youth Focus are currently exploring options for possible sites with a priority on regional areas that currently have little or no access to psychological services for young people. The concept is that young people use a secure web-based connection on an iPad (provided and support by Youth Focus), to link with a counsellor at one of our sites, to receive evidence based psychological support.

We have capacity for qualified and experienced counsellors to start delivering services and are looking for local organisations that can support a location for the young person to attend. As a new service model, we are initially restricting it to twenty specific locations across WA, supported by a local onsite contact where risk management can be closely monitored, managed and evaluated.

Through site partnership we offer the opportunity to offer the service in your community, reputational benefits for your organisation within your local community, community benefits generally through mental health support, and staff training opportunities that may expand upon their current experience.



Youth Focus will provide a comprehensive induction and support to the site and key site contact/s.

Local site partnership requires:

- The provision of a suitable private room where young people would feel comfortable to access support for up to four hours per week.
- Maintaining the confidentiality of those accessing the service.
- A local contact who will be onsite at the time of counselling sessions to:
 - o Ensure the ipad is charged and available in the room
 - o Provide basic onsite technical assistance onsite as required. Youth Focus will provide IT support service.
 - o Receive and secure ipad at the end of the sessions.
 - o Report any concerns to Youth Focus.
 - o Support duty of care requirements while the client is onsite.

We require that at least one person onsite during counselling sessions holds a minimum of mental health first aid or suicide prevention training, and ideally Gatekeeper training. Training can generally be arranged in consultation with WAPHA funded Suicide Prevention Coordinator in your region and we will assist to coordinate this.

Getting started:

The process to establish a site involves:

- A site visit to make introduction, view the proposed room and discuss formal site agreement. We will also establish a local support and referral network for the service at this time.
- Confirm site contact training and deliver site induction.
- Deliver an iPad to the site which has all requirements loaded on and ready to go. There is no need for a Wi-Fi connection at your end. The site agreement covers the use of the equipment for the intended purposes.
- Allocate a counsellor to the site to be available ½ day a week in line with our site agreement. A draft agreement is available for review if you would like to move forward.



- Your support in distributing service promotion materials and making referrals in your location. The service requires 3-4 appointments per week with suitable young people to support ongoing service provision in a location.

Based on sites we have established to date, we are aware that having local contact who understands and supports the service is key to making this arrangement work on an ongoing basis.

Our web counselling liaison team will maintain regular contact and provide support to ensure referral numbers and processes are maintained, however site partnership is a critical element to the success of the service.

