

MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed until 11am, 3 August 2022

Young Canberrans helped by ‘life changing’ new program

An evaluation released today shows that a new program supporting young people with early symptoms of borderline personality disorder (BPD) has demonstrated positive outcomes. Young people attending the University of Canberra’s (UC) WOKE Program have significantly reduced their symptoms, distress, suicidal ideation and dysfunctional coping approaches.

Capital Health Network (CHN) CEO, Megan Cahill said the free WOKE Program addresses a major need and service gap in the ACT mental health system.

“As ACT’s Primary Health Network we recognised the lack of early intervention programs for young people with early symptoms of BPD in the ACT region. So, we commissioned the University of Canberra to develop and run a suitable program to address this need which resulted in the WOKE Program. Young people who attended the program have reported that they achieved significant gains in their ability to regulate their moods, achieve goals and improve relationships,” said Ms Cahill.

Sixty-nine young people took part in the 14-week program, based on Dialectical Behaviour Therapy for Adolescents, including individual therapy with an intern psychologist and a skills training group.

WOKE Program Lead, Dr Dean Buckmaster explained that the WOKE Program used an innovative, sustainable and cost-effective workforce model with 16 UC Master of Clinical Psychology students delivering the program as part of their second-year practicum placements, under clinician supervision.

“The students highly commended the program, training and clinical supervision and recommended that the WOKE Program become a permanent placement within the UC Master of Clinical Psychology course. They will now enter the workforce with much-needed skills to confidently work with young people with borderline symptoms, including self-harm and suicidal ideation,” said Dr Buckmaster.

Dr Buckmaster said that unlike many other programs, parents were involved in the WOKE Program.

“We welcomed 55 parents or family members to the program who were invited to join their young person at the skills training group and also offered separate parent therapy sessions. Parents reported that they felt valued and included in their young person’s treatment, which is often not the case in other programs. Parents also learnt new ways to communicate with and support their young person and some parents reported the program was ‘life changing’,” said Dr Buckmaster.

Young people expressed a strong desire to see the WOKE Program as a permanent mental health service in the ACT: “Please get more funding as I really hope that it blows up and becomes a very well-funded program because it will change a lot of people’s lives”.

CHN commissioned UC to develop and deliver the WOKE program, supported by \$800,000 funding over four years (July 2019-June 2023) from the ACT PHN through the Australian Government’s PHN Program. The WOKE Program Final Evaluation Report can be found at:

chnact.org.au/about-us/publications/evaluations/