

# A WHOLE COLLEGE APPROACH



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*Tamworth Community College had noticed a 10% increase in students declaring a disability...*

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**Michelle Simpson, Executive Officer at Tamworth Community College (TCC), had noticed an interesting trend in college enrolments with a 10% increase in students declaring a disability (including mental health illness).**

Many of these students were accessing CSO funding and Michelle felt it was time for the college to take a strategic and proactive stance.

With strong support from the College Board, TCC set out on a journey to ensure their college was providing a supportive learning and working environment for those with support needs, especially mental health support needs.

The journey has been an interesting and eventful one for the college and they are now seeing tangible returns in completion rates and personal success stories for some of their most vulnerable students.

Additionally, the Staff Satisfaction Survey, conducted annually, shows that TCC staff members feel safe, cared for and supported in their workplace.

The TCC journey started in early 2015 when three colleges, Tamworth CC, New England Community College and Community College – Northern Inland held a “Disability Standards in Education” consultation with local disability and mental health service providers.

They discussed a range of topics including service and individual needs, barriers to access and participation, the NDIS and its implications and the objectives of their Disability Action Plans.

The consultation identified a range of rich and valuable strategies that the colleges were able to implement, some immediately, others requiring time and resources.

With strong support from the College Board, TCC undertook a thorough review of their employee support policies and invested heavily in professional development for all staff.

A first step saw management, administration and senior training staff engaging in training in the unit *CHCDIS007 Facilitate the empowerment of people with disability*.

TCC received a grant of \$6000 via the RichmondPRA Recovery Integration Plan (RIP) Funding Program.

The funding was used to support the development of the TCC Recovery Integration Plan and provide the framework for the College’s future approach to implement the National Framework for Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Services.

The grant also enabled TCC to put one of their trainers through Mental Health First Aid Australia’s (MHFA) Instructor Training course,

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so that TCC had a fully qualified person available to deliver MHFA courses to staff, local businesses and partner organisations.

By the end of 2016 all TCC staff will have completed the MHFA training and two staff members are also scheduled to complete Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training.

In this way, all staff and trainers have the skills to identify mental health issues in individuals and will be aware of barriers to student engagement, employment and mental health recovery.

They will also be au fait with the College Recovery Integration Plan and Disability Action Plan and their individual roles and responsibilities in relation to these plans. Each individual at TCC will be trained and ready to respond, resourced and supported by management and the organizational policies and procedures.

The approach supports the students, but it also supports the staff. In the team of 45 staff, 44% identify as having a lived experience of mental health issues either personally or with a close family member.

*"I felt no hesitation in discussing my circumstances or needs with management, as the College has a strong culture of open communication, privacy, respect, and trust, underpinned by employee support policies. I was able to easily utilise the College's flexible working agreement, access carers and personal leave, maintain my work/life balance and manage my workload with the help and support of management."*

The success of the program can be attributed to a number of factors including:

- Whole college approach to mental health awareness with trained staff and a comprehensive and sufficiently resourced Disability Support strategy

- Strong support from the College Board and senior management
- Documented Recovery Integration Plan and Disability Action Plan
- In house qualified MHFA trainer and designated College Pathway Planner
- Close ties with local support organisations to provide wrap around services
- Strong links with New England Partners in Recovery Mental Health Recovery Charter and associated research activities to identify service gaps, best practice and referral pathways
- Regular meetings with individuals who have disclosed a lived experience of mental health issues, their carers and their families

Student feedback included in all stages of planning and decision making

- Flexibility: in delivery, venue, breaks, blended modes, and financial support
- Providing opportunity to disclose mental health issues prior to enrolment through private discussion with staff, trainers and/or pathway planner, over the phone or meeting at the College



*This training is subsidised by the NSW Government.*