LISA CHIANG: Good afternoon. My name is Lisa and I have the unique opportunity to work across two teams as both a Senior Disability Advisor with student disability and accessibility and as a counsellor with counselling and wellbeing at Griffith University. In student disability and accessibility. I work with Cathy Easte and it is our passion to raise the importance and incorporation of accessibility and inclusive practices for everyone. Today I would like to share with you some of what we’ve done at Griffith University to advance and promote wellbeing and inclusion and hopefully there are some good ideas for you to use and also to open the conversation to share and discuss with us. Let me first begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At Griffith University we have five main campuses and I would like to recognise the traditional owners of the land, the Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera, Turrbal, Yugambeh and Kombumerri peoples. Let me begin by first setting the stage. Imagine you were Alex studying a double degree in business and law and you were so excited that you have finally made it to university and now all your dreams will come true, but suddenly you find that university is very challenging for you. The same strategies that had helped you in high school are not seeming to help you at university. There are no daily timetables to follow and you don’t know how much time to invest in each of your studies. You feel like your lecturer is talking an alien language sometimes and you have no idea what information to put down in your assignments. You have not done well with an assignment but the feedback makes no sense and you don’t know how to improve. You are not quite sure what’s going on with you but you have trouble sleeping and sometimes you wake up with a jolt and your heart is racing, you’re becoming less interested in things you once found fun and continuously worry about whether you will pass or if there are even any job opportunities for you when you graduate. Then the coronavirus pandemic hits and now you are forced into studying online and feel even more disconnected from your studies. The more you fall behind the harder it is to catch up. You procrastinate and then panic when the deadline looms feeling defeated. Nobody seems to understand and when you reach out for help you are told to just try harder and you begin to feel ashamed for feeling this way and for failing. Well, it sounds horrifying. Actually, Alex is a typical student. A study of nearly 6500 students at two major Australian universities found elevated levels of generalised psychological distress in 84% of the participants where only 29% of Australian population samples report such levels. It certainly sounds like something about university studies is contributing to that high level of distress. In my job as a Senior Disability Advisor and a Counsellor I have definitely seen many students in highly distressed states impacting on their mental health and wellbeing and their physical health was well. With the student in mind but also together with the students through codesign we embarked to increase awareness, help students to develop strategies and to embed wellbeing and inclusion into the curriculum. This year, although challenging, has presented us with some unique opportunities. As we worked online it seemed as if silos were broken down and interconnectivity between colleagues allowed us to bring about increased awareness for the need of inclusive practices, mental health and wellbeing knowledge and disability awareness. As Griffith University embarked on a new Bachelor of Business to be launched in 2021, we wanted to provide our graduates with a new way of thinking, new values, new opportunities relevant for this new economy, the recognition of the importance of embracing diversity, inclusion and wellbeing strategies and acknowledging that it needs to not only be lip service but actually needs to be taught in the curriculum. This allowed us to work together with learning and teaching to embed into the curriculum the relevant knowledge, skills and strategies. This is also aligned with the strategic goals to embrace diversity and be an ethical and values-based university and aligned with the Griffith graduate attributes of being socially engaged, responsible and effective in cultural diverse settings. We also recognise that the high levels of mental health issues in university students the curriculum and assessment has an important role to play in supporting mental health, wellbeing, destigmatising mental health issues and promoting avenues of support and the development of personal wellbeing strategies. In supporting wellbeing and inclusion through academic practices we promoted overarching inclusive accessibility, wellbeing and fostering growth practices, for example, accessibility and universal designed guidelines for both teaching and assessment, the use of inclusive language and avoidance of stereotypes, inbuilt options and a variety of learning opportunities, providing clear expectations, feedback and promoting engagement and supporting students to find positivity in their tasks, for students to submit assessments that meet their accessibility standards as well as to bring their knowledge and skills in creating accessible documents and the importance of accessibility is for everybody not just for the few. To truly embed wellbeing and inclusion it should not be a stand alone topic but relevant to the topics that they are studying, so beyond overarching principles and practices we embedded explicit knowledge and awareness building when it is relevant into the topic in the new Bachelor of Business first year foundation courses. Here are some of the examples, neuroscience and the impact of emotions and decision making, emotional intelligence and employability skills of the future, inclusive work practices and inequalities in the labour market, digital accessibility, equality versus equity versus justice, dimensions of diversity, discrimination in the workplace, strategies for self management, destigmatising mental health issues and referable to the online health and wellness centre and the counselling service for support when needed, understanding of common mental health issues such as anxiety, worry, depression and suicide prevention. As we transition to online learning at Griffith University the world has become smaller and we are now able to tap into and communicate with a much wider audience than ever before, the need for resources that support wellbeing, inclusion and accessibility has become more urgent and brought into the spotlight as new strategies are needed for this new world. As students were studying online we wanted to create online resources to support academics and students to create accessible online material and how to use some common assisted technologies. Many were using Microsoft products such as Teams, Streams and Powerpoint and we created step by step instructional videos and tip sheets to support them. I worked together Melissa Wartell who you heard earlier yesterday talking about technology at Griffith University. You do find some of our created resources in the link on the slide in creating accessible learning environments. In my role as a counsellor I used to run mindfulness sessions on campus. To continue to support students and staff the meaningful minute videos were created weekly and these are short, around three minute videos on relaxation, mindfulness and positive affirmations. If you’re interested you can check them out in the link in the slide or you can just search it up on YouTube under Meaningful Minute Relaxation. One of the videos should appear and you can find the rest from the play list from the Griffith Health and Wellness centres. Although these were created with students’ wellbeing in mind staff have been commenting that they have found them to be beneficial and look forward to them weekly. To continue to support students’ mental health and wellbeing we created a suite of resources on our online Health and Wellness Centre from strategies to adjusting to university, study/life balance to supporting themselves during the coronavirus pandemic. Another way we have been embedding wellbeing and inclusion at Griffith University is to increase staff awareness of inclusion, mental health and wellbeing through training, participation in meetings, talks and sharing posts on Teams. We have conducted two rounds of the online disability awareness training and are now working towards a self-paced disability inclusion module for general staff. During this coronavirus pandemic and the fast transition to online learning academics have been experiencing this outpouring of distress from students. To support them with strategies and knowledge on policies we have a conducted training on managing and supporting students with complex needs. To highlight the importance of inclusive practices we have been participating in regular academic prac team meetings and also to be on the pulse of new development in the university. The use of Teams has really helped us communicate and advertise what we have produced or any upcoming events. The university has prioritised wellbeing in all parts of the university under the healthy universities approach. For promoting wellbeing in staff healthy university champions have been appointed to increase awareness of wellbeing strategies and to come up with initiatives to support the wellbeing of their colleagues. What we have started embarking on is codesigning with students through design challenges in educational wellbeing and we collected mental wellbeing surveys. Every data point is someone’s lived experience and including student voices meaningfully ensures that the result is relevant and it also meets the needs of the students. So, student codesign is crucial and we will continue to use this collaborative approach both internally and externally. These initiatives have worked towards putting wellbeing and inclusion on the map and hopefully will continue to increase wellbeing and inclusion for all our students and colleagues. Back to the story of Alex, in this environment of disability, mental health and inclusion awareness he feels a little bit more included and with less stigma and is able to understand his own mental health with strategies to support his wellbeing and knowledge of avenues for support. With this awareness and reduced stigma hopefully more students are encouraged to identify their needs and seek support. The hope is that with the embedded relevant knowledge and mental health wellbeing and inclusive practices codesigning with the students and inclusive approaches of staff the students will be able to succeed, thrive and flourish. They will be able to truly enjoy their university experience which will develop themselves both professionally and personally and when they graduate and embark on their careers that they bring with them these skills, tools and strategies to continue to take care of their wellbeing and be a socially responsible citizen. I do think that we have a long way to go but this is a good start. If you need to contact me here are my contact details. Please feel free to contact me at lisa.chiang@griffith.edu.au if you have any questions or you want to just share some of your strategies and discuss with me. Thank you.

DARLENE: Selena made a comment “I like the idea of codesigning with students. What products i.e. programs or assessment types or curricular approaches have been codesigned.”

LISA CHIANG: What’s been happening is an educational wellbeing. They have a group of students, student mentors and sort of select students who have been sort of chosen to join into this group and also by sort of electing themselves to join to design some products for students around educational wellbeing and also the importance of inclusion. That’s still in the progress of being designed but hopefully working towards a website for students created by students on how to take care of their education wellbeing and that hopefully is embedded onto our online health and wellness centre with a lot of the stuff that’s created by staff. What we’ve also done is the recollective survey tool. It is used to sort of survey students on mental health and wellbeing and the knowledge of the services that we have and ways that they would like to know about our services in mental health and wellbeing especially and whether it is incorporating to their lectures or on different avenues or on social media, how they would like to find out that information. That’s under way as well. Codesigning with students is a relatively new thing that started second trimester this year. A lot of the projects are still ongoing.

DARLENE: That’s brilliant. Tracy would just like to hear a little bit more about the online module for staff.

LISA CHIANG: We are still in the midst of working that out. I’m working with Melissa Wartell on that. We did the online module that was delivered through Teams, you know, like we’re doing now in the conference with staff joining in, asking questions, interacting, like a workshop. What we want to do is that online self-paced module that’s specific to Griffith University so that staff are aware of some of the things that impact on our students and ways to be inclusive. That’s what we are working on currently so hopefully to host that through like some of the other trainings that we have, not mandatory for staff but encouraged for staff to use.

DARLENE: That’s brilliant. Thank you so much. We haven’t got any more questions now but it’s great people are writing some comments that I can help wrap up the session. Anna said quite succinctly, it’s great to hear students’ voices informing your approaches and our approaches which is fantastic. Thank you, Lisa, for sharing that. It was absolutely wonderful. ADCET will be back in touch so we can actually get some further information as well so we can showcase it.

LISA CHIANG: Great.