DEBBIE: Without further ado I will introduce you to our next presenter Brandon Taylor the manager of student support for TAFE Queensland serving the Brisbane region. Brandon has worked in the VET sector as a teacher, disability officer and manager for 16 years and been with TAFE Queensland for 12 of those. Managing a multidisciplinary team of counsellors, accessibility, Indigenous and international student welfare officers across campuses in the south-east of Queensland, Brandon also leads the organisational mental health and wellbeing strategy. I will now welcome Brandon to present to us about accidental counsellor, staff training workshop. Thanks, Brandon.

BRANDON: Thank you very much. Good afternoon to everybody. Thank you, Debbie, for that little workshop, that was very good. I already have a few little ideas for celebrating and acknowledging some success. I would like to first of all begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land where I am today here in Brisbane. So both the Turrbal and Jaggera. And pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Accidental counsellor. Well, I'm sure this is something that many of you are very familiar with, in terms of you have either done this training before or it's a course you have heard of. The reason why I'm talking about this at the conference today is because we took a little bit of a different approach and that's really what I'm going to share with you. For those of you that don't know TAFE Queensland, I will just give you a very brief little bit of background. So we are a state-wide training organisation. We are actually 135 years old. And there is a beautiful old black and white photo of one of the very, very first training rooms there in Brisbane. In addition to all the, I guess you’d say the expected and the usual VET courses we offer, we quite literally have students on land, sea and air. We have students in aviation programs learning to fly, fixed wing aircraft, helicopters across the state, we have students in maritime technology courses. So it's a very large diverse and varied organisation in terms of what we offer. From entry level certificates through to Bachelor degrees. We have over 50 training locations in campuses across Queensland, I think in the last 12 months, and somewhere about 112,000 students and we have over 5,000 staff. So it's a big organisation, an enormous amount of very, very good work being done. Now, the background here that I will tell you a little bit about will be very similar across the entire tertiary sector. That really is that we were seeing an increase in both the student mental ill health in the classrooms and our training facilities, our teacher referrals to student support were increasing year on year. Requests to - or for advice and guidance was certainly on the increase, and the complexity of the mental ill health we were seeing was definitely increasing and changing. Pretty much throughout the mid to late 2018 we developed a draft plan, if you like, a strategy for TAFE Queensland, the mental health and wellbeing strategy. There were many, many aspects to this strategy. One of which was what are the staff training requirements? So we put together a working group that we could consult, we could have some very informed conversations, identify the issues that all of the key stakeholders could see. We included many different teachers, human resources, health and safety, faculty, education leaders, and student support, predominantly our counsellors and psychologists. I will actually use the term “teachers” today. We do tend to use "educators" in TAFE Queensland and that covers everything from our higher ed lecturers, industry trainers, workplace trainers, and educators. I will just use the term "teachers" as a bit of a catch-all. So in terms of the challenges and considerations, not just because of the scale of the organisation but because we have so many different programs at very, very different timeframes not just the standard two semesters that we do have, we had to work out how on earth are we going to deliver staff training and then actually have staff released from the various different teams so the when, the where and the how was a key part of the conversation. We were absolutely adamant that the training respond and directly meet the emerging issues and the needs of our teachers. So it had to be absolutely contextualised training for the practitioners. We also wanted to uses it as a way of demonstrating how our existing policies, procedures and frameworks can actually support positive outcomes. And knowing VET practitioners they are very, very hands on, practical people, it only made sense that the training itself was very hands on and practical. We wanted to e quip people with a level of confidence, if you like, in those very real day-to-day situations. As this consultation progressed, and this was very much led by student support, it became clear that we actually had the staff in-house with the skills, the knowledge and the expertise to develop and deliver an appropriate training package. So, in consultation, we were able to put together what we wanted to achieve through the workshop. Those objectives were about helping predominantly educators understand what is it they already know, and how is that useful? Some real basics that we didn't want to overlook, but absolutely critical, the importance of rapport and personal beliefs and values and how they can influence our communication. We wanted to cover some of the basics of listening skills and attending skills. About disclosure, and then really get into the meat of the training, which was how do you respond to a student who is in distress or absolute crisis and specifically somebody who is having a mental health episode if you like, who may be self-harming or have simply disclosed that they wish to end their lives? And those stages, we call them manage, collaborate and escalate. We absolutely wanted to encourage our staff to be very open and understand the limits of confidentiality in those different situations and some very hands on practical case studies. We wanted time dedicated to address how other people's distress can actually have an impact on ourselves. That of course then naturally fell into, well, what are the boundaries and led to a whole part of the training about self-care and the importance, and of course what is often overlooked, the debriefing, what that looks like, how it can be done, the fact that it can be very informal and local, but it's so, so important to do that. Now, I won't read through this text, but this is essentially the wording for the invitation that we put out to staff through our internal staff training calendar. There was even some conversation about, do we call it accidental counsellor? Because as I'm sure many of you know, there is a whole range of agencies and service providers out there that offer accidental counsellor. We created our training workshop from scratch. When I say "we" I will give some acknowledgment to the staff who did that but it was my team that did that and created it from scratch. What did we want and we built it out from there. There was some very open and robust conversation about, well, if it’s got counsellor in the title, that’s going to scare people away. But I think there was enough of us that felt no, no, it's the accidental counsellor. It absolutely applies. So we put this wording together to get people to understand this is going to be where disclosure and the presentation, if you like, of mental ill health is going to happen in your space. And you're not always going to have a counsellor to call upon. And an organisation that has as many training locations as we do, you might not have other staff immediately on hand. That's a very real day-to-day situation. So what is it that you need to be able to do in the first instance? And we could tailor that workshop to the individual faculty or even the program area, and the needs of the group. So what we actually did is we had a training day that was put together and we started to advertise this and word of mouth. We offered a number of initial training days. We were happy to take groups anywhere between 10 and 20 participants of educators at various different campuses across Brisbane. Really interesting what those early findings were. In that safe and secure training workshop, where at the beginning of the day the boundaries were very clearly set out, for the format of the day. Wow, our teachers were incredibly open about what they were experiencing and there were some tears. It was so, so obvious that our staff had increasing levels of stress and worry about their students, that the educators and teachers were carrying that worry and stress themselves, in addition to all of the other faculty pressures and demands. Our teachers absolutely wanted to know, what do I do? And where do I say I hand over now? That was very clear. There was an enormous sense of appreciation to actually have the time out and to work through very real hands on case studies to have that conversation with other educators from all different trades, from industries, because of course, they were all having some very similar experiences. Of course like anything you have to get the data, you have to show people what is happening and why and we were in a good position. We had a very -- and still do -- have a very good human resources and workplace health and safety team who understood this and our faculty directors were on board. Because they were hearing it from their own staff. So what you are looking at here is the first 90 respondents, the first 90 people -- that would be about -- oh, 7 or 8 groups. 7 or 8 separate days. Each workshop is a one-day workshop. In amongst some other questions, these are the questions that we asked. So, out of the first 90 attendees who provided feedback and more or less everybody did, 86 out of 90 said they felt better prepared to respond to challenging situations. 88 out of 90 said they would apply the learnings in their role and they would recommend that to a colleague. And 19 out of 90 said they found the workshop useful. I'm sure you will agree that for any internal training and certainly TAFE Queensland educators they're not shy with their opinions. They will very quickly tell you if something quite frankly is not on message. This said to me that not only was it on message but the consultation in the early days of developing this was absolutely on the money. And there was clearly an appetite out there to meet this need. If I show you some of the commentary, because we like to ask people to put into their own words -- I have picked out some of the comments. These are in the teachers, the educators' own words. What is it they found most useful. Again an educator and certainly in TAFE Queensland are wonderfully honest. The conversation starters, what do you actually say? The importance of teach yourself care. Allowing myself to be kind to me. I can't fix everything. Asking for help. And just again having the opportunity to see that oh it's not just me carrying this. Other teachers are saying this as well. So really, really important.

DEBBIE: Five minutes. Thanks, Brandon.

BRANDON: Thank you. What is it you found least useful? Well, a few people did say look maybe the verbal, nonverbal explanation or there was a degree of repetition. I can tell you now we very intentionally made sure everyone left with a very clear understanding of some of those communication skills. We never set out to cover how to build students' resilience but that's one for the future. And of course, teachers always want more free coffee. We asked them what they would like to see in the future. A lot of it was, well, how do we help students build their resilience? Time management. And stress management for teachers. How do you create positive cultures in the classroom? Of course what we have got here is a whole body of work and possibilities for future PD. I will take you straight to what our survey results looked like from 90 up to 350 staff. It's as simple as this. 89 per cent now out of 350 attendees, 89 per cent have said they applied the learnings in their role. 93 per cent said they found it useful. And 95 per cent said they felt better prepared and would recommend this workshop and training to a colleague, which I'm sure you will agree is a fairly phenomenal result. The plans -- well, I can tell you we have delivered this a number of times in recent weeks. We are actually about 450 staff for our organisation who have done this one-day training. Last week we have delivered to 13 staff from across the state who are appropriately qualified already, to become train the trainers. We're planning further follow-up sessions. We actively encourage people to do their mental health first aid. And any other training, quite frankly. On that note of mental health first aid, trying to get a lot of staff out of their day-to-day roles for two full days is a challenge. That's why we started with our in-house one day. Of course, we want to look at some further PD opportunities that will support our staff. So, it's a quick overview, I know. But there's an absolute appetite there for educators and they want help. They want support. They want to know how to support their students and to support each other. We're absolutely delighted how this is going. It will continue. Michelle Keel is the person I will give all the credit to. Michelle led the development of our in-house product from scratch. She basically put 95 per cent of that together. Ably assisted more recently by Louise Kelly from the Brisbane region counselling team. We are asked all the time: When you will run this again? When will it be available? I have more staff who would like to attend? There is an appetite out there and we have been happy to share this with colleagues in other organisations because quite frankly there is such a need. There is no need for everyone to rewrite all of the materials. So I appreciate your time today, guys. It was a fairly quick overview but my word, what an important need.

DEBBIE: Many thanks, Brandon, for that fantastic presentation. And also your generosity in offering to share the work that you have already done to mitigate the need for others to duplicate the effort. That is fantastic.