

Complex Communication Needs and Mental Health: The Bridging Project



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The Bridging Project

- A project being undertaken by Scope Specialist Services in collaboration with the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria, Monash University.
- The Bridging Project has as its mission to progress the knowledge and resource base to ensure that individuals with complex communication and mental health needs have access to quality services.



Complex communication needs (CCN)

- People with complex communication needs are unable to use speech to meet their daily communication needs.
- Severe communication impairment.
- Associated with developmental disabilities, acquired disabilities.
- 1 in 500 individuals in Victoria have complex communication needs (Perry, Reilly, Cotton, Bloomberg, & Johnson, 2004).
- People with complex communication needs will rely to various degrees on extant communication methods (e.g., speech approximations, vocalisations, gestures, facial expression) and/or augmentative and alternative communication systems.

Mental health

- *"A state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life."*

Mental illness

- Mental illness is one of the leading causes of non-fatal burden of disease and injury in Australia.
- Associated with increased exposure to health risk factors, poorer physical health, and higher rates of death from many causes including suicide.
- Twenty per cent of Australian adults are affected by mental illness at some time in their life.
- Disorders such as depression (16%) and anxiety (10%) more prevalent than disorders such as schizophrenia (1%) and bipolar disorder (2%).
- Evidence-based treatments include psychological therapies and medication.
- <http://www.aihw.gov.au/nhpa/mentalhealth/index.cfm>
- http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Mental_illness_prevalence?OpenDocument

Common ground

- People with disabilities experience a similar spread of mental health disorders compared with people from the general population (Hagiliassis et al., 2005; Jenkins & Gulbenkoglou, 1998).
- People with complex communication needs have the same range of counselling needs as people who have functional speech.
- The principles of assessment and intervention remain the same ***BUT*** sometimes individual techniques need modification so as to be accessible to people with complex communication needs.

The example of 'counselling'

- Counselling:
 - The process by which people are supported to work towards living in a more satisfying and resourceful way (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2000).
- Common ground:
 - The overall objectives of counselling: to facilitate client self-exploration and to increase a client's level of self-understanding in order for effective and desired changes in behaviour.
 - The capacity for a clinician to achieve counselling attitudes and behaviours such as empathy, positive regard and genuineness.
- Where modifications may be required:
 - Additional time often required for operation of AAC devices (Crawford, 1987).
 - Clinicians are more active and directive, make interpretations at more concrete levels, have a greater reliance on secondary sources of information (Di Marco & Iacono, 2007; Hoyt et al., 1981).

Barriers:

- Diagnostic overshadowing
- Behavioural overshadowing
- Challenge in diagnostic accuracy
- Need for emotional-based supports overlooked
- Perception that people with disability are 'protected' from mental ill health
- Financial barriers that limit access to counselling
- People with disabilities being less likely to self-refer
- 'Discomfort' about working with this population
- Assumption that people with disabilities lack capacity to engage in counselling
- Limited, accessible assessment tools
- The challenge in modifying approaches to support access
- Lack of education and training
- Few clinicians with an interest in this field

Barriers:

- *When compared with the general population, there is an under-identification of mental health issues and poor early detection and intervention for people with disabilities, as well as a range of attitudinal, educational and practical barriers that impede access to mental health support.*

Complex Communication Needs and Mental Health: Priorities

- A biopsychosocial conceptualisation of mental health.
- Improved early detection and intervention.
- Developing accessible, self-report mental health assessments.
- Modifying intervention techniques to support access.
- Accessible information regarding mental health and service pathways.
- Greater community understanding.
- Increasing professional competence and confidence.
- Strengthening access to generic services in communities.
- Strengthening links between generic and specialist health services.
- Strengthening of a multidisciplinary approach.
- Removing barriers that impede access to mental health services.

***= INDIVIDUALS WITH COMPLEX
COMMUNICATION AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS
HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES.***





*SOME EXAMPLES OF RECENT
RESEARCH AND SERVICE
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES*

- Beyond speech alone: guidelines for practitioners providing counselling services to clients with disabilities and complex communication needs
 - Describe approaches for making counselling maximally accessible to people with complex communication needs, whilst maintaining the integrity of the counselling process.
 - Targeted at counselling practitioners working in community settings, with more people with disabilities likely to be serviced in community settings.
 - Published as a hard-copy document, or available as free-to-download PDF.
 - Order form and download links <http://www.bridgingproject.org.au/>

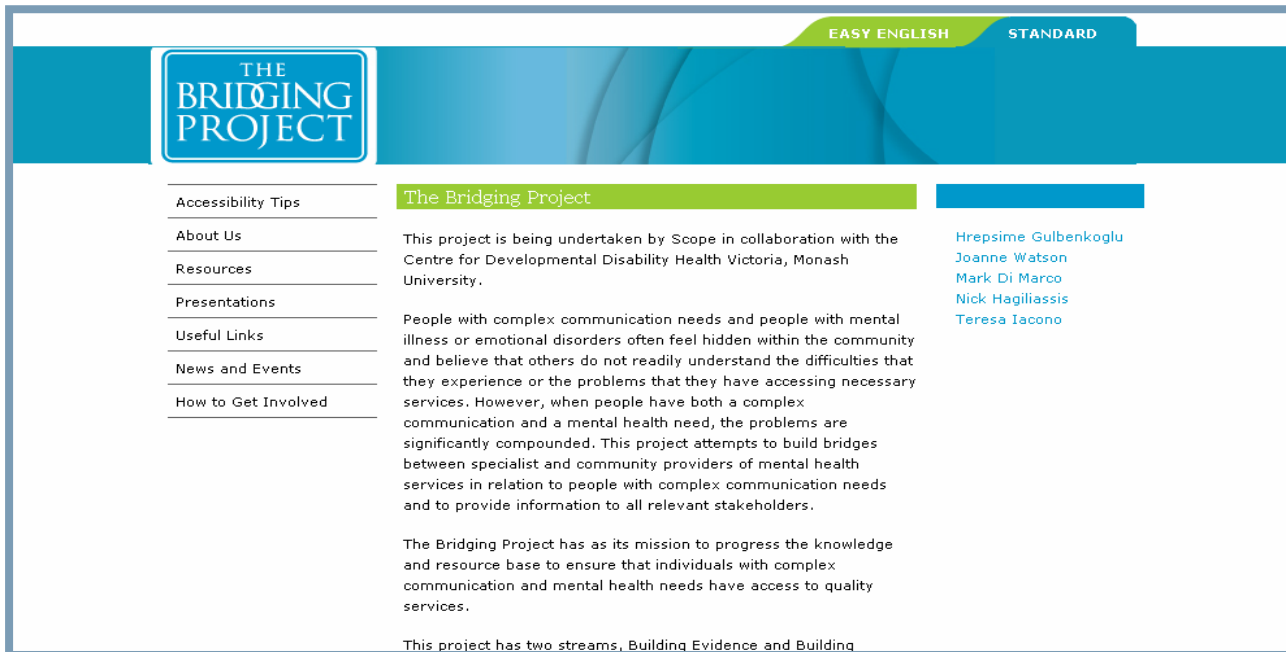


guidelines for practitioners providing
counselling SERVICES to
CLIENTS with disabilities and
complex communication NEEDS

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- Bridging Project Website <http://www.bridgingproject.org.au/>
 - For dissemination and sharing of information and resources on the topic of complex communication needs and mental health.
 - Information on resources, conference and seminar presentations, useful links, news and events, and getting involved.
 - Easy-English/standard-English formats.



The screenshot displays the website's header with a blue background and white text. On the left is the logo 'THE BRIDGING PROJECT'. To the right are two tabs: 'EASY ENGLISH' (highlighted in green) and 'STANDARD'. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Accessibility Tips, About Us, Resources, Presentations, Useful Links, News and Events, and How to Get Involved. The main content area has a green header 'The Bridging Project' followed by a paragraph: 'This project is being undertaken by Scope in collaboration with the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria, Monash University.' Below this is another paragraph: 'People with complex communication needs and people with mental illness or emotional disorders often feel hidden within the community and believe that others do not readily understand the difficulties that they experience or the problems that they have accessing necessary services. However, when people have both a complex communication and a mental health need, the problems are significantly compounded. This project attempts to build bridges between specialist and community providers of mental health services in relation to people with complex communication needs and to provide information to all relevant stakeholders.' A third paragraph states: 'The Bridging Project has as its mission to progress the knowledge and resource base to ensure that individuals with complex communication and mental health needs have access to quality services.' At the bottom, it says: 'This project has two streams, Building Evidence and Building'. On the right side of the main content area, there is a list of names: Hrepsime Gulbenkogl, Joanne Watson, Mark Di Marco, Nick Hagiliassis, and Teresa Iacono.



- Development and pilot study of the A-DEP Tool (Accessible Depression Tool)
 - Tool designed for people with complex communication needs for the clinical assessment of depression and related mood disorders.
 - Designed as a self-report measure.
 - Requires a "Yes/No" response and avoids complex concepts.
 - Pilot study has explored the communication characteristics of this tool and its comparison against an established screening tool for depression in the general community, the Beck Depression Inventory.
 - Larger scale psychometric study to commence 2008.
 - Further information <http://www.bridgingproject.org.au/>

A-DEP (Accessible Depression) Tool

Domain/items	Yes		
	No 0	A little 1	A lot 2
you feel sad			
you feel empty			
you feel happy			
you feel the future is hopeless (bad, bleak, grim, pointless)			
you feel like crying			
you feel irritable (easily annoyed, edgy, moody)			
you feel miserable			
the future is bright			

Future directions

- Workshops for 2008.
- Development of a 'conceptual' service model.
- Development of fact sheets.
- Dissemination and roll-out of guidelines.
- Larger scale study into the A-DEP Tool.
- Development of networks, both nationally and internationally.
- Online counselling?

Contact

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