Plays well with others: Student responses to multidisciplinary placements as undergraduate service-learning
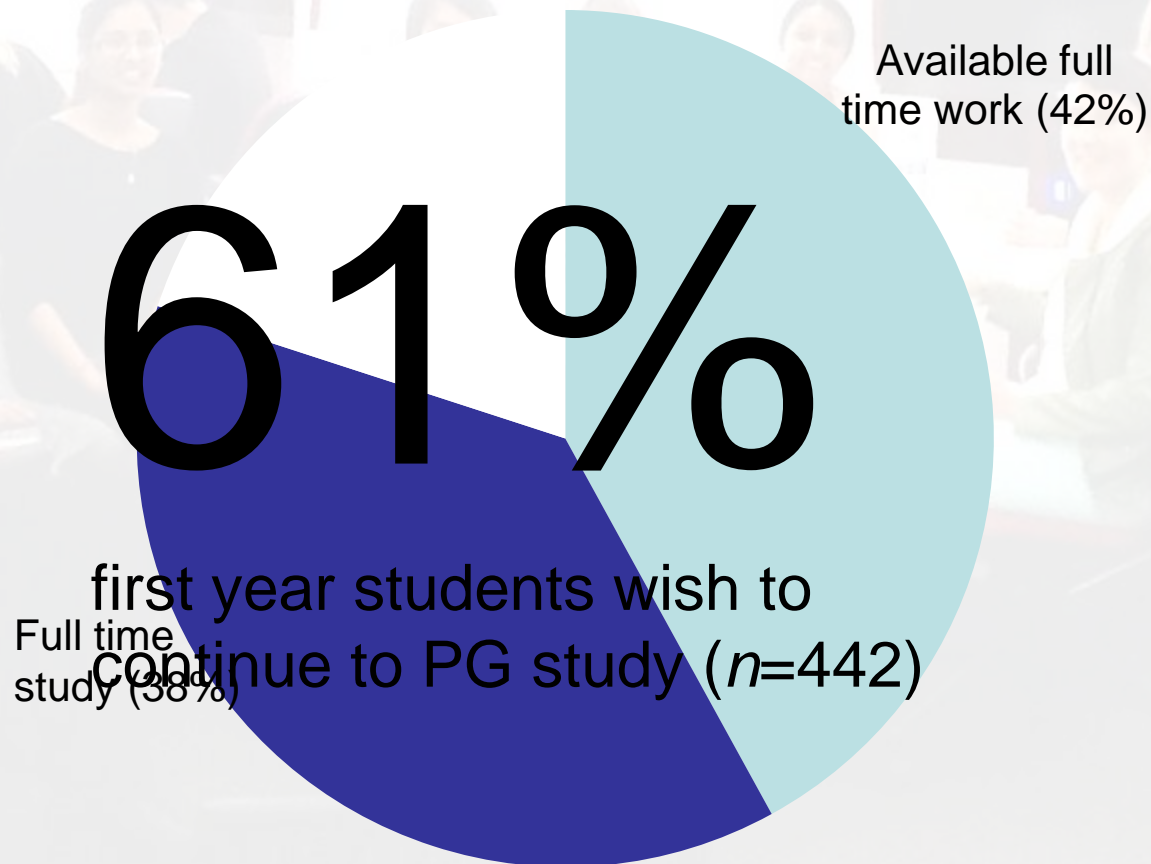
Dr Erin O'Connor,

School of Psychology and Counselling, QUT

"Organic challenges call for organic teams."

How well do our 3 and 4 yr degrees serve graduates entering the broader workforce?

Bachelor graduates - 2011

Available full time work (42%)

61%

first year students wish to continue to PG study (*n*=442)

Full time study (58%)

"Students must complete a minimum of 1,000 hours…"

"No placement will be shorter than 280 hours" – Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards 2012

QUT

a university for the real world ®

Students are required to complete 840 clinical hours– Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (APHRA)
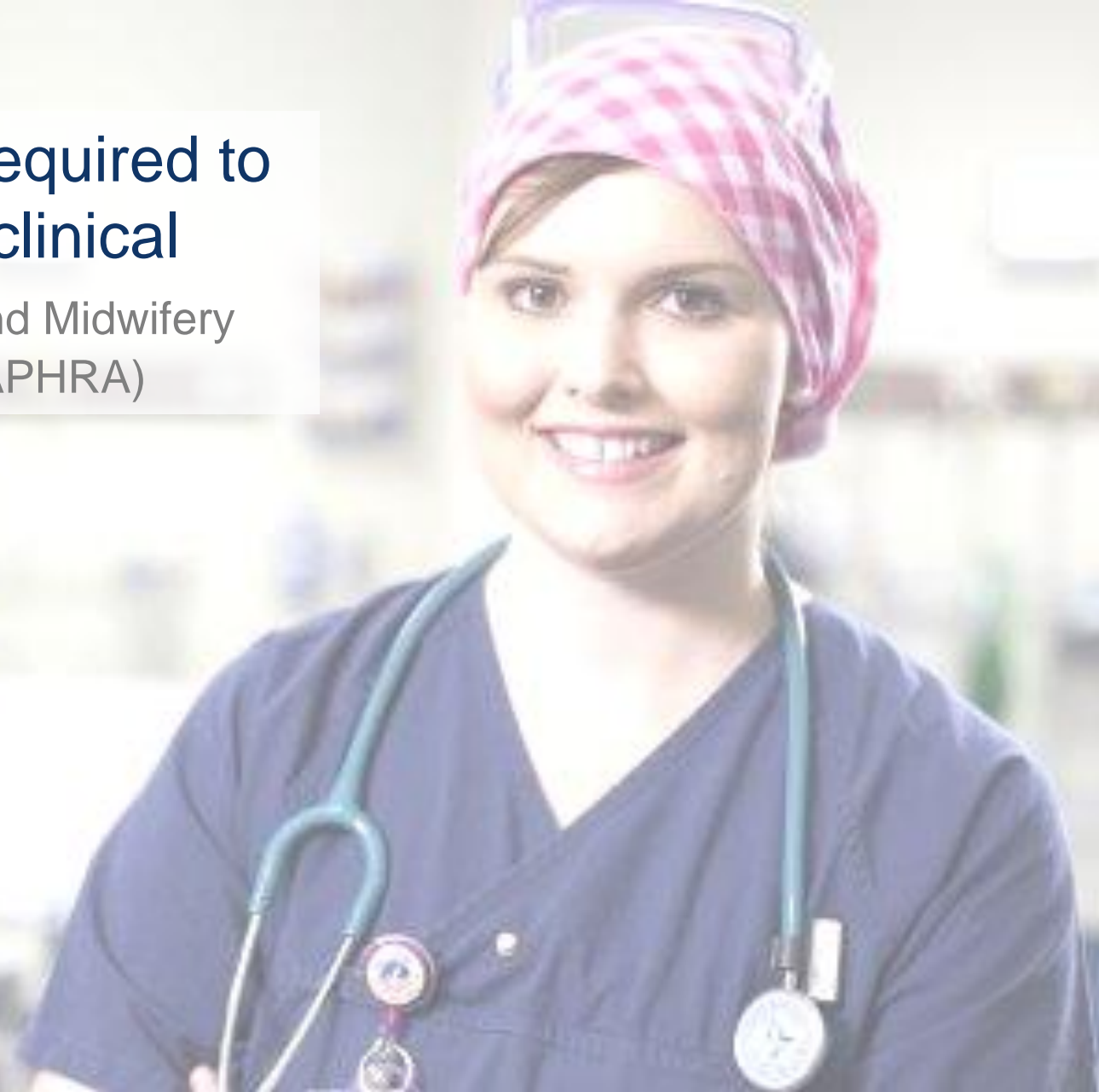
More undergraduate student placements

Single discipline
Reflections
Community/NGO,
government, private
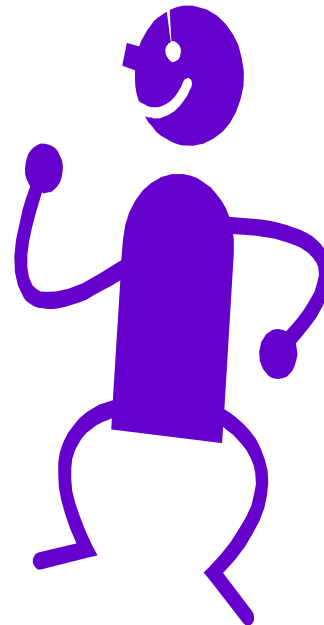
Psychology in the Community

3rd year
WIL
50 hours
Community/government
/private partner
(proposal, hrs and
learning plan, reflections
& video)

3rd year
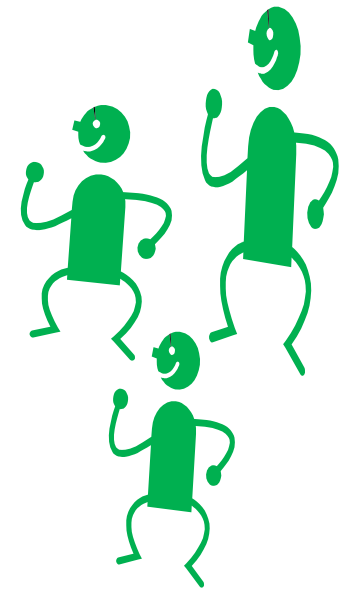Multi-disciplinary
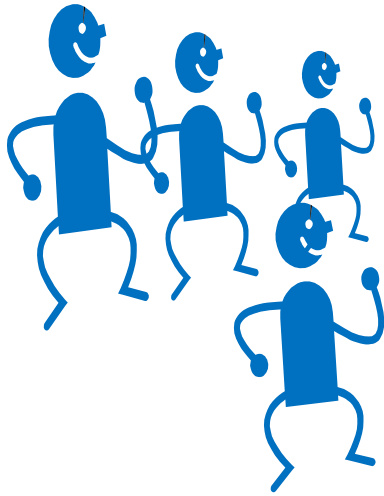service-learning
1 semester
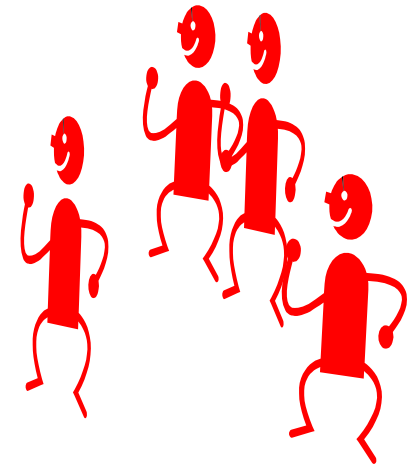'wicked' problem
Community partner
Participatory action
research framework
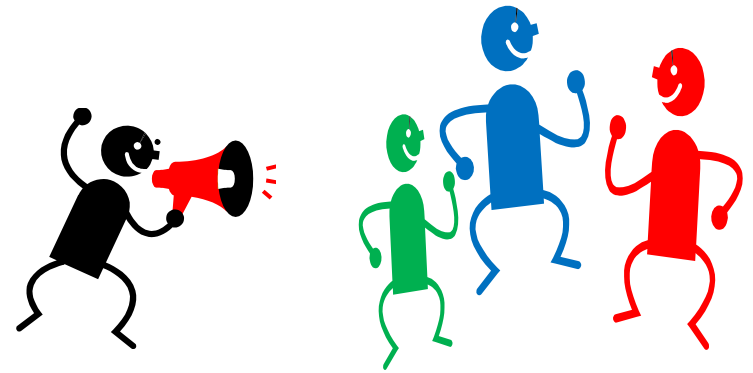
QUT- Community Engaged Learning Lab

Students from a range of disciplines…
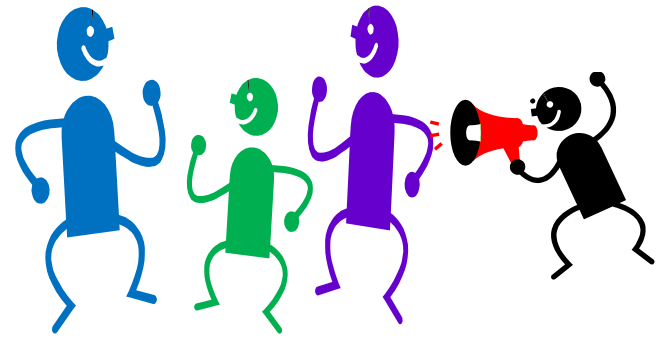
…Working in multi-disciplinary teams with a 'tutor'…
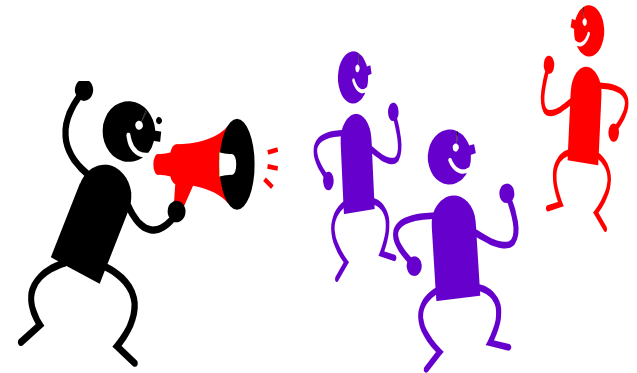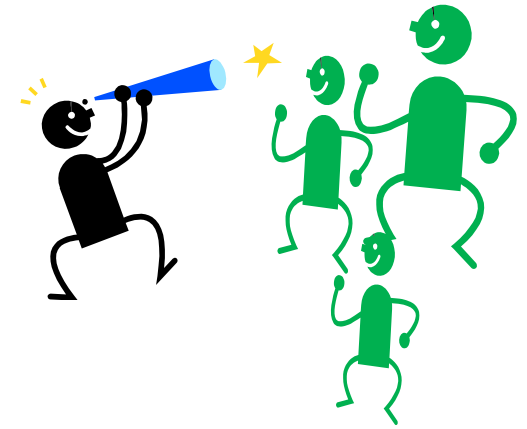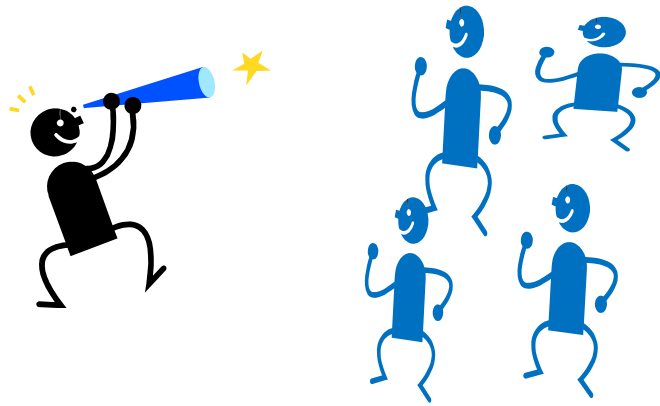
…and supported by a discipline lead.
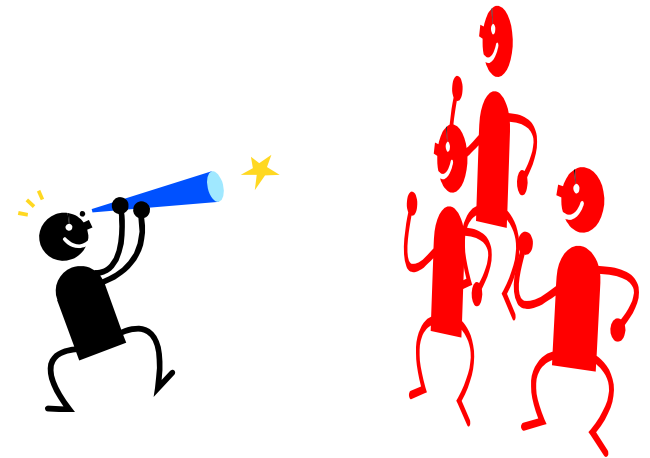
Our Lab
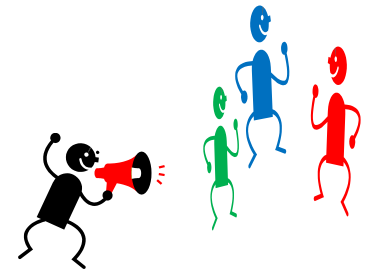
2 years

23 double degree students

130 students

6 faculties

25 psychology students

kyabra

"Building hope by focusing on strengths and success and a vision of how things could be"

Salience of the service learning values
How learners made sense of multidisciplinary work
Any other issues about the unit approach

7 students
Disciplines represented – psychology, creative industries, business, human services

Congruent and Incongruent frameworks

"I was embarrassed that I had unintentionally stereotyped the service users. This has made me consider the social and personal impact of stereotyping disabled people"

Service learning values

Challenges
Approaches to process
Strengths (discipline-defined)

Reactions to multi-disciplinary work

We all felt helpless as to finding a balance between project needs and the discipline coordinator needs

Design issues

Roles for psychology students

"I have since learned that I will be able to use the skills I have gained from studying psychology, which include active listening, rapport building and research interviewing"

Balancing academic and community agendas

Learning about teaching from one another

Reflections from academics

Future directions

Thank you

Plays well with others: Student responses to multidisciplinary placements as undergraduate service-learning

- EOC from School Psych&Counselling at QUT

- Acknowledge the traditional owners of the land

- Based on some research conducted with colleagues in the QUT Community engaged learning lab

- Acknowledge APS support to present here today.

What can you really do with UG psychology?

- ## Serves those who enter Masters and Doctoral programs well (research or course work)
- Even does an OK job for psychologists with 4th year and Pathway 1 qualifications
- What about our UG degree serve 3 year and 4th year grads who enter broader positions (## only 38% of bachelor graduates go into further ft study; 42% are available for full time work – this includes some already working)?
- Our total percentage of grads seeking full time work is comparable to languages, architecture, and just a bit better than visual and performing arts.

- 61% of first year students aim to take on PG studies in psychology with almost another 25% not sure (in sample across 3 Australian universities)

- Professions of 3rd year grads include: *1. Legal, Social and Welfare Professionals 2. Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals 3. Health and Welfare Support Workers*

- ##Hrs of direct experience are not competitive when we are compared with other disciplines

We've tried to address this in part.

- ## Increase in work placements in psychology
  - Symposium later today
  - They are also typically students as sole placements or teams in a single discipline academic environment

What QUT has tried (and retained!)

- 3rd year placement based on WIL principles
- Service learning inspired
- Career development component (resumes/selection criteria)
- Reflections feature heavily
  - BUT still single discipline and MANY GRAUDATES ARE entering multidisciplinary environments

Why consider multidisciplinary

- Multi disciplinary teams feature in the professional areas hiring 3rd year grads
- Enhance understanding of other disciplines
- Allows students to act as disciplinary advisor to group
- Still addresses graduate attribute needs that are well served by placement (Cranney et al)
- Allows academics to share practice and learn from each other
- Naively thought it might reduce workload

The Community Engaged Learning Lab

Created from a QUT Engagement and Innovation grant

- ## Students enrol in unit in home faculty and are pooled into the lab. ##Then assigned to teams working with external partners from a range of areas – each team is also assigned an academic who acts as their project lead or tutor.

- ## At intervals through out the unit, students will meet with their discipline based "unit conveners" or discipline lead

- Due to growth of the lab - some additional academics who are brought on to be project leads (not discipline leads)

This lab has run for…

- ## 2 years – 4 semesters

- Involved 130 students

- From 6 faculties and a range of disciplines including law and justice, education, business, creative industries, science and engineering, and psychology

- 23 double degree students

- 25 psychology students – 2nd largest contributor of students but smallest cohort that is engaged by lab.

- Curriculum delivered from service learning framework (social justice, examining privilege)
- Projects nominated by community partner as an area of importance
- Participatory action model – cyclical
- Team in first semester might brief team for next semester
- Partners nominate 'wicked' problems that are complicated and broad

Kyabra example

- Kyabra Community Association Inc.
  is a medium sized multi-service community organisation which works with families and communities in the outer southern suburbs of Brisbane.

- Community programs such as financial inclusion

- Disability support, child and parent activities, housing support, foster and kinship care services

- One of their wicked problems was about their profile in their community & how to best engage (identity, branding, social media, referral and services scans)

another e.g. recognition project

- With Anglican arch dieses of Brisbane
- Informed by past semester including surveys and focus groups
- Hosted a public event in Queen street Mall in CBD of brisbane.
- Range of speakers
- Developed resources for the event

Evaluation of the Lab (1)

- ## We really wanted to know
  - How salient the service learning values were for students?
  - How learners made sense of multidisciplinary work
  - Any other issues about the unit approach
- Of course would have been possible to survey students, even do pre and post scale comparisons. But I was hoping to go deeper

Evaluation of the Lab (2)

- Qualitative analysis of student reflections
- Students provided consent to this after the unit completed and marks returned
- Topic of reflection was open – pros and cons of this
  - Hoping to identify if these themes were important or salient enough to come up in unguided reflections
- As submitted for assessment, may introduce some bias
  - Assessment also limits word count – so acknowledge that a learner is never going to be able to reflect on everything…just like we can't have unlimited items or measures in surveys.

Sample of reflections

Case study recently published

- 7 students
- Disciplines represented – psychology, creative industries, business, human services

Additional psychology student reflections

- From other partner projects

Method of analysis

- This opportunistic data was analysed using a focused thematic analysis informed by Pat Beazley (2009)
- Coder consistency checks on a sample of the reflections were performed by an academic with similar teaching not involved in CELL (Thomas, 2006)
  - Overall, coders agreed 74% of the time.
  - 4 points of disagreement
  - 3/4 were about coding of multidisciplinary learning and professional growth (accounted for by the subsequent reviews of the data) via negotiation

Results - Service learning values

- Aligned
- I was embarrassed that I had unintentionally stereotyped the service users. This has made me consider the social and personal impact of stereotyping disabled people (p)
- PAR encouraged the team to …develop a dialogue with Kyabra and the stakeholder, where all parties subsequently adopted a participatory role and engaged in the fulfilling act of collaboration (6)

- Incongruent
- After a lot of discussion it came down to what we wanted to get out of this project, not only for ourselves, but for Kyabra.
- I already held a preconceived schema of how the project would proceed, a schema which –in hindsight- was fatally disconnected from reality.

Multidisciplinary

- *Challenges*
- This is a critical event for me because I realised there's a communication barrier between us and XXXX.
- In the future, I would be sharing my ideas with other team members and also respect their suggestions. When I get more experience, I would like to guide my team in a better way.
- *Approaches to process*
- This experience has reminded me to be patient and understand that communication styles differ between people
- Our informal and free style of collaboration has definitely helped us overcome the wild diversity of my team.
- *Strengths*
- - I have learnt a lot through this process not only about my strengths within this project but my limitations. Futher more, I have learnt where the skills of other team members compensate for my deficits, which in turn allows for a more effective team dynamic (7)

Design

- Two different masters
  - Academics
  - Community partner

  - We all felt helpless as to finding a balance between project needs and the discipline coordinator needs
  - Sitting on the final weeks of term, the focus has slipped greatly from the organisation to the assessment.

Roles for psychology

- Facilitators
- Project managers
- Surveys, interviews, focus groups and data analysis

- "I was not sure what to expect when working with a community organisation. I thought my lack of experience and knowledge regarding media and communication would hinder my ability to contribute to the project. I have since learned that I will be able to use the skills I have gained from studying psychology, which include active listening, rapport building and research interviewing, in order to communicate with the organisations staff and service users.

In summary

- Support for students adopting SL values
- But also some SL incongruent themes

- Multidisciplinary practice a big deal! Many students making a range of comments here

- Biggest design issue is the tension between partner, and academic purposes
- Outcome for me: learning about teaching from other disciplines

Future directions

- First investigation using qual
- Document analysis of reflections is a promising avenue – with checking of themes via focus groups or interviews
- Some of these themes have already come up with this semester's cohort!
- Workload has been high, sustainable models are emerging but have been slow to take off
- Follow up feedback from students needed – but already positive .
- -## thank you!