BSW Students Under Stress: Students' Struggles Lead to an Innovative Response in Aotearoa New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Social work students balance multiple roles and responsibilities alongside their educational journey, with recent research suggesting these challenges are exacerbated during practicum. The informal accounts of the pressures and strains on students on the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme in Aotearoa New Zealand provided impetus for an exploration of the local issues compared with those reported internationally and in different institutional contexts. In 2018, Year three and Year four BSW students were invited to participate in focus groups exploring both the challenges and sustaining factors they encountered during the course of their studies. The findings reveal that, as described in the international literature, NMIT students experience multiple pressures and use a range of support systems to sustain themselves through their student journey. The findings from the study are now informing a review of the structure and delivery of the academic curriculum at NMIT and have led to the development of "He Arawhata". This programme sits alongside the academic curriculum and is aimed at enhancing the health and wellbeing of students in preparation for the demands of both practicum and a career in social work.

Keywords: *Social work; Students; Wellbeing; Fieldwork; Practicum; Placement*

INTRODUCTION

Students encounter multiple challenges related to financial hardship, workload management, emotional and social strain during the course of their studies according to recent international studies (Brough, Correa-Velez, Crane, Johnstone, & Marston, 2015; Collins, Coffey, & Morris, 2010; Gair & Baglow, 2017). These challenges are considered to be interconnected and exacerbated during the practicum component in Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programmes (Grant-Smith, Gillett-Swan, & Chapman, 2017).

The Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) is a smaller tertiary education provider based at the top of the South Island in Aotearoa New Zealand. With over 7,000 students across five campuses it delivers a range of vocational and degree programmes (NMIT, 2018). These include a four-year Bachelor of Social Work programme, which is recognised by the Social Worker Registration Board (SWRB) for the purposes of professional registration (SWRB, n.d.).

As with our international counterparts, the teaching team on the NMIT BSW have become increasingly concerned in recent years about our students' health and wellbeing. Informal conversations, in-class discussions and reflective assignments have all referenced the challenges students are encountering in balancing study with wider responsibilities. The study reported here initially grew out of this growing concern, and subsequently recognised the exciting potential for developing an innovative local response to address the issues raised. Understanding the pressures on local students and identifying the protective factors that support them through their challenges has led us to review our programme's existing practices and policies for enhancing student success. In response to the gaps identified in our review, an emotional curriculum, as described by Grant and Kinman (2014), has been developed to sit alongside the academic requirements of the NMIT BSW degree.

Setting the context: The stresses and strains on social work students

An increasing awareness of the growing stresses on social work students is not unique to the Aotearoa New Zealand experience. A recent Australian study of 2,320 social work students from 29 universities found that students experience notable financial hardships and manage a precarious balancing act of study, restricted finances, paid work and family commitments (Gair & Baglow, 2017). Undertaking paid work alongside their studies does not completely ameliorate financial hardship and most students have experienced financial stress, requiring them to make budgeting choices about what to forgo in order to make ends meet (Brough et al., 2015). In addition, full-time students in paid work have been found to experience significantly more demands on their time than those who are not (Collins et al., 2010). The findings from a 2015 survey of university students highlighted the ways in which their constricted financial positions impacted on their mental health and wellbeing (Gair & Baglow, 2018). Results indicated that the day-to-day financial hardship forced them to juggle the resources available for food, rent, transport, textbooks and medical care. At times, the students were just not able to prioritise health and mental health needs, including appointments and medications (Gair & Baglow, 2018).

Grant-Smith et al. (2017) found that social work students' financial stress became particularly acute during practicum. This was due to the unpaid nature of placement, increased

costs such as transport and sourcing appropriate work clothing, and the loss of paid work that had to be reduced to accommodate the required hours of practicum. Gair and Baglow (2018) argue that student mental health vulnerabilities may also be exacerbated during practicum and, for some students, burnout is a significant risk (Brough et al., 2015; Robins, Roberts, & Sarris, 2018). The relative inflexibility of placement requirements set by tertiary providers and professional bodies contribute to these stresses and strains (Johnstone, Brough, Crane, Marston, & Correa-Velez, 2016). Students' learning is affected to such an extent that, in some cases, their study trajectory is jeopardised and successful completion of their qualification becomes an unachievable goal (Gair & Baglow, 2017; Johnstone et al., 2016).

By the time students have reached the endpoint of their studies, many are exhausted (Brough et al., 2015). In a study of students from the disciplines of nursing, psychology, occupational therapy and social work, and their transition to the workplace, Robins et al. (2018) alarmingly found that student burnout predicted burnout in the workplace. Hence, they concluded that intervention concerning student wellbeing and the cultivation of resilience is a matter of urgent concern.

Research indicates that practicum students from the disciplines of health, social services, education and nursing are looking for increased "pastoral care, staff support, and empathy" from their tertiary provider (Grant-Smith et al., 2017, p. 4). However, a tension exists whereby concerns regarding stigma and perceptions about their personal capability may hinder their willingness to seek help (Browne, Munro, & Cass, 2017). Some students are reluctant to seek assistance due to their belief that they should be the helper, not the seeker, and that any disclosure of financial and mental stress may compromise their studies (Brough et al., 2015).

In addition to the challenges faced by BSW students, Beddoe, Hay, Maidment, Ballantyne, and Walker (2018) argue that the transition from student social worker to beginning practitioner is another complex and potentially fraught process. Not only are graduates faced with the stressors described by students, but also with managing their emotional responses to their many new experiences whilst maintaining their self-confidence as new professionals.

Setting the context: Responding to student needs

The international literature identifies a range of approaches and strategies that social work professional programmes can integrate into their everyday practice to support positive outcomes for their students and graduates, particularly with regard to practicum experiences. Brough et al. (2015) recommend, for example, that educators minimise the number of courses running concurrently with practicum and review whether enough credits are associated with successful completion of field education requirements. Grant-Smith et al. (2017) argue that combined support from peers, family, community and the tertiary setting contributes to positive practicum outcomes. Alongside this, they state that the triadic relationship between the tertiary institution, the student and practicum agency should be strengthened in order for agencies to be better prepared for students, and provide effective support and supervision throughout their practicum experience. In their study of the experiences of social work students, Flanagan and Wilson (2018) reported that nearly 20% stated they would have benefited from more contact with their universities during

field education, while 82% found peer support helpful during this time. Collins et al. (2010) also found that many of the students in their study valued structured opportunities for group support, preferably with these timetabled into the academic year. In extending these ideas, Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, and Huggins (2010) highlighted the value of integrative seminars, which they described as student-centred sessions running alongside practicum. In these, students share case studies, ethical dilemmas, and wider practice issues from their fieldwork experiences, thus broadening their skills and knowledge, self-confidence and self-awareness (Williamson et al., 2010).

Professional supervision is also widely understood to play an integral role in supporting students in practicum and preparing them for practice. However, Zuchowski (2013) reports that often placement supervisors have high workloads and competing organisational demands that limit their capacity to give students the in-depth supervision they would like to. While acknowledging the limitations of this within-agency practice, student participants in Zuchowski's (2013) study appreciated receiving external supervision, commenting that it gave them a distinct and safe place to reflect on their field education experiences, as well as an independent view of the practice, organisational and ethical issues they encountered in their host agencies.

Collins (2007) contends that social work educators have a responsibility to develop qualities in students so that they are prepared for the realities of the workplace. Agreeing with this, Grant and Kinman (2012) state that: "building resilience in the future workforce should be a key element of social work education" (p. 1). A successful practicum experience is fundamental to this goal, and developing self-care skills is necessary for this to happen (Hay, 2019). To support future practitioners to achieve resilience, an emotional curriculum needs to sit alongside the existing academic requirements of professional social work programmes (Grant & Kinman, 2014). The focus of an emotional curriculum, as Grant and Kinman (2014) describe, is to give students the understanding, strategies and skills to develop emotional resilience that is comprised of the core competencies: emotional intelligence, reflective ability, social confidence and empathy. This complements other elements of resiliency that are important to the helping professions that include good support networks, accurate empathy, reflective ability, optimism, self-awareness and self-efficacy, social confidence, sense of humour and work–life balance, as well as emotional literacy (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

It is important to note that the literature reviewed here, both in terms of pressures and potential solutions for students' struggles, is based on the experiences of much larger programmes than those delivered by NMIT, and in much larger, more urban settings.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study reported here had four main aims:

- To understand the pressures and strains on BSW students at NMIT.
- To determine whether these pressures echo those reported in the international studies above or are unique to the local setting.

- To identify the protective factors that support and enhance NMIT student experiences.

- To use the literature review and findings of the study to reflect on the existing practices and policies of the NMIT BSW programme and guide a revision of these to better respond to students' needs.

METHODOLOGY

Carroll and Rothe (2010) describe qualitative research as a process of enhancing understanding through gathering participants' descriptions of their experiences and then seeking to understand these and identify shared themes. In order to follow this process and elicit rich and in-depth information about the student experience, a qualitative methodology was considered appropriate for achieving the aims of this study using focus groups as the method of data collection. Five focus groups were conducted from a pool of 28 Year three and Year four NMIT social work students of mixed ages, genders and ethnicities. The focus group structure gave students the opportunity to reflect collaboratively on their experiences and share their thoughts as they talked, eliciting further detail in their recollections (Adams & Cox, 2008). Informal discussions following a semi-structured questioning guide allowed flexibility in the flow of the conversation while covering the desired content.

Ethics approval was gained from the NMIT Research and Ethics Committee in 2018. As noted, participants comprised of consenting Year three and four social work students, with the research conducted immediately following the completion of their respective 2018 practicums in order to optimise the capture of immediate experiences. Participation in the study was distinct from course work and associated assessments or grades. No inducement was offered for students' involvement in the study. In gaining informed consent, students were alerted to the limitations of confidentiality in collective spaces (Tolich, 2009). While absolute confidentiality could not be assured, all identifying information was removed from recordings and students given pseudonyms that have been used throughout the dissemination of findings. Participants were given the opportunity to review the notes from their groups if they requested.

The recruitment of participants occurred through what Brown (2015) describes as a naturally occurring setting within which participants could articulate their experiences. As Swift (2011) argues, naturally forming focus groups offer potential benefits for participants because of the familiarity and trust-enhancing nature of membership. While the Year four student cohort assembled in this way, the Year three students did not choose this option and consequently the researchers assigned them to focus groups that mirrored the external supervision groups they had participated in over the course of their practicum.

Two of the researchers facilitated the focus groups, using semi-structured questions to guide the discussions. The groups ranged from 60 to 120 minutes in duration and were audio recorded. The researchers also kept handwritten notes of the discussion and the digitally recorded data were transcribed and manually analysed for themes using the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data were coded by these researchers and then peer-reviewed in order to agree on key themes.

FINDINGS

Findings illuminate the challenges and demands that NMIT social work students encountered during their course of study and while on their practicums, and the ways they sought to manage these. The findings are organised into two thematic categories with a set of sub-themes.

Challenges and demands

In this section, the key challenges and demands that students faced were financial stress, and balancing study with family and life, all of which contributed to a struggle to maintain health and wellbeing.

Financial stress

Many students expressed that financial stress was a key challenge during their studies. This comprised of three interrelated components: financial hardship, the necessity of paid work and navigating financial support. Living with financial hardship featured as an unwelcome reality for many students. While student responsibilities and academic requirements inevitably resulted in a decrease of time available to engage in paid employment, many students persisted in undertaking part-time, paid work and juggled their academic responsibilities – not because this enriched their studies or social work career trajectory, but because this was necessary to survive:

> I think financially has been the toughest for me – rent in Nelson is really expensive and most of my student allowance goes to living costs so I have to work as well as study so that's been the biggest challenge – having to work on weekends, do assignments and be at class at 9 o'clock. (Jason)

For many students, financial stress was exacerbated during practicum. Students were expected to commit to the operational hours of the agencies where they were placed. These hours exceeded their scheduled class-based hours; consequently, the time available to engage in paid work was further reduced. At the same time, many students expressed that their expenses increased with their financial resources being reallocated to purchasing clothes for placement, transport, and additional childcare arrangements. Melissa stated: "My petrol costs to get to and from placement were $80 a week and I had to put my child into an after-school activity and that was $80 a term … it's tough." For Rebecca, the process of navigating access to state financial support presented as an additional stress, even when she met the criteria for gaining this support: "Having to deal with Work and Income … is quite a process and you have to do that every year so you bounce between Studylink, Work and Income. There's a stand down period and it's a nightmare." Nicola talked about the battle of accessing and explaining the need for additional funds for childcare during placement: "They [Work and Income] don't seem to get that it's not a choice, it's not paid. They just don't get why I need more hours and it takes so long to organise."

Balancing study with family and life

As the findings above allude to, most social work students expressed that it was a struggle to balance their student role alongside the pre-existing demands and responsibilities of life in general. Accommodating the role of student required a renegotiation of existing

commitments and allocated resources: "It's just the reality – family, social life, free time, money, are all impacted, there's not the same freedom to spend time with family or buy myself what I want or do what I used to be able do when I wanted" (Dale). Many students noted that it was difficult to separate student life from other day-to-day activities and responsibilities. This difficulty to switch off was described as an inability to be completely present in life outside of study because of ongoing academic requirements and responsibilities. The encroachment of student life into other domains also held an environmental weight as, contrary to many workplaces, students' homes were also the places they studied and undertook assessment work. Thus, this lack of boundary between home life and study life was a source of conflict:

> It's easy, well easier in my experience, when you've got a job to separate home life and work life because to go home and your work's not at home. Whereas, when you're studying, you go home and that's your study life too…you've constantly got your laptop in front of you at home and your kids are playing, and you're saying "shhh, I need to study". You can't switch off. (Taylor)

A further challenge that students experienced involved meeting the requirements of their studies and managing their academic workload. During placement, this proved more difficult as the schedule for the required placement hours afforded little flexibility. Because of the onsite, agency-based nature of placement, the time available to complete academic work often occurred in small slices, such as during downtime at their placement, after work, or after children were in bed. These fragmented opportunities to engage in study did not simultaneously occur when students felt most ready to engage in this work. Many students expressed that they often experienced fatigue and pressure to be study-ready in supposedly opportune moments but, as Nicola describes: "It's not that you might not be able to find the time, but that when you get there, there's nothing left."

Managing challenges and sustaining wellbeing

The students identified a broad range of strategies used to address the challenges and demands they encountered in their studies and in practicum. These included focusing on key milestones and the endgame of their studies; relaxing the expectations that students held about how they should perform in their studies and in other aspects of their life; assembling a toolkit of strategies for managing their self-care and wellbeing; and accessing support and mentorship.

Key milestones

Students expressed that identifying key milestones to work towards was one of the ways that they managed their challenges. This included embarking on placement, being in the final year of study, and, of course, graduation, with Jen saying: "Graduation! For me it was graduation – seeing the light at the end of the tunnel!" Rebecca added: "… getting past the half way mark and getting to this final part is a lot easier, you're nearly there".

Relaxing expectations

Many students maintained their wellbeing concurrent with juggling various responsibilities and by relaxing the expectations they had of themselves. It was unrealistic and detrimental

to wellbeing to hold expectations of student performance that exceeded the students' capacity to fulfil. For the student below, this meant modifying the standards they set themselves for their academic performance in order to balance their studies with other commitments:

> I also had to accept lower marks. I had [other activity] as well, so last year I was like, I have to get A+s, and now I'm just like, you just have to pass. I still tried to get A+s but I just had to do what I could do and hand it in. (Melissa)

This theme of relaxing expectations continued into the home and social spheres. Many students with children discussed the challenge of balancing family responsibilities and maintaining what they perceived as good parenting. Managing this challenge also required changing their expectations about their parenting practices, as Rebecca explains:

> I think you relax with parenting too … there's been a lot of screen time and I've just had to let it go, you need the peace and quiet … I just [sigh] like I'll take study breaks and I've got better at allocating [time] so we'll have like a fun morning and then I'll say look, this afternoon, you'll actually have to entertain yourself.

Assembling a toolkit of strategies to manage stress and maintain wellbeing

A further issue identified by students was the need to develop strategies to manage their stress and maintain their wellbeing. Watching Netflix, giving themselves permission to have a night off study, creating breaks between practicum and home life such as having a hot shower, are all examples of strategies used:

> I've just learnt to manage the stress as best I can … I think really focusing on self-care and coming up with strategies to make myself kind of switch off and put study aside has been my way of getting through. (Taylor)

Accessing support and mentorship

Most students talked about the importance of asking for help, although often this tended to be reactive rather than proactive with students experiencing considerable stress before they sought assistance. Help took various forms whether engaging in professional supervision, counselling, approaching tutors about managing personal and academic concerns, and financial or practical assistance from family and other support:

> I've got better at asking for help to be honest. Initially I thought, no no, I'm fine, I can do it but then I was like, I can't actually finish this assessment and look after you ... So I had to put my hand up and say, look, I'm not really coping, I need some help. Which is tough really, because you still want to have that pretence that you're parenting really well and you're giving it 100% but actually it [study] comes at a cost and that's why when you graduate … it's your whole family graduating with you. (Teagan)

Reciprocity between the student and the agency was also key to a supportive placement. While acknowledging the learning that was undertaken, students were acutely aware of the unpaid nature of their placement and appreciated when their successes were

acknowledged and when they were recognised for their workplace contributions:

> I remember there were days when I would be sitting in the office and they would start complaining that they were only getting $25 per hour and I would think … I'm doing it for free! ... It makes a difference if the organisation appreciates having a student there. (Taylor)

Jason stated that: "For me, what got me through was my educator and her support ... And I always felt like I was under my team's wings." Peer support was also important:

> One of the unintentional self-care things that I haven't really thought of until now is getting together outside of polytech and … being able to talk to someone in a similar position, because sometimes partners don't understand and family don't understand. (Eva)

Many students felt that they needed a layered system of support to sustain and enhance their wellbeing. For others, the learning journey was considered to be an experience shared and supported by their whānau and community. This was particularly relevant for the Māori and Pasifika students:

> I think one thing that sustained me was having mentors, and this was something I actively sought, so I knew that I had good people around me because I think that for Māori and Pasifika there are other elements and things that impact and other responsibilities. And failing is not really an option because there are other people relying on me to get that degree for the community so there's all of that. Which is just a different kind of weight, yeah, it's not just about you. And anyone that has children or family know[s] that you are a role model, so there's more weight, the obligation, the responsibilities, it's not just being a role model for your children but you're a role model for your community and youth in your community. (Rebecca)

Thus it can be seen that systems of support accessed by students included: their family and whānau; their wider community and peer networks; the social work programme and its staff; practicum educators and the practicum team; professional supervisors and the broader support from the institution and government (see Figure 1).

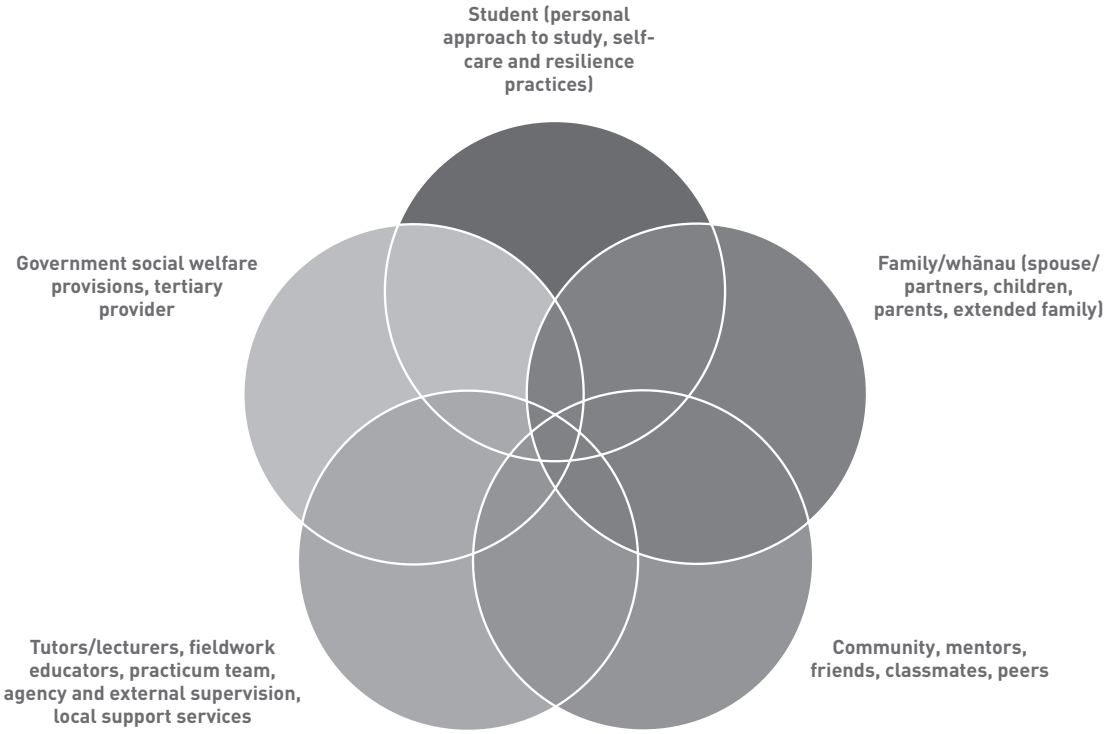

Figure 1. Supporting and sustaining student wellbeing: Interconnected systems of support.

Participants desired a responsive student pathway where they are acknowledged and valued. They identified continued attention to personal development and resilience as key to their growth, wellbeing and professional safety.

DISCUSSION

A clear limitation of the study exists in the small sample of participants. In addition, given that the research was conducted within a smaller institute of technology, the results cannot be generalised to represent the realities of all social work students in other localities and across other settings such as wānanga and universities. Locally, however, the findings have illuminated the experiences of the Year three and four cohort of NMIT social work students, both in understanding the challenges they face, and the strategies and systems of support they have put in place to sustain themselves. In addition, the findings are consistent with the larger-scale international studies discussed earlier and align with evidence showing that social work students grapple with competing demands, an experience that intensifies during practicum (Agllias, Howard, Cliff, Dodds, & Field, 2016).

In examining the protective factors that support and enhance student experiences, focusing attention on coping strategies at a micro level comes with the caution that social work education itself is impacted by wider influences. Reiterating the concern noted by Gair and Baglow (2018), a focus on individual self-care and responsibility for achievement is not enough. As clearly identified by students in both the current and international studies, sufficient income and organisational support are fundamental to student wellbeing. At a macro level it is imperative for tertiary institutions such as ours to safeguard against a

response that merely reinforces the idea that the problem lies with the students concerned. As has been demonstrated in this research, beyond the responsibilities of the student and their immediate network of support, successful outcomes for study and practicum experiences rely on collaboration between students, field educators or mentors, and tertiary institutions in order to meet intersecting goals (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers [ANZASW] and the Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand [CSWEANZ], 2016). The findings of this study, like recommendations elsewhere (Gair & Baglow, 2018; Robins et al., 2018), call for a multi-pronged and integrated response to further support social work students and enhance their resilience-building capacities.

NMIT's response to enhancing student health and wellbeing

In an attempt to meet the challenge of developing such a response, NMIT has made a number of changes in our policies and practices. These demonstrate one possible pathway to meeting students' needs.

Minimising concurrent course and practicum requirements

In collaboration with our then partners, the Waikato Institute of Technology [WINTEC], the NMIT social work programme was redesigned in 2014 to meet the new requirement of the SWRB that all social work degrees become four-year programmes. As recommended by Brough et al. (2015), the redesigned programme increased the credits for practicum in years three and four to 60 credits each (previously 30 credits). Each practicum course has a teaching and classroom component integrated into the learning outcomes to circumvent the artificial split between theory and practice that students can experience. Again, in accordance with Brough et al.'s (2015) recommendations, no other courses are delivered whilst students complete their fieldwork hours.

Increasing flexibility in practicum

Participants in Gair and Baglow's (2017) study described in the earlier literature review, argued that the way practicums are organised in many educational institutions is not consistent with social work values relating to self-care, with no leeway for sick leave or any flexibility for maintaining part-time paid employment or responding to family needs. At NMIT we have endeavoured to address these challenges for students by building an extra week for catching up on fieldwork hours into the year's timetable, and keeping term and semester breaks free of practicum requirements.

Contact with academic staff

In line with the recommendations of Collins et al. (2010) and Williamson et al. (2010), NMIT BSW students work with their agencies four days a week for 15 weeks in each of the final two years of their degree to meet the requirements of the SWRB for 120 days of placement over the course of their study programme. The fifth morning of each of those weeks is spent in class with a social work lecturer. These classes provide opportunities for group support and follow the concept of the integrative seminars described above. Instead of the standard theory-to-practice approach, the classes are flipped with learning outcomes met through practice to theory discussions, student-led case studies and examination of wider professional and practice issues and challenges.

Ensuring quality professional supervision

Each NMIT BSW student has a field educator in their placement agency who is responsible for providing them with supervision on a regular basis. In addition, we have a well-established practice of providing students with small group, external professional supervision with an experienced, registered social worker. Initially this was set up to meet the SWRB requirement for all students to have a registered social work supervisor but, over time, the practice has become embedded in our programme delivery for the very reasons identified by the students in Zuchowski's (2013) study described earlier. In addition, the small groups give students experience of another model of professional supervision and additional support for their developing practice.

Supporting students to develop emotional intelligence and self-care skills

Most importantly, the NMIT social work team concur with the argument that, to be successful in their practicum, students need to develop emotional intelligence and self-care skills (Collins, 2007; Grant & Kinman, 2012; Hay, 2019). From the reported experiences of our students, the NMIT social work team identified that this aspect of our delivery could be significantly improved. In 2019 we began to develop "He Arawhata", a pilot programme focusing specifically on giving our students the space and opportunity to develop resiliency in its many forms.

He Arawhata: An innovative response for enhancing students' health and wellbeing

From the first year of delivery of the four-year BSW, degree partners WINTEC and NMIT instigated weekly integrated tutorials known as "Ngā Roopu Awhi". As the architects of the programme, Giles and Stanfield (2017) explained:

> Ngā Roopu Awhi is a Māori name gifted to the social work teaching team by local kaumatua ... The title refers to the opportunity students are offered to "shelter in quiet waters", to think creatively, reflectively, safely and collaboratively about what it means to be a social worker in today's world. (p. 42)

In developing He Arawhata, we chose to build on the Ngā Roopu Awhi structure and philosophy, extending it and weaving through it a blend of educational and social work theoretical perspectives. A fundamental aim of our new programme was to contribute to the achievement of self-awareness and a sense of self-worth through students' development as unique individuals and beginning social work professionals. We determined that the role of the social work lecturer would be to work cooperatively with students, focusing on the cognitive and affective needs of each individual as they negotiated their academic and social work professional worlds. Building on the small group structure of Ngā Roopu Awhi, we created a regular, timetabled space for skills development in supportive, small-group environments. Social work lecturers in these sessions acted as facilitators of learning by offering suggestions, asking questions and using problem-solving or inquiry methods of teaching. Learning and development opportunities in He Arawhata were scaffolded through the four years of the BSW. The aim was for students to move to new levels of awareness and understanding of the components of resilience and emotional intelligence, and then to connect analysis with action.

For the content of He Arawhata, we chose to concentrate on eight key themes drawn from the literature and our students' feedback from the focus groups. These themes are threaded through the BSW and extended at each level, adding strategies and tools to the students' toolkit for practice.

Goals and dreams
In these sessions, we focus on students' hopes for themselves, their whānau and their families, their studies and their future professional careers. Individual learning plans are created and shared in sessions held early in the academic year. Students identify the strengths they wish to build on, and any challenges they want to address. Lecturers guide their planning where appropriate by sharing the common challenges that were identified by students in the focus groups along with strategies they had successfully implemented throughout their study.

Balancing life, study, work, whānau and family
Sessions in Year one begin with the teaching of simple tools such as ecograms for assessing life balance, or lack thereof. Year two focuses on developing time management and organisational skills as students, while Year three introduces tools for auditing time management and organisational skills in readiness for practicum, and Year four translates this learning into preparation for the second, more intensive practicum and then future practice.

Hauroa (wellness)
Across the years this session focuses on restoring and revitalising, using fun activities and adventures to introduce students to different and increasingly in-depth concepts of hauora and wellness.

Developing resilience
In the first year, these sessions introduce the concept of personal resilience in all its forms. Year two focuses on preparation for practicum, with a particular emphasis on reviewing and learning new financial resiliency skills and strategies, as these have been identified as a major stressor during practicum. In Years three and four, when students are fully immersed in their practicums, the focus is on adding to their resilience toolkit, with particular emphasis on being ready for practice.

Enhancing emotional intelligence
These sessions focus on this concept in more depth and use a range of strategies and techniques to extend and enhance this important personal and professional quality.

Developing emotional resilience for working effectively in groups, teams and organisations
In Year one, the focus is on developing emotional resilience in relation to working in groups, and in Year two, in teams. Year three extends the learning in relation to working in organisations and Year four in interdisciplinary settings.

Standing tall – building confidence in professional social work identity
The activities in these sessions are scaffolded through the four years of the NMIT BSW Programme. In Year one, emphasis is placed on students developing confidence in the

academic and professional social work programme. Year two concentrates on extending this confidence so students are ready for their first practicum experience. Year three builds student confidence in their professional identify for interagency work and Year four consolidates their confidence as beginning practitioners for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary practice.

Reflection
The final session for the year incorporates a broad range of reflective activities and experiences to review progress on goals and development in relation to the emotional curriculum and establishes goals for the year to come.

Evaluation of He Arawhata
Our pilot project for 2019 was to undertake the initial design for He Arawhata as a vehicle for effectively delivering relevant elements of an emotional curriculum and to undertake an initial trial of the programme with Year one and Year two students. In 2020 we hoped to extend the pilot to students in all four years of the degree, with a formal evaluation process running alongside. Unfortunately, this has not yet occurred as the national lockdown in response to Covid-19 has meant the focus of our team, as with tertiary educators everywhere, has been on a rapid shift to on-line delivery and day-to-day support of our students.

CONCLUSION

Collins (2007) argues that social work can be a rewarding profession, with practitioners seeing high value in their work with client groups. He also acknowledges the significant stressors that social workers cope with in their everyday practice, ranging from a lack of resources and support to managing competing demands and complex caseloads. As noted earlier, Beddoe et al. (2018) contend that this situation is heightened for newly graduated social workers.

It is argued that, while students have a responsibility to develop their own strengths and coping strategies for study and for their future careers, educational institutions also have an important role to play in preparing and supporting students to manage these challenges alongside meeting their academic requirements and practicum competencies. The findings of the research described here led the NMIT social work team to review the practices and policies we currently have in place to support our students. The innovative developmental programme, He Arawhata, also emerged from the research. While this programme is in its infancy, we hope it will contribute to successful outcomes for students and the development of social work graduates skilled and prepared for the many competing demands they will encounter as beginning practitioners. It is intended to continue with the development and evaluation of the programme once the current Covid-19 situation is resolved and classes resume as normal.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken across the social work qualifying programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand to gain a broader understanding of student challenges and their resilience-building capacities. There may also be value in exploring the general need for tertiary education settings to be increasingly flexible, and family- and whānau-

friendly as a backdrop for understanding the specific needs of both local and national student cohorts.

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