



LFC Welfare Report


Jude's

Introduction

"I feel so supported and so much healthier now. I've never known a football club to be like this"

This wonderful comment was made to me by a player towards the end of the season. It was a rainy night, everyone was sore and tired, finals were approaching; and this young man had been through his share of adversity over the past couple of years.

For me this comment is indicative of our shared labour with the Launceston Football Club. Three years ago the LFC board reached out to us at Tailrace with the simple request of "could you provide a chaplain?" (We use the term chaplain and welfare officer interchangeably). Little did we know that this partnership would become one of the most impactful that we've had the fortune of being a part of.

Since then we've worked closely with Mitch Thorp (Senior Coach), Sandra Boland (President), and the club, to help foster a supportive environment where players thrive off the field first, and the on-field performance follows.

Over this time there is much that we are proud of which we will detail over the coming pages. But the number I am most impacted by is that

1 in 4 players have accessed meaningful support during the 2021 season.

When we pause long enough on that number and consider all the things that we believe to be true about young men, mental ill-health and their reluctance to seek help, it's an astonishing statistic. It reflects the supportive culture that has been painstakingly created by the club and the impact that a consistent support person being present weekly can have.

Sporting clubs have a significant opportunity to address the major issue of wellbeing in the wider community. As strategically key pieces in the fabric of community, their potential for positive community change is largely untapped. This is what makes LFC a true leader in the field as they have recognised not just their opportunity but taken it on as their responsibility. Resultantly, the effect has been enormous and the wider West Tamar community are recipients of that.



I hope you feel encouraged as you read the following report. More than that though, I hope you feel inspired by the partnership between LFC and Tailrace and see the potential for this to be multiplied.

JONATHON O'NEILL
LAUNCESTON FOOTBALL CLUB CHAPLAIN



1 in 4
PLAYERS
accessed
meaningful
support



it costs
\$369
PER YEAR FOR
1 YOUNG PERSON
to access the meaningful
support required (ongoing)



TOP 2 ISSUES
by hours spent:

MENTAL
HEALTH

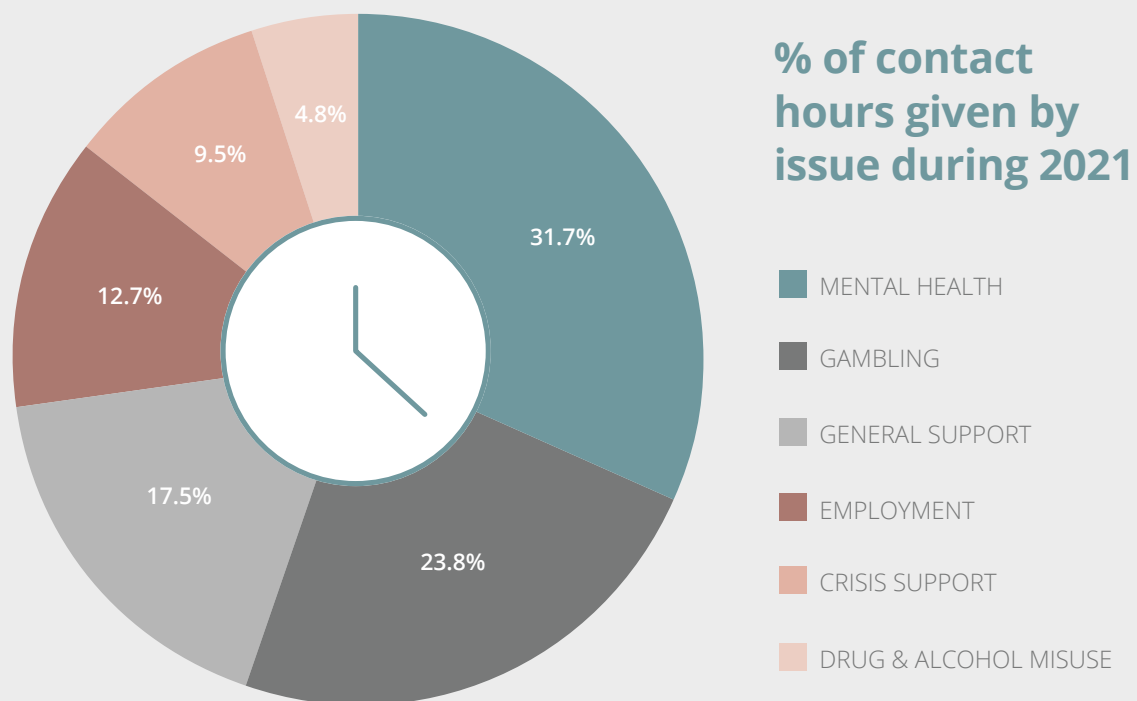
PROBLEM
GAMBLING



1 in 7
YOUNG MEN
AGED 16-24
will experience anxiety or
depression each year
(Beyond Blue)



75%
of mental health
disorders occur
BEFORE THE
AGE OF 25
(Beyond Blue)



Snapshot of supportive actions undertaken during the 2021 season

- Helped access support for problem gambling
- Budgeting skills and engagement with a debt management program to manage major debts
- Make a phone call to lifeline when they've seriously considered self-harm
- Process the emotional toll after suffering injuries and the accompanying rehab process
- Transition between jobs to find a healthier place of employment
- Gain employment
- Engage with a GP and begin a mental health plan
- Counsel through the stages of grief in losing a family member
- Learn to carry the burden that comes from being the first responder to a family members self-harm event
- Navigate the end of serious, long term relationships
- Manage the complexity of broken relationships and access to children
- Find new direction when dreams and ambitions become impossible
- Plus, all the natural ups and downs of life!

A young man with curly hair, wearing a dark football jersey and shorts, is running on a grass field while holding a football with both hands. He is looking forward with a focused expression. The background is blurred, showing other players and spectators. The image is overlaid with a dark teal gradient on the right side.

An 'upstream' approach

Football clubs are full of young men. This stage of life is characterised by constant change in the significant domains of life being vocation, relationships, living arrangements and social life. Each of these change moments has the potential to derail a young person's life due to the anxiety and stress associated.

A preventative approach to wellbeing is to provide support to young people as they transition through these periods of change. By successfully managing these moments, the young person reduces the health burden by not adding to it at the clinical end which requires far greater intervention and resource. Furthermore it equips them with the skills and self-efficacy to manage future change in a healthier manner.

Case studies

1

Imagine being in your early 20's and you are burdened by tens of thousands of dollars worth of gambling debt.

That's the position this young man was in when we met.

Having lost his friendship circles through the impact of his addiction he was at an all time low. Depressed, anxious, and in a low paying job meant there was little to be hopeful for.

When football became unavailable through his problem behaviours and COVID, his one escape was now gone too.

Over the following 12 months we met weekly. We went to the GP for a mental health plan, applied for jobs, engaged in gambling counselling, signed

up for a debt assistance group to manage his finances and endeavoured to contact every friend whom he was indebted to for the purpose of installing a payment plan.

It's a story of complex needs with intertwining factors that make change incredibly difficult.

He hasn't yet arrived at his finish line of restoring all those relationships and resolving his debts, but he is doing much better. He has moved away and has settled into a new rhythm of life where he has received a second chance. This time, he has the skills and the experience to hopefully make the most of it.

I hate to think how his story might have ended had he not arrived at LFC and engaged with the supports that were made available to him.

2

The first significant interaction I had with this young man was in the car park just prior to training on one warm summer evening.

There he was, doubled over in pain. Both his Dad and senior coach were beside him with an ambulance on the way.

As a new player to the club he was in the process of moving to Launceston from regional Tas. It turned out this episode at the club was later to be diagnosed as a symptom of his as yet undiagnosed anxiety disorder.

We worked closely with Mitch and others at the football club over the coming weeks to help provide a supportive base for him as he struggled to manage this disorder. Over time and

after a return to living at home with his parents, he reached a much healthier sense of being.

Moving to Launceston on the second attempt was much more successful. Supported by the wider football community and employed with a team mate, he settled into his new life with relative ease.

He has now developed into a confident and assured young man who is a real leader around the club.

His transformation over 12 months from being crippled with anxiety to being a key young leader has been inspiring. I truly believe this kind of transformation would be impossible without a community group like the football club being at the centre of it.

Case studies

3

We have formed a close relationship with this young man over the past three years.

In many ways he is at the highest risk of poor mental wellbeing and self harm ideation of anyone at the club.

As a result we have an ongoing relationship with him that survives the good and bad seasons of life. Critically though, we have helped him to raise the level of his self management and resilience. By this I mean his lows aren't as low nor as often as before.

In regards to the critical moments of our relationship, we have sat with him in the

emergency waiting room, taken him to the GP, accessed counselling for problem gambling, contacted lifeline and helped him find a more fulfilling job. There have been countless coffees and midnight phone calls.

Had it not been for the chaplaincy support and club environment, he could quite possibly be one of those horrible statistics of young men who didn't make it.

He will likely struggle with mental well-being for much of his life as he has a number of predisposing factors. However there is a real hope he can have a healthy and fulfilling life because of how he's grown over the past three years.

4

Picture this. Your 18th birthday is coming up and you're in the car with some friends. You've just been swimming and had a great afternoon.

As you're travelling back from the river, you get a phone call from your mum. She is basically saying goodbye....

Your mum has had a long battle with mental health and this phone call naturally gives you huge cause for concern.

A quick change of plans and you're dropping off your mates and heading home to check in on mum. You get there to find all the doors locked and blinds closed. You head around to mum's bedroom and through a gap in the blinds you see her splayed out on the floor with blood evident. You make the call. Thankfully mum ended up being ok.

We started to touch base and debrief these events a few hours later. It's difficult to process pain, grief and responsibility like this. Especially at such a young age.

Football became an even greater part of this persons life. It was his safe place and his refuge.

He engaged with our support intermittently. Periods of time would go by when he was unresponsive and then he would be totally open and in need of support. This type of behaviour is not atypical, especially amongst young men. The difficulty is it precludes them from a number of other services who would be prone to discharge him due to disengagement. But simply calling it disengagement is not entirely true. The support structure just had to look different.

In this case he needed a wide support circle where he could just exist in safety and process things slowly. Then when there were those

critical moments which brought to the surface all the difficulties where he needed immediate support; such as when mum goes to rehab, returns from rehab, exams, and poor form in football; the support was easily accessible.

A year removed from the first incident he is doing remarkably well. He is navigating a

complicated home environment with wisdom and strength that is uncommon for his age.

The football club is everything to this young man and the supportive culture of LFC with the addition of the chaplaincy program provided him with just what he needed to be able to cope with this season of great difficulty.



One of the most impressive things I've seen is what happens on the LFC pre-season camp.

"Honesty", "transparency", "mateship" aren't just buzz words that get casually thrown around sporting clubs. For LFC they are clearly defined and tangible aspects of their club.

There we were; gathered at the pre-season camp. A full senior group cramped into a tiny room at Greens Beach. Over the course of the weekend, 3 different players got up the front and shared their story, highlighting some of the difficulties they are facing. You could have heard a pin drop, such was the intensity in the room.

The stand out moment was when a trembling young man got up and shared his story. Between tears he told his team mates of his mum's shock diagnosis of terminal cancer and her expected timeframe of only a few short months.

At this point he couldn't share anymore so he and I went for a walk. Mitch got up and filled in the details for when this young man faltered. From that moment forward the entire club rallied behind this young man.

He and I continued to dialogue throughout the year as his mum repeatedly fought off the disease and prolonged her life. It culminated

in an emotional fortnight of football where she came to speak at a home game before she passed just a few days later.

Hours before her passing I went for a walk with this young man just prior to a training session. He'd just been to say goodbye to her and would return to her afterwards. Football was his escape and his safe place. It was his support network.

We rejoined the rest of the team just as Mitch began to address the playing group. He informed the team of the current situation and there was a collective breath as they shared in the pain that their team-mate was in.

Mitch asked me point blank: "How do you think he's coping?"

"Really well," I answered.

As I reflected on that question I came to the conclusion that he'd arrived at a place of peace. He'd clearly done the internal work of resolving grief over the preceding months. Grief is non linear so there would still be ups and downs, but all things considered he was doing exceptionally well.

For this young man to handle such adversity so well is a clear sign of the impact of our partnership; LFC's deliberate environment of support of which our chaplaincy service plays a key part.

Hi, my name is Jack,

I've been seeing the team at Tailrace for almost 2 years. My first call to the team was to Jono and obviously I opened up a bit about my mental health. Straight away Jono organised a coffee catch up the next morning. To have someone to talk to about my life; sometimes days in a row, once a week or whenever you need him; he's there. To this day I still talk to Jono almost 2, even 3 times a week. He has helped me to put in some fantastic ideas on how to deal with my anxiety and struggles through life. Without Jono and the team at Tailrace, I'm not sure what state of mind I would be in.

Always speak up when things are good or bad. The person I am today and still growing and maturing into is because of Jono and the team. I have come a long way with my self-development and how I look at life, but that doesn't mean I still don't have my struggles. I can go to them all the time, every time! They've helped me in a lot of ways and in doing so we've become good mates. I'm glad I met him before maybe it was too late.

Cheers Jack

Our model

We believe in the efficacy of sports chaplaincy because it is a model that differs from the other valuable services in the community. Other services, such as Stay Chatty, Lifeline and Beyond Blue; all provide either a crises hotline or educational seminars.

However, what is missing in this approach is what we refer to as “being present”.

The reason why so many young men accessed meaningful support through our service was because of the rapport built by being around the playing group on a regular basis. It builds trust, a known face that is available for when things suddenly happen; and it allows for a regular check in that's within their normal routine.

Being ingrained into the fabric of the club through a culture of vulnerability and honesty has done more to reduce the stigma of seeking help than any social media campaign ever will.

Whilst we are well qualified for the role, I don't believe that it is necessary for chaplains to be trained social workers or the like. Rather, the role exists to be a supportive friend who can guide them to the relevant trained professional.

There are a number of ancillary benefits which come from our model too. Specifically the ability to keep people engaged in sport and physical activity is impactful upon a range of physical, social and mental wellbeing markers which are well known and documented.

On a practical note our partnership involved two chaplains, each being around the playing group during the week at training. Anybody needing further support would arrange to do a catch up away from the club.

Funding

A model focussed on being present is costly because there are hours spent in being available.

To compensate the cost we initially approached the Tailrace Church community for sponsors. We were fortunate that some generous individuals were willing to help compensate the hours of our chaplains.

Early in 2021, Launceston Football Club were successful in applying for a grant to help cover these same costs which was a fantastic win.

We are now constantly fundraising for this program through Jude's Village, our monthly giving subscription.

We estimate that there are 94 contact hours given per year on average.

All expenses included our service costs \$6277 p.a.





Next steps

Our dream is for communities to be thriving with a reversal of the shocking mental health statistics. Simply put, too many young people are not well.

Other service providers in the community do a fantastic job and should continue to be supported.

However, we believe that there is a piece of the puzzle that is missing; and that is in the creation of healthy communities at grass roots level. Therefore we are advocating for every sporting club to have a sports chaplain.

A proposed way of funding (from our admittedly limited vantage point) would be to increase the Gambling Support Program levee and direct some of it towards providing every club with a sports chaplain.

As we understand it; the Gambling Support Program receives 4% of profits from gaming machines which is portioned out between charity (1%), sports groups (1%) and support programs (2%).

Due to the costly damage that gambling has upon the wider community and in particular young men; we see this as being a possible mechanism to close the gap of social impact.

But regardless of how it is funded, we firmly believe that it would be impactful for local communities if every club had a sports chaplain.

Who are we?



Caleb Smith

Caleb is the operations manager at Tailrace and he comes from a (near finished) degree in Psychology. He too loves sport and has a passion for supporting young people.

Jonathon O'Neill

Having studied Health Science and been employed in a range of roles across health, justice and youth; Jono has a well rounded skill set for supporting young people. Now an associate pastor and having grown up around sporting clubs, he loves working with LFC to help build healthier communities.

Jude's Cafe at Tailrace

Jude's Cafe is a social enterprise whose cause is helping young people. Through this we provide several youth services for the local community.

Jude's Cafe operates out of the Tailrace Centre and is owned and operated by Tailrace Community Church.

You can see more of who we are here at the QR code and you can read our latest impact report by selecting the Jude's Village tab.



Join our Village

Jude's Village is a passionate and determined group of monthly givers with a mission to foster positive mental health and wellbeing in young people.

You have our Word and more...

We want you to know where and how your donation is being used. These are the promises we work to keep.



We're an Open Book

We want to be open and transparent with where and how your donations are being used.



We are Present

We will be present to build belonging with photos and stories from our programs.



We will Innovate

We will innovate and let you know what innovations are working and which ones fail.

