



# How is La Trobe Communication Clinic helping trans and gender diverse individuals and those who stutter?

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**Services we provide:**

**Speech Pathology**

**Audiology**

# About the La Trobe Communication Clinic (LCC)

- Health service situated within a University
  - Our consumers are members of the public and students on placement
  - University subsidises services
- Almost all services are student delivered (supervised by expert clinicians)
  - Student clinicians are enthusiastic providers and clients acknowledge this
  - Educating the future workforce
  - High expectations placed on the students as they are assessed for competency on placement
- Close liaison with academic experts ensures best practice provision
  - Our services are supported by research and outcomes published. In some fields results demonstrate our student delivered treatment is equivalent to or better than results published from experienced clinicians

# Overview of LOC Programs

- Audiology Clinic
- Adolescent and Adult Fluency Clinic
- Voice Clinic
  - Trans and Gender Diverse Services in partnership with Monash Gender Clinic
  - General Voice Clinic
- Paediatric Fluency Clinic
- Phonological Awareness for Literacy Clinic – primary school age clients
- Preschool Speech and Language Clinic

See [www.latrobe.edu.au/communication-clinic](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/communication-clinic)



**Trans**

**and Gender Diverse**



# Mental health of trans and gender diverse individuals

- This population is at increased risk for poor mental health outcomes such as:
  - Poor self image and reduced self esteem
  - Emotional difficulties such as generalised & social anxiety, depression, fear, anger, & suicidal ideation
  - Social withdrawal, reduced social integration
  - Discrimination, violence, harassment, bullying & inequality of vocational opportunity

(Davies & Goldberg, 2006; McNeil, 2006; Dacakis, 2002)

# Voice and gender identity



## What is the issue?

- Voice plays a major role in gender identity
- The negative consequences of intolerances in our community to gender non-conformity means that a gender incongruent voice contributes to:
  - Discrimination
  - Loss of employment
  - Abuse
- Those perceived as visual-non-conformers (**identified by others as not matching how they should look and sound for a given gender**) are at greater risk of the negative consequences (Grant et al, 2011).

# Population seeking LOC's services

- We see people with any gender position who feel that their voice does not align with their true self, and therefore desire voice modification to address the incongruence
- Our clients are mostly Birth Assigned Males who identify as Female. We have fewer Birth Assigned Females who identify as Male or non-binary clients
  - In birth assigned males, hormones do not change the pitch of the voice
  - In birth assigned females hormones (testosterone) increase the bulk of the vocal folds resulting in a lower pitch
- Of 71 new referrals to our service so far this year, 20 clients come from the North East Melbourne region. Which equates to 28% of our caseload; nearly a 1/3

# How can speech pathology assist?

Identifying goals collaboratively with the individual

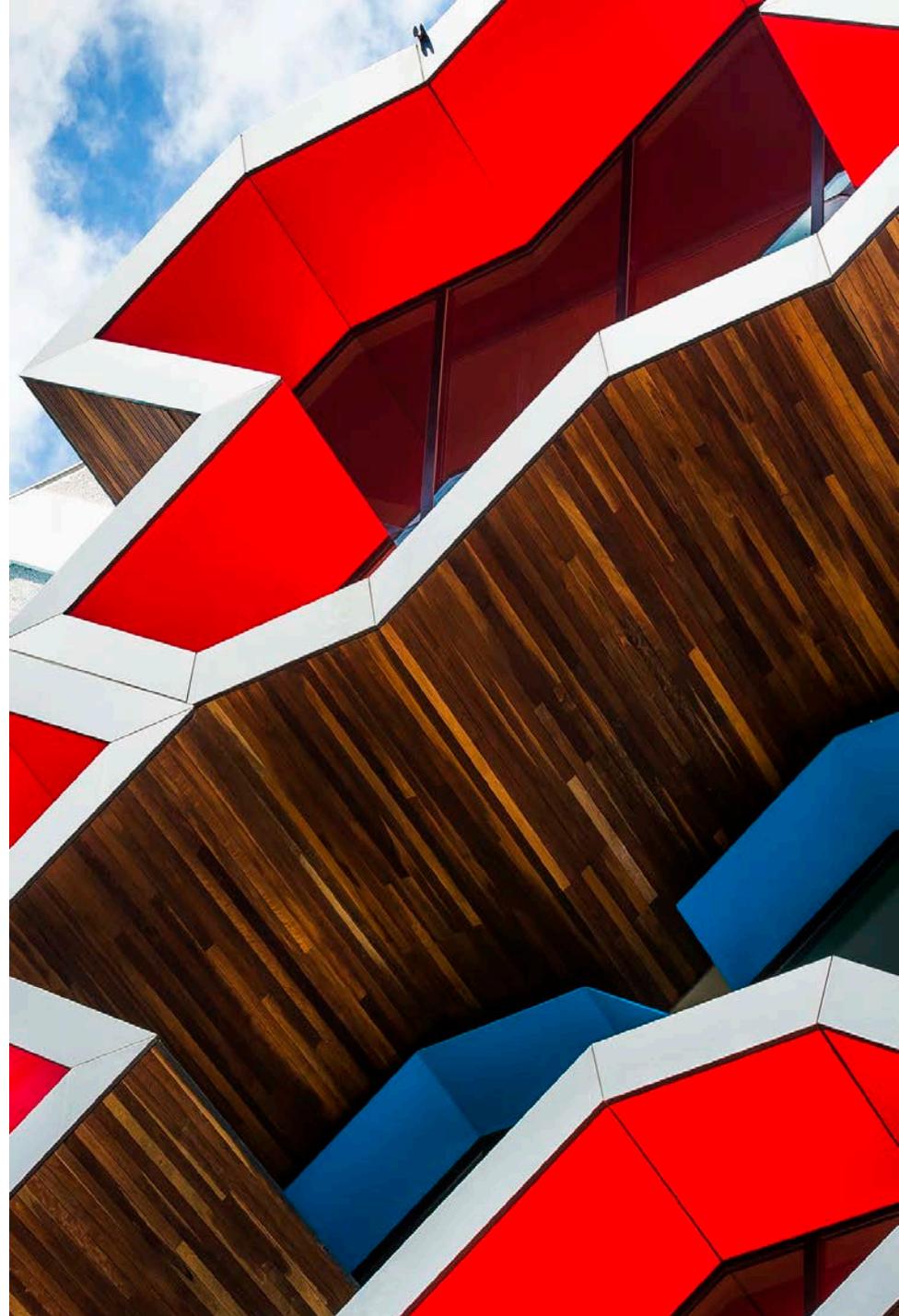
- Assessment:
  - Establishing the impact of the voice
  - Taping the voice for analysis on computer software
  - Identifying personal goals
- Voice Training
  - Providing individualised training in line with recommended techniques to achieve pitch and resonance change
  - On request, body language, eye contact and non speech sounds e.g. laughing, coughing, sneezing



# How LCC assist the trans and gender diverse community?

- Provide a comprehensive and lifespan service encompassing
  - Group education days (Health Promotion Activity)
  - Individualised assessment, training and generalisation
  - Group review days (Health Promotion Activity)
- Flexible service delivery
  - Spaced (weekly/fortnightly)
  - Group
  - Individual
  - Telehealth

# Stuttering



# Stuttering and mental health

- Stuttering is associated with:
  - Poorer mental health outcomes
  - Social anxiety  social phobia
- Children who stutter are more likely to be teased by their peers.
- Older children and adults who stutter often fail to achieve their educational or career potential and may experience significant anxiety in social situations.

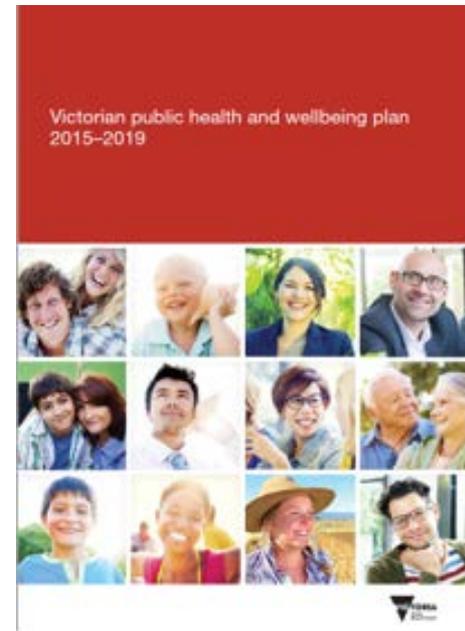
# How LCC assists those who stutter?

- Providing a comprehensive and lifespan service encompassing
  - Fluency instatement
  - Generalisation
  - Maintenance (Health Promotion Activity)
  - Relapse (Health Promotion Activity)
- Flexible service delivery
  - Intensive / Spaced (weekly/fortnightly)
  - Individual / Group
  - Telehealth



# Our health promotion approach

- Improving Mental Health
  - Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015-2019
  - Receive funding from DHHS
- Specific target groups
  - Trans and gender diverse individuals who are aligning their voice and communication characteristics with their gender identity
  - Those who stutter
- Poorer outcomes if communication issues aren't addressed and skills aren't maintained
- Conscious effort to maintain stutter free speech or gender congruent voice



These specific groups need more than the usual population focussed health promotion approach

Service delivery as prevention (health promoting interventions)

There is a place for targeted interventions for at risk populations



# Health promotion activities at LOC

- Fluency services

- Stuttering in adolescents/adults is prone to relapse & thus impacts wellbeing
- Fluency Review Days (4 – 6 annually) for adolescents and adults who have had prior therapy (usually at LOC) and wish to work on maintenance or relapse strategies
- Promotes wellbeing, self management and fluency maintenance: includes opportunities for guided skill practice, transfer, group presentations etc
- Evaluation: pre and post surveys, objective measures

- Voice services

- Voice Education Days (2 - 3 annually) to promote overarching knowledge of voice, gender differences, and vocal health
- Voice Review Days (1 - 2 annually) to promote maintenance of voice and the chance to 'refresh' and update knowledge and skills with new evidence based changes in training techniques
- Socialisation and education regarding services in the community
- Evaluation: pre and post surveys

# Our successes

Participants return year after year

Rapid change as a result of review days (stuttering reduces)

Increased confidence in using voice / fluency techniques

Increased confidence when communicating in social activities as a result of their review day attendance

Attendees report reduced anxiety following participation

# Future directions

- Join with local services to continue health promotion work to improve the mental health of the community
- Trans and gender diverse
  - Social support networks / services
  - Rainbow Tick Accreditation
  - Online module and webinar development to support other Speech Pathologists to work with the community and provide voice training
- Stuttering
  - Service development, public information forums, clinician education
- Paediatric populations – focus on literacy, early stuttering
- Other ideas?



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Thank you

[latrobe.edu.au](http://latrobe.edu.au)