Co-Facilitating an LGBTIQA+ Support Group with Student Queer Peers
Oral, Successful and sustainable partnerships

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Abstract:
Queer Chat is a weekly social and support group for LGBTIQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual) students run by the La Trobe University Counselling Service, with the aim of reducing isolation and nurturing positive queer identities. The group is co-facilitated by a Queer Counsellor and two ‘Queer Peers’ – students who identify as part of the queer community. The group has a large number of regular attendees, which has been increasing each semester as the queer students build their own community, through first connecting in the safety and confidentiality of our group at the Counselling Service. In consultation with other community groups, we have recently created a manual to guide our practice and navigate the challenges presented by working in a peer model at the Counselling Service.

In this presentation, the Queer Counsellor and student partner Queer Peers will jointly share about how the group works, how the peer model contributes to its success, the complications and boundary issues that arise, and the benefits and challenges of working together to make the group more relevant and engaging for queer students. Queer Peers will share their personal experience of having been participants in the group, and what it is like in their new role as co-facilitators and consultants to the Counselling Service and the wider university, and the importance of an authentic, respectful partnership to make the Counselling Service more inclusive and accessible to LGBTIQA+ students.

Biography:
Davina Morley is a counsellor and registered counselling psychologist at La Trobe University Counselling Service, and has 7 years of experience working with LGBTIQA+ students in the university context (at Curtin University, the University of Melbourne and now La Trobe University). She has co-facilitated groups for bisexual students, transgender students and LGBTIQA+ students, in addition to having been an Ally trainer. She has a history of volunteer work in the queer community including supervising QLife phone counsellors and as a previous chairperson of Living Proud (formerly Gay and Lesbian Community Services in Perth).

Savannah Zwickl is a PhD student in Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies at La Trobe University. They are a queer, non-binary person and has been involved in a number of
peer-based LGBTIQA+ and sexual health programs in Perth and Melbourne. Savannah has a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) and a Master of Sexology.

Amelia Cooper is a former member of the La Trobe Queer Chat group and university student who studied law and humanities. She grew up in country Victoria and came out as a queer trans woman in 2015 and has been co-facilitating the Queer Chat group for the past 2 years, in addition to other volunteer work in the queer community.