

Future Makers: Virtual Psychologist breaks down barriers to seeking help

Providing business skills and financial support to inspirational Australian social enterprises.

Overview

Dervla Loughnane saw a need to establish new communication channels for mental health support. This was driven by the distress she and her team had witnessed during face-to-face and phone conversations about mental health issues. In some cases, it had led to suicide.

Optus recognised the value of her Virtual Psychologist concept, accepting her solution into its Future Makers program.

Optus Future Makers is a capacity building and Accelerator program aimed at entrepreneurs, social enterprises and not-for-profit (NFP) organisations. It has a strong focus on solutions that use technology to address societal problems for vulnerable and disadvantaged Australian people.

Launched in 2016, Future Makers selects applicants each year to take part in the capacity building program and pitch form a pool of up to \$300,000. They also receive four months of individual business coaching from the brightest talent at Optus and the wider tech industry.

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Challenge

Dervla and her team understood the psychological needs of patients but effectively engaging with some of them was proving difficult.

Virtual Psychologist focused primarily on partnering with schools and universities to reach vulnerable young people. The team deemed these sufferers of mental health issues to be most at risk and in need of non-confrontational support.

Though this path seemed the most beneficial and obvious, the red-tape and bureaucracy was too much for a small organisation to cut through.

Benefit

Dervla and received \$72,000 from the Future Makers program to help transform the Virtual Psychologist from a great idea into a fully functioning service. She says learning the importance of customer validation has made the largest impact.

Her time with the program also made her realise there's no point having a cause you believe in unless you're able to support it financially. That's the only way to achieve your business goals.

Breaking through to a confined market

Working closely with Optus, the Virtual Psychologist changed tack and started using social media to reach its target audience.

It ran an anti-bullying campaign through Facebook, reaching 56,000 young people and gaining more than 7,000 engagements. The campaign identified body image issues and cyber bullying as the main problems within this demographic. These were valuable insights for the program.

This strategy helped build the organisation's profile, providing the team with valuable social capital and turning the Virtual Psychologist dream into reality.

Outcomes

With continued support from Optus, Virtual Psychologist has been able to communicate its idea to influential players in government and not-for-profit space. The success stories include:

1. Signing a \$500,000 contract to provide mental health services in rural and remote communities.
2. Presenting to former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Health Minister Greg Hunt and Social Services Minister Christian Porter.

3. Influential radio host Alan Jones promoting the service as a cost-effective solution to the current mental health crisis.
4. Securing a six-month pilot contract with Optus Retail to assess effectiveness as a proactive strategy for dealing with critical incidents.

A genuine mental health solution

Virtual Psychologist is making a real difference in the lives of vulnerable young people.



"Future Makers provided me with the business skills necessary to sell the idea into companies and politicians. It helped me to think outside the box, exploring other issues and areas that I hadn't considered such as our social impact."

Dervla Loughnane – Virtual Psychologist



See how Optus Future Makers can help your Organisation.
Find out more at **Future Makers**