

The Sophia-J. N Heredia Centre for Counseling: End of Year Report 2020-2021

Co-ordinator: Jennie Mendes

The year was filled with a lot of ups and downs, and saw the emergence of a new system of counseling that was employed. **Online counseling** was attempted and successfully executed through the academic year 2020-21. A separate email ID was created for the counseling center that was used to communicate with the students. The procedure involved the student interested in availing counseling services filling out a Google form requesting details such as the student's email ID for communication, a trusted adult's contact number and email ID, and the student consenting to the idea that the adult may be contacted in case of any risk to life, or extreme emotion being experienced by the client. The therapist then responded to each enquiry with an appointment slot. The message was spread to the student body with the help of the College Union Committee through WhatsApp. Within a couple of hours of the form being released, the counseling center received 29 requests for appointments, pointing to the dire need of counseling services.

Throughout the year, **966 appointments** were held, with 4 appointments being held every day. Appointments were also scheduled by the counselor. About 45 students saw the counselor for regular appointments, organized once every 2 weeks. The students discussed concerns ranging from dealing with uninvolved parents, anxiety, loneliness, depression, and instances of relationship issues, and lack of a routine due to the lockdown as well as more long-standing issues. Multiple students brought in instances of lack of motivation, struggling to keep up with college work, concerns about what their future will look like and navigating unique stressors and challenges brought about by the uncertain situation around us. A lot of students also discussed the guilt they felt due to the privilege that they had and the helplessness that they felt about the crumbling infrastructure.

In addition to sessions, the counseling center also organized **webinars** of different topics. These webinars originally began as weekly sessions providing the students a space to discuss and talk about areas of concern, but with the increasing workload that the students were dealing with, the frequency was shifted to once a month, then shifting to once in two months, and finally being organized as the students needed a webinar. 11 webinars were held through the year. Some of these were by guest speakers and covered topics like the process of applying abroad, SOP writing, as well as more diverse topics like empathetic listening. Other webinars were conducted by the college counselor and covered topics such as talking to your parents, maintaining relationships, managing uncertainty, as well as suicide prevention and spreading awareness. All webinars were enthusiastically received and a large number of students attended and showed good participation. On an average, 80-110 students attended the webinars organized.



During the year, there was also a **pilot batch** of a course organized by the Counseling Center. The course was **Emotional First Aid and Listening Skills (EFALS)** and dealt with common issues that students face, and how can empathetic listening help them provide a listening ear. It was offered to second and third year students who had psychology as a subject. The procedure and plan for the sessions was discussed with the students in a webinar, and they were invited to apply by sending a letter of intent and their resume. There were 38 applicants for the course. Each application was reviewed carefully, and a call was organized to understand what motivated the students to apply for the course. For the pilot batch, 6 third-year, psychology double major students were selected. This was done in an attempt to understand how the course would tie in with the college schedule and demands. The students were very enthusiastic and the discussions around topics was informative, open and showed deep emotional understanding by the students. They were trained in the basic skills of empathetic listening and were given role plays to check their progress.

Another change that was brought in was moving **career counseling** appointments to an email medium as opposed to having face to face video chats. This was done to reduce the inter-appointment period. It was realized that after the first-year orientations, there were a lot of appointments that were booked, which made the inter-appointment period very long, reducing the progress made in the therapy process by the students. It was also noticed that most career counseling appointments were shorter and dealt mostly with going through links that the students requested. Keeping this in mind, the process of career counseling was taken completely online where the students were to fill a form out, stating their chief concern and what their confusion is. The responses were read and evaluated by the counselor and an email was sent out to all the students. Those who expressed more serious concerns were offered a choice to come for a session. Overall, 119 career enquiries were read and responded to through the year by the counselor.

In addition to sessions, webinars, and the course, the college counselor also took on additional tasks such as **conducting orientation sessions** for the newly incorporated first year students, giving them insight into the functioning of the counseling center, need for therapy, and having a space to discuss and work through their concerns. The counselor also addressed and heard the grievances that the students had with the college and directed them to the right resources to have an open discussion and sort the issues out. This ensured communication between the students and the teachers, or other staff members and ensured a smooth way for the issues to be resolved. The counselor also attempted to provide some insight into how the pandemic was affecting student involvement in college activities and suggestions on how this challenge could be worked through. **Regular meetings** were held with Ms. Jennie Mendes with ideas and discussions, and with her approval and involvement, all of the above-mentioned things were executed. The counselor was also responsible in reaching out to parents of students who shared that they were experiencing suicidal thoughts or difficulties at a personal level, and it was felt that a higher level of care would be needed. Lastly, regular reports and session recordings were maintained. Any additional email that was received was also guided to the right source or given an adequate response to by the counselor.

On the whole, the year was a very challenging one, with students facing multiple difficulties at a personal and college level. The students were very open and motivated to work on these concerns, and brought this motivation into the counseling sessions. They showed up for repeated appointments, showing grit, determination, and resilience in the face of challenges. The working



of the whole year was challenging, dealt with setbacks, but on the whole successful, with changes being brought in and implemented, and a sense of support and help being accessible being communicated to the students.

SUMMARY:

Work done by Ms Deepika Bhandari, College Counselor,
Sophia JNHeredia Counseling Center in 2020-2021,

Month	Appointments	Webinars	Scheduled	Meetings	Leave	Credit course	Career Sessions	Career Emails
June	39	1	65	5	0	-	-	-
July	64	5	70	5	0	-	-	-
August	72	0	76	7	2	-	-	-
Sept	100	2	143	5	0	1	38	-
October	100	2	104	4	0	8	-	42
November	76	0	118	2	0	5	-	44
December	80	0	96	4	0	-	12	
January	66	1	80	6	1	-	0	
February	96	0	100	3	0	6	6	
March	100	0	104		0	6	7	
April	88	0	92	6	0	-	8	
May	85	0	84	6	3			
TOTAL	966	11	1132	48	6	26	71	86

Appointments are actual personal counseling sessions for students

Scheduled are appointments fixed with students taken (not actual)

Meetings lasted nearly an hour with Jennie Mendes, Coordinator Sophia-J.N.Heredia Counseling Center

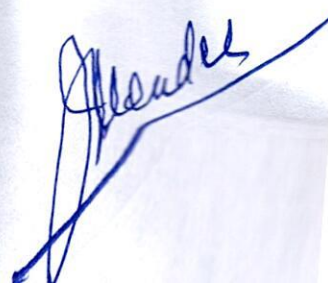
Leave taken as brother tested Covid 19 positive and mother had cataract surgery

Credit Course: This was a 30 hour credit course 26 sessions (1 session approx 2 hours) +3 hours of Assessment

Career sessions were actual career counseling 15 minute sessions with students

Career emails were written emails to students

3 serious cases:



Meetings held with 2 Mumbai parents & 1 telephone communication with a parent from Calcutta as their daughters needed Psychiatric help. This was totally handled by Coordinator Ms Jennie Mendes

J. Mendes