The Thin Line – a theatre-based education program about eating disorders

The Thin Line is a theatre-based education program about eating disorders. It consists of two parts, a 30 minute play performed by a single actress that illustrates a young woman’s struggle with an eating disorder, followed by a moderated panel discussion of at least 30 minutes.

The play weaves together the voices of four characters—a girl who is struggling, her internal negative voice, her mother, and a friend—showing how the disease affects not only the individual struggling, but also how it impacts his or her surrounding family and circle of friends. Panel members for the post-show discussion are drawn from local eating disorder specialists, advocates, and/or health professionals who can continue to provide support after the program.

The program aims to increase knowledge and understanding about eating disorders and to give people knowledge about services and support that exist, and what they might do to support a friend, family member or colleague.

Originating in the U.S. in 1998, The Thin Line has been delivered in colleges, schools, organisations and conferences across the U.S. and has been listed by the national office of the U.S. National Eating Disorders Association on its National Speaker's Bureau.

“The Thin Line is an accurate and powerful tool for eating disorders education. It touches the viewer with an amazing combination of information and emotion, and poignantly illustrates the devastating experiences of an eating disorder sufferer.”

U.S. National Eating Disorders Association

“The Thin Line captures the contradictory psychology of eating disorders and the frustration, fear, and confusion they evoke in others who want a simple way to make things better. The play addresses beautifully the way girls speak through their bodies—in symbolic and emotionally complicated ways—the things they cannot say or even know consciously. It will blow people away.”

Dr. Lyn Mikel Brown, Colby College, U.S.

The Australian version of The Thin Line is produced by Deakin University under licence and is directed by Suzanne Chaundy. It uses an Australian version of the U.S. script, and the producer, director and actor are all Australian. During the first week of May 2015, a very successful preview season confirmed the value of the Australian version of the program.

In the previews we delivered the program to secondary schools, universities and in community settings. Typical comments from those involved in the preview season included:

“The play shows how many people can be affected by one person with an eating disorder and how this can have lasting impacts not only on the person suffering the eating disorder but on her family and friends.” (preview in community setting)
With a simple set-up of two tables and a chair, The Thin Line can be performed in virtually any setting. An implementation guide, other resource materials and telephone support are available to help the local organiser plan and prepare for the delivery of the program.

If you want to explore bringing this educational program into your community there are a number of options.

The Thin Line can be purchased as a package for $985 (excluding GST) by organisations located anywhere in Victoria and provides:

- a professional actor (Kyrie Capri or Madeleine Whitehead), trained and regularly rehearsed by our professional director (Suzanne Chaundy);
- a comprehensive resource pack to advise and support a local organiser as they select a venue, build an audience and choose and brief a local panel of experts.
- phone and email back-up by the production team at Deakin University, as required.

In 2016 and subsequent years, we will offer The Thin Line in three limited seasons:

1. February and March
2. June and July
3. September

If you would like to make a booking for any of the seasons in 2016, please contact Julie Melican (phone: 03 5227 8108 or email: julie.melican@deakin.edu.au), who can also prove copies of the resource pack to support local organisers.

Dr Genevieve Pepin has also secured funding to run a research season of The Thin Line some time during 2015 to explore the short and medium term impact of the Thin Line on audience members. This will enable her to offer to provide the program for free in return for local organisers helping in collecting research data. She is currently in the process of gaining ethical clearance, and until this is complete, we will not be able to say when this season will run. If you would be interested in being a part of this research season, please contact Dr Pepin directly.

If you have other questions or want further information about the program, feel free to contact:

Dr Genevieve Pepin, Deakin University on 03 5227 8462 or genevieve.pepin@deakin.edu.au OR

Professor Ann Taket, Deakin University on 03 9244 3798 (if I’m not there, please leave a message, it gets forwarded to wherever I am) or ann.taket@deakin.edu.au