Connecting Minds

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**Season 2 Episode 4: Turn2Me online mental health support**

**Useful links:**

Turn2Me: <https://turn2me.ie/>; <https://www.facebook.com/turn2me>; <https://www.instagram.com/turn2me.ie/?hl=en>; https://twitter.com/Turn2me

List of counselling services available through PCHEI: <https://www.pchei.ie/index.php/students1/student-counselling>

USI Mental Health Website: [https://mentalhealth.usi.ie/](https://mentalhealth.usi.ie/%20)

USI Mental Health Social Media: [https://twitter.com/MentalHealthUSI](https://twitter.com/MentalHealthUSI%20)

Sources of Help & Support for your mental health: [https://mentalhealth.usi.ie/i-need-help/help-in-a-mental-health-emergency/](https://mentalhealth.usi.ie/i-need-help/help-in-a-mental-health-emergency/%20)

National Office for Suicide Prevention: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/>

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**SPEAKERS**

Suzanne Ennis, Sarah Hughes

**Sarah Hughes** 00:02

You're listening to Connecting Minds, the student mental health podcast, brought to you by the Union of Students in Ireland. Hello, and welcome to season one, episode four of Connecting Minds. I'm your host, Sarah Hughes. I'm delighted to be introducing you today to Suzanne Ennis, Clinical Manager at Turn2Me, which is an online source of support for mental health. Welcome, Suzanne, thanks very much for joining us today.

**Suzanne Ennis** 00:27

No problem at all.

**Sarah Hughes** 00:28

So as I mentioned, you're Clinical Manager at Turn2Me, could you tell our listeners a little bit about what Turn2Me is?

**Suzanne Ennis** 00:36

So Turn2Me is an online forum. And it came about by two brothers, Oisín and Diarmuid Scollard, back in 2009. And they lost brother Ronan to suicide. So they put their heads together. And they said, there has to be or should be some element of support there for people. So they came up with the idea of Turn2Me, a lifeline online so that people could access it from the comfort of their home at any given time during the day or night. So we're not bound by traditional, I suppose bricks and mortar models, we have a lot more flexibility and to meet user requirements, because we're an online based platform.

**Sarah Hughes** 01:26

I think that's a really key part of what Turn2Me does, I mean, most freely available mental health services, you know, they operate on a nine to five Monday to Friday basis. And as we all know, typically, you know, mental health doesn't stick to that sort of office hours schedule. Absolutely.

**Suzanne Ennis** 01:42

Absolutely not, no and so it's our reach is broad, given that we're not confined to nine to five, and as you say, traditionally, people you're working, you're busy with lectures, you know, your part time job, you have other commitments, and you're not available necessarily during the day. So beauty of our setup is that we offer a number of services with that in mind.

**Sarah Hughes** 02:11

Fantastic, and what kind of services would be on offer?

**Suzanne Ennis** 02:16

So within Turn2Me, so we offer kind of a psychosocial model. So it's a three tier, em, approach. So the first approach is very much peer support, online, community driven. So users help other users. So we have what we call a thought catcher. So if a user new to the site, for example, was to come in, they register as a user, so they pick their own, so say, if you were to join onto Turn2Me, for example, you would pick your own username. So you were only identifiable by that username to any other user. So you have that anonymity that can sometimes assist people, [clears throat] excuse me, very much. So with taking that first step into any kind of therapeutic setting, you know, that wouldn't normally or they would have a lot of hesitancy to go see, say, face to face counselor, or the college counselor, they're just that bit hesitant, I don't know what to expect. Am I bad enough? Do I need it? So the beauty of Turn2Me is it's, it's that perfect kind of first step into that therapeutic kind of world, that sometimes if you're not familiar with it, can be very, very daunting. So within the thought catcher, users put up their thoughts. So whatever it may be, I'm feeling lonely, or I'm feeling really down, or I'm really struggling with college work with the load, I'm struggling to fit in, em, I'm afraid of the large numbers in the lecture halls, COVID, you know, whatever it may be, that social interaction piece is huge at the moment as well for people so you can put your concerns up there. And then other people, other peers will then offer their words of encouragement; 'I found doing X and Y really helpful. Maybe try it'. And we also then the next step is we have a number of weekly support groups. So the way they work is their topic related. So we have, you know, tips on how to manage your anxiety, how to deal with bereavement, em, how to better manage your stress. And we have a number of topics up there, and then one every week on a weekly basis. And again, it's through instant chat, so there's no face to face. So that anonymity piece is there, you're only identifiable by your username. So there's safety in that for an awful lot of people and it encourages them then to you know, to really explore what it is they're feeling. And it's that whole piece, you know, there's comfort knowing you're not alone with what you're struggling with or the challenges that you're facing. You know, strength in numbers. And it's it's also brings into the forefront, the early intervention piece. You know, don't wait for these challenges that you might be feeling or trying to deal with on your own, you know, share them, and don't let them get to the point where, you know, say a mental health issue suddenly snowballs into a mental health crisis, you know, which can happen very, very quickly. And sometimes we don't even realizing, you know, we don't realize it's happening. So we have to thought catcher, and then we would have the support groups would be the second level, and then we have the one to one counseling. So we offer six free sessions of one to one counseling through either instant chat or video with a qualified professional counselor/psychotherapist, em, on the site, so there are six free sessions in consecutive, there'll be six weeks on the trot, the same time each week. And they're posted up availability, and you go in, and you book your slot and go through, the application process would just be would be, again, just to give a few additional details just for the counselor in advance of the sessions. And again, our services are free. So you know, student life is lean, if my memory serves me correct.

**Sarah Hughes** 06:18

Absolutely.

**Suzanne Ennis** 06:19

So it ticks that box!

**Sarah Hughes** 06:21

Yeah, I think there's a number of things that are key for students in what you said there. For starters, that that anonymity piece, I think it's got to two kind of sides to it. First of all, the ability to to use chat, you know, a lot of students are living in digs or shared accommodation, where they can't always get a room that's private and not going to be disturbed and all of that kind of thing.

**Suzanne Ennis** 06:43

They won't be overheard. It's confidential.

**Sarah Hughes** 06:45

Absolutely

**Suzanne Ennis** 06:45

They won't have that concern. Yeah.

**Sarah Hughes** 06:47

And then from the other side, in terms of what you're saying, in terms of using usernames, I think, you know, I think particularly among postgraduate students, one thing we found is they're reluctant to attend in person counseling sessions on campus, because a lot of postgrads teach undergrads, and they don't want to end up sitting across the waiting room from, from somebody that they teach or that they know. So this kind of provides a kind of another avenue for that, I guess.

**Suzanne Ennis** 07:15

That's it. I mean, there's no point in denying there is still, you know, that whole persona of where I think the conversation around mental health is definitely taking a huge step forward. And the conversation has definitely started. But there is still that piece of if somebody is engaging in support around their mental health, it's very private, you know, so like that they don't necessarily want to be seen to go into, you know, a known counseling centre, or practice, private practice, or college campus counselor, for those reasons. So we kind of, you know, with the way we're set up with the online platform, is we break down that barrier, we just remove it completely.

**Sarah Hughes** 08:02

That sounds really...

**Suzanne Ennis** 08:03

you know, we can reach those more kind of vulnerable or hesitant cohorts, you know, and it's, it's very much user led, so you know, the user, you can engage with the services as much or as little as you want, you know, so you can come online, and you don't necessarily need to engage to begin with, you can just observe, you know, observe what's happening, and then dip your toe in slowly at your own pace.

**Sarah Hughes** 08:30

I think there's, there's an element of that, that sounds like it would feel really safe for somebody who is a little bit hesitant.

**Suzanne Ennis** 08:37

Yeah, and it is a very safe, confidential, and it's moderated environment. So we do have very qualified and highly highly trained staff, monitoring the thought catcher. So that, you know, it does stay safe for every user.

**Sarah Hughes** 08:53

And in terms of, you know, we would often find certain kind of things coming up again, for students, like, I'm not bad enough to take a counseling slot away from somebody who's very unwell. Or sure, especially at the moment, as you mentioned, with the whole social issues, you know, everybody is struggling coming out of lockdown, you know, this is the normal way to be, I think what Turn2Me can provide is an opportunity for, as you say, students to engage with, you know, with their own mental health and with the level of help when they're not, you know, identifying as being I'm really mentally unwell. I really need help right now. And I need clinical help right now.

**Suzanne Ennis** 09:34

You know, it's that piece of, you know, with chronic stress, or, you know, very, very bad anxiety, a lot of, you know, a huge amount of population. It's gotten so bad that it's their familiar now, it's normalized. So, you know, they're in survival mode, almost, they're coasting, and they're unaware that actually I'm really struggling here, I'm in trouble. So, I'd be saying to your listeners, you know, ask yourself, when was the last time you were able to quieten your mind? When was the last time you were able to relax? Be still, just be in that moment, you know, kind of look up and smell the coffee, smell the flowers kind of stuff? And if the answer is God, I can't remember, or I'm not sure? Well, then maybe, you know, Turn2Me is the ideal place for them to come online and just test the waters. See, get those tips, you know, because anxiety and stress once it's identified, and you're, you know, you you equip yourself with the tools to manage it, it becomes a lot more manageable. To the point where you wonder, Oh, my God, how? How did I not realize? How did I not see it coming? You know, that these are things that you know, knowledge is power. I think every student in you know, the educational sphere can agree with that, they're all absorbing huge amount of knowledge in their chosen courses. So, you know, why not educate yourself around your own mental health, your own well being, you know, set yourself up properly for your chosen career that you want to move forward? You know, stress and anxiety, I would argue, are the pandemic, you know, they're up there with COVID If not surpassing COVID.

**Sarah Hughes** 11:25

I definitely agree with that. And in terms of, with, with the way things went with COVID, obviously, a lot of services had to shift rapidly to an online place, which is somewhere that Turn2Me was already occupying, did you guys see this much change or much shift or anything once locked down kind of hit?

**Suzanne Ennis** 11:42

Em, well, I think every charity, or service out there can say that certainly the demand increased, because a lot of people's mechanisms for coping, you know, gym, socializing, that kind of thing, they were all stripped back. They were all taken from them. So a lot of people, you know, it's all around, I suppose, the self care piece, how are you minding yourself and a lot of people's self care plans were really disrupted because of this, you know, and so it came to the forefront, certainly. So demands, a greater demand was certainly put on on the service. And I'd say most services worldwide.

**Sarah Hughes** 12:25

Absolutely. And I think one of the great things about Turn2Me with that demand, you know, it doesn't, it doesn't, it hasn't led to, because of the way you operate, particularly with the support groups and the thought catcher, it's not like that generated a waiting list or a queue before you could access the service.

**Suzanne Ennis** 12:43

You see this is it, it's there. And, you know, just to, I suppose, say, as well, in around the peer support, the thought catcher, you have two choices, you can post thoughts publicly, so other users can see them. But there's also a private option as well. So if you want it, it could be like an emotional diary or a mood diary for the user. And they can just track their own moods over, you know, a 10 day periods to 14 day periods, and just see themselves how they're feeling on any given day and keep it private for the moment. And again, it's just that, you know, it's very much you, they work to their own pace with this. But it's a great opportunity to take that first step for a hesitant person or students to, you know, dip their toe into that therapeutic environment. And, you know, see, what help is out there, what does support look like, what does it feel like? And I think, you know, if they were to read what other users are posting and putting up, they'd really realize, you know, I'm not the only one struggling here, I'm not the only one feeling this low, or you know, having these thoughts or whatever it may be that they're going through. But I suppose the message is, whatever your listeners are going through, it's valid.

**Sarah Hughes** 14:07

Absolutely

**Suzanne Ennis** 14:08

You know, so, I would really urge them to definitely plug into Turn2Me, and just explore and equip themselves with the tools that really might, you know, improve their quality of life.

**Sarah Hughes** 14:20

I think that's a really key point that you touched on there about problems being valid. I think there's a lot of sort of, across the board comparison of like, oh, well, I'm not as bad as or I might be worse than, and I think, you know, the key message is everybody's issues are important because they affect your life in some way. And I think the part you were saying there as well about, you know, being able to take things at your own pace, I think particularly for students sometimes life can get, it kind of comes in waves, you know, up around Christmas, it gets really hectic and then it dies down again and then it comes up again around exam time. And it I think you know, being able to have a place where you can touch base with your mental health without necessarily making a commitment to show up at a certain time on a certain day would be very helpful

**Suzanne Ennis** 15:10

Flexibility is huge with it, you dip in and dip out to suit yourself. There is no timetable. Now our peer to peer, we do operate it from 2pm to 2am, seven days a week. So there are those time constraints. But other than that,

**Sarah Hughes** 15:27

absolutely

**Suzanne Ennis** 15:28

It's available, you know, yeah, we're 12 hours, seven days a week, you know, at present.

**Sarah Hughes** 15:33

Fantastic.

**Suzanne Ennis** 15:34

So there is that flexibility is huge there. Yeah, absolutely.

**Sarah Hughes** 15:38

And I think going forward across the board, it's something that mental health services will need to look more at in terms of how can they be accessible to those who need it. And, you know, flexibility and listening to user need is is one of those key things. And it sounds like you guys have really done that in developing your services.

**Suzanne Ennis** 15:56

Well, that's it with the platform, we're able to see kind of presenting issues, so then we would regularly kind of review the groups to make sure that the groups are what users need, you know, we match that need. And it's also about I suppose, you know, for our users and your listeners, it's about, you know, this, you know, personal responsibility to allow yourself to feature in your own life, you know, we're all guilty of, you know, sometimes worrying about everybody else and everything else and ignoring ourselves neglecting ourselves, you know, and in this country I mean, you know, 'how are you?' 'I'm grand', it's up there with 'Hello'. You know, people ask the question, they don't wait for an answer, and people just 'I'm grand', and that person could be really struggling. You know, so it's about kind of looking at somebody in the eye, taking that moment. How are you? You know, but also people asking themselves that question, How am I? And honestly answering it, you know, and if the answer isn't something that, you know, we can't, I suppose the message is, we can't all be good, and grand all the time. That's a completely unrealistic, em, outcome to hope to achieve. That's not reflective of real life. You know, we all get curveballs thrown at us throughout our life. So it's about how can I help myself manage those curveballs, you know, like the stress of exams, social pressures, you know, college, but it can be great. It can also be quite a journey of self discovery. A lot of students can, you know, find themselves away from home for the first time or, you know, really outside their comfort zone, struggling with course choice, 'I always wanted to do this', and now that they're doing, it's suddenly realizing, 'Oh, God, no, maybe this isn't for me, have I made a horrible mistake?', you know, so there's huge, it's an awful lot of unknowns in the college life as well. You're meeting new people, you're making new friends. But for those who are more introverted, they can struggle with that. So there's a lot of curveballs there and barriers to be navigated by students. So why not arm yourself? Why not help yourself manage all of that in a healthier way? You know, build up your resilience.

**Sarah Hughes** 18:23

I think that's a really important takeaway point, you know, to, to kind of make that time for yourself and just check in with yourself and you know, that it's okay, if the answer isn't what you might want it to be when you ask yourself, How am I? So there are two questions that I ask every guest towards the end of each episode. And the first one, which I'm going to ask you is, if there's one thing that you wish every student knew, what would it be?

**Suzanne Ennis** 18:54

If there was one thing we wish every student knew. I would say prioritize yourself, you are the most important person in your life. And that's not something to be confused with being selfish or a touch narcissistic, or anything like that. You are the most important person in your life, and you need to mind yourself. So I would say to your listeners, ask yourself three questions. Every day. Am I being supportive of myself? Am I being mindful of myself? And am I being patient with myself?

**Sarah Hughes** 19:42

Those are three really good questions. I really like them. I'm going to start asking myself them I think they're they're a very kind way

**Suzanne Ennis** 19:49

They just shift the focus back to yourself but in a positive way.

**Sarah Hughes** 19:53

Yeah, there's a there's a lovely gentleness and softness about the approach that those questions take. Absolutely.

**Suzanne Ennis** 19:59

 And we all have to mind ourselves, you know, it's not about, you know, we all have an inner critic, very much present, you know that that's a very human trait almost. But it's also about well, you know, what about that the good voice, the positive voice. Where's that? And challenging that kind of negativity

**Sarah Hughes** 20:19

Absolutely. And giving it giving that kind voice space to come through.

**Suzanne Ennis** 20:23

 Yeah.

**Sarah Hughes** 20:24

And then the second question is, what is your favorite or your main act of self care that you yourself would engage in?

**Suzanne Ennis** 20:31

Self care is a wonderful thing. But my first I'm going to say that a good self care plan has got to be flexible, to life, I mean, life, no day is the same, and so it has to be flexible, and it can't become something else on a to do list, Oh, I must do this as well, you know, and so flexible, and manageable and sustainable, are the three things I would say are absolutely crucial to any workable self care plan. And for me, I've a number of things. I practice what I preach. Em, I love a bubble bath. That is my happy place to disappear with a bit of Norah Jones, good book, light a candle bubble bath, em I do some exercise, I like to run, I like to go for a walk. And and I get down on the floor and play with my son and allow myself to be a kid again.

**Sarah Hughes** 21:40

You know, that's something that people have touched on in a couple of other episodes as well. You know, getting in touch with your inner child, that seems to be a really good form of taking care of yourself.

**Suzanne Ennis** 21:49

Yeah, I mean, adulthood is full of, you know, big decisions, some life changing, you know, responsibilities, you know, all this grown up stuff. But I mean, you can't be that grown up all the time. Who wants to be the adult all the time? You need a break from it, you know? So, absolutely, it's hugely important to be able to tap into that inner child and laugh, you know, at yourself, alongside yourself, you know?

**Sarah Hughes** 22:17

Yeah. Have a little bit of fun in your life as well, where we can, yeah,

**Suzanne Ennis** 22:21

yeah, laughter is definitely the best medicine as they say.

**Sarah Hughes** 22:23

That's it. Well, listen, thanks very much for joining us, Suzanne. That was that was a lovely chat. And it was really interesting to hear all about Turn2Me and all the services that they offer and how they offer them as well.

**Suzanne Ennis** 22:35

Thanks so much for having me. It was an absolute pleasure.

**Sarah Hughes** 22:37

No problem. Thank you for listening to today's episode. Connecting Minds is made possible thanks to funding from the National Office for Suicide Prevention. If you have any comments or questions about today's episode, the podcast, or the work that USI are doing on student mental health, please feel free to contact us. Details of how to do so are available in the show notes. sources of support are also included in the show notes. Please reach out for help if you are struggling in any way with your mental health. Take care for now.