Tena koutou katoa
Nga mihi nui kia koutou katoa
Nō Heretaunga ahau
Kei Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki ahau e mahi ana
Ko Becky Dames tōku ingoa
Tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora koutou katoa

Kia ora everyone, my name is Becky, I’m a library assistant at Lincoln University, and this is the title of my presentation for you today
And THIS is the title I wish I’d given it,

Because there’s nothing quite so frustrating as trying to help an anonymous someone on the internet who doesn’t have to respond, and can disappear at any second.
THIS is what I’m here to talk about.

At Lincoln University. I work in the department of Library, Teaching and Learning, henceforth referred to as LTL, and we offer a service through our website called AskLive.

AskLive is a live online text chat that connects users with a member of LTL staff.

These are just a few of the awesome questions we get asked on a daily basis. My personal favourite at the bottom there, asking about local student pubs.
So how does it all work?

Well the user sees the ad for the AskLive service, They click on the ad, a pop-up window appears, they type “Hi”, or sometimes “Help!” or sometimes “Are you there Moriarty?”

And a member of staff replies.

The user presents their problem - and we try our best to help before they get bored and disappear forever, like I said the social etiquette of not walking away in the middle of a conversation doesn’t really seem to apply online. Occassionally you have to come to terms with the fact that you’re sending all this great info out there, and no-one’s listening on the other end.
Online chat is by no means exclusive to Lincoln. But there are a few things we do that are a bit different and that’s what I want to talk about today.

So today we're going to look at the history of the implementation of this service at Lincoln.
The expansion of the advertising of this service and it's effect on uptake.
The innovative staffing model within Library, Teaching and Learning.
And an in-depth examination of the data from the year just ended.
In July 2014 the LTL website launched their online chat service, allowing online users to enter into a live text chat with a member of LTL staff. Prior to this launch, all staff underwent training on how to use the system, how to customise the backend display to their preferences, and how to answer queries in this live online environment. It’s like a reference interview, but without the body language cues….although sometimes a delay in replying can seem very telling…even though they’re probably just making a cup of tea. It is not as uncommon as you would think to have a person come back over an hour later and expect to pick up their conversation exactly where they left off.

The project began with a six month beta test before bringing all LTL staff onboard. The choice of AskLive and Pidgin software allows Lincoln to utilise an innovative first come first served staffing model which removes the need to have a scheduled staffing roster – more on this later.

As you can see here on our old website, the service was initially just a static button on the homepage.
In early 2016 we updated our website, and launched the new AskLive button and introduced the 30second pop-ups, both of which were now available on every single page of the site.

LTL, or Library, Teaching & Learning, is exactly what it's name implies, it is Library support. It is Learning support, and it is Teaching support. And it's an important philosophy for us that no matter where you are on the site, or what material you're looking at, the message is consistently "we can help you with this, all you need to do is ask”

A couple of years ago when I first got interested in this topic, I did a survey of all the NZ university libraries offering this online chat service, and at the time Lincoln was definitely the most in your face advertising of all of them. Interestingly I actually spoke to Vic on the day they were shutting down the service because their model wasn’t working for them, which just spurred my interest further into why ours was.
Uptake of the service has increased every year. Users are of course completely anonymous, but anecdotally sometimes from the tone of the conversation you can tell if this is a person who's used the service before coming back, and we certainly feel like we've seen a lot more of that in the past year. There is a spike at the beginning of Semester 1 in March, and of course the natural drop-offs over Summer. We'll look more at the trends throughout the year later, but for now it's just nice to acknowledge the significant increase for each year that we've been operating, we really hope it just keeps going up.
At the beginning of 2016 this service was also extended to be accessible from the LibrarySearch primo results screen, basically the catalogue. And at the beginning of 2017 we added a link to the student Learn page.

Expanding the service to these sites has had an effect on the types of questions we’re receiving. From the library catalogue we’re seeing more questions from students needed help accessing e-resources, because the ad for our service is right there on the page they’re having the issue. Colloquially I’d say the problem is usually about a 1/3 to do with logging in and passwords, 1/3 genuinely broken links, and 1/3 lack of basic search skills. In cases where a database or e-journal link is actually broken it’s a brilliant user-driven alert system for us so we can get onto the problem and get it fixed long before we would have ever discovered the issue ourselves.
Very quickly here’s a look at the number of queries from users experiencing difficulty accessing e-content in the past year. Take note of the spikes in March and May...when the first and second assignments for the year are generally due.
From the student Learn page, which is like blackboard or moodle, we’re seeing a big jump in student administration questions, from mid 2016-Jan 2017 we had about 2 per month, a natural spike at the beginning of the university year you would expect with new enrolments and first years, but the continuing high numbers through to June definitely tell us something interesting about where students are looking for information, and how they view LTL within the wider university community.

This actually leads on really nicely to my next point which is that we don’t have all the answers, especially for university things like enrolment queries or IT help, but even closer to home, within LTL, I wouldn’t expect a teaching advisor to know the ins and outs of say, thesis deposits which I’m in charge of, but that’s how our staffing model works.
Talk about our staffing model

We’re small so we know everyone – or can yell across the office
We can fit our cheat sheets onto a single page

Skype for business allows us to find the right person for the wider university

We have rarely had a problem with not giving the answer straight away, students are generally just as grateful to be pointed in the right direction for their next step as they are to be given an answer outright.

Often it’s a personal choice between a straight answer and a tutorial, e.g. how do I reference a news site? Judgement call based on time available, how competent they seem with a computer, and hundreds of other tiny clues that we all know from a traditional reference interview, but learn to reinterpret in this online environment.
Here are the number of queries answered per staff member since we began.

Not that it’s at all relevant but I will just point out that when you transfer a chat it gets recorded under the name of the person it was transferred to...not the one who originally answered it. So if you were perhaps say a referencing expert, you could expect to get a number of chats transferred to you and this might just be enough to give you the edge over the person who was coming second in the overall stats. Purely hypothetically of course. *wink*
This is the same report, but just run from the beginning of 2017.

I realise the numbers are tiny, and they’re more for the interest of looking at later, but it’s interesting to see that there’s definitely a top 3 of answerers, and these are the ones who naturally gain the most general knowledge about goings on and who are looked to leaders in this service, even occasionally being asked to slow down their response times, to give others a chance. After that there’s a big group of about a dozen staff who have answered enough questions this year to be fairly confident in using the service, although some of them might wait until they’re the only one left in the office to bite the bullet as it were. And the single digits, and the missing names….well we’re working on it.

Generally uptake across staff has been excellent. This year we added a login for student assistants so they could man the queue while on the front desk in the evenings and weekends. As long as one staff member is logged in then the service will show as available. Which is why most of us have it set to change our status to unavailable after a minute of inactivity at our computers.
So I’ve been talking about we and us and our, but the fact is I didn’t implement any of this clever technology stuff. I just think it’s really interesting and I love being the staff member on the other end of it.

I starting looking deeper into AskLive for an assignment for Kotuku16 – (2018 registrations now open – please see a member of the LIANZA team for more details, or head to the talk Wednesday 11am with Jane Cherry) and as I was looking into it it became more and more apparent that the data had so much more value beyond simply recording the details of the service.

By knowing what questions students were asking and when they were asking them, we could track trends in their behaviour, identify gaps in our information resources, collaborate with the wider university to solve issues together, and put together some pretty impressive statistics for the Council Bigwigs which is always a nice thing to be able to do around funding allocation time in a university.

So this is what we did, with the help of two of my amazing colleagues, Deborah and Hadrian, we created a spreadsheet of every query from July 16 – Jun 17. We recorded the IP address, the referring URL, Date/Time, all that stuff. Then we manually went through and read every transaction to determine which category best fit the question
being asked – which was actually a bit of a nightmare. Hadrian and I ended up doing almost the entire list independently then arguing...I mean compromising...at the end to come up with a single category.
Every main topic is broken down into subtopics, and all of this clever data can be played around with in interesting ways.
A full set of the anonymised data with a breakdown by main topic and subtopic is available on FigShare, link at the end.

So we can pull some cool stats out of the data, for example this graph shows the trend of queries across a 24-hour period. We could repeat this for each day of the week, and see if there were peak times, or outliers, like a spike in printing questions on Friday afternoons before assignments are due.
These are all the queries that were transferred from one staff member to another, particularly endnote, referencing and turnitin which are quite specialist subjects in LTL.

These graphs are barely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the data we can pull out of our analysis. Analysing every query and manually categorising it took time, though not as much as we expected. But even if we’d just stuck to the data that is collected by the AskLive/LibraryH3lp software, there are still some really cool trends to discover.
So we’ve looked at the implementation, the advertising, the staffing model and briefly explored just some of the cool things you can do with this sort of data. I love the AskLive service, sometimes when I’m at my desk for hours upon hours of cataloguing, having a question pop up is just the quick change I need to keep me interested in my work and remind me why I love it.
We’re very big on open data at Lincoln. Our LTL site has monthly stats you can follow about our AskLive service, and a truncated, anonymised version of the data I used for this presentation is available for you to play around with as well.

Ka ki-te ano, thank you for listening.
Any questions?