

Youth Studies Australia

Media release: 15 March 2006

A blip on the radar: Young people's mental health

COAG's recognition in February that mental health is 'an issue of national significance' and 'a major problem for the Australian community' follows on from the announcement by the Federal Government late last year of 'funding of \$69 million ... to help young people with mental health problems'. Mental health is a major issue for young people, which has only just begun to show up on the political radar. We are so concerned about the issue that we have devoted the entire March 2006 issue of *Youth Studies Australia* to cutting-edge research from several leaders in the field of youth mental health and wellbeing.

We preview the Australia 21 report on young people's wellbeing, a collaborative cross-discipline project that identifies flashpoints and signposts for future research and policy. We outline features of an effective service partnership that provides assistance for young Australians with dual diagnosis. We consider the mental health impacts for young people of the widespread association in Australian culture of 'happiness' with hedonistic behaviour and excessive consumption. We report on a strategy that young people are increasingly using for mental health problems – self-help support groups. We provide insight into the healthy and not-so-healthy things that young people think contribute to their sense of wellbeing. And, finally, we report on the development of an innovative Internet-based program that targets anxiety in young people.

Success & wellbeing: A preview of the Australia 21 report on young people's wellbeing

by Richard Eckersley, Ani Wierenga & Johanna Wyn

Australia 21, a non-profit research company, and the Australian Youth Research Centre carried out a cross-disciplinary project to better understand the points of convergence and divergence in the commentaries and evidence on young people's well-being.

The results suggest a need for a greater focus in both research and policy on the "big picture" of the broad social changes reshaping life today; total health and well-being, not just ill health; the "mainstream" of youth, not only the marginalised and at-risk; and the social and cultural resources that are as important to wellbeing as material and economic resources.

Email: Richard.Eckersley@anu.edu.au

Media inquiries: Sue Headley, Editor, *Youth Studies Australia*

P: (03) 6226 2591 **F:** (03) 6226 2578 **E:** Susan.Headley@utas.edu.au **W:** www.acys.info



VOLUME 25 NUMBER 1 MARCH 2006

People today live in a world of improved services and faster machines, but they do not 'feel' any better because the thing that justifies and validates their existence is missing.

Where to from here: Guiding for mental health for young people with complex needs

by Andrew Bruun & Christopher Hynan

Experienced practitioners in the youth sector have always realised that a young person's general health and well-being can be influenced positively by effective, client-centred, relationship-based practice. Here, the authors use the analogy of 'practitioner as guide' to focus on one critical aspect of this kind of work. They aim to demonstrate how the practitioner as guide can be instrumental in building the capacity of young people with complex needs to maximise their mental health potential.

Email: Andrew Brunn: abruun@ysas.org.au

Being true to oneself: The role of authenticity in promoting youth mental health

by William Hallam, Craig Olsson, Glenn Bowes & John Toumbourou

Young people are growing up in a society that teaches them that feeling good is the main game. And it also teaches them that to feel good, you need, at least, material wealth, beauty, sex and education. This is despite research that shows that hedonistic people are less happy. The authors of this paper suggest that perhaps we need to teach children that self-indulgence and pleasure are not, in fact, virtues, or even necessary for happiness. Self worth and a sense of meaning may be more related to a commitment to generative social values than to hedonic values of self-interest.

Email: William Hallam: billhallam@optushome.com.au

Self-help support groups: Adding to the toolbox of mental health care options for young men

by Ann Dadich

Australian young men do not readily access conventional mental health services because, it is said, they believe they are futile. However, this research reveals that young men involved in self-help support groups feel that these groups offer emotional and practical support; information on mental health matters; the opportunity to relate to the mental health experiences of others; inspiration and hope; strong social networks; and a reminder of the importance of self-care in the management of mental health issues.

Email: A.Dadich@uws.edu.au

Health & wellbeing: How do young people see these concepts?

by Gary Easthope & Rob White

Interviews with 73 young Tasmanians aged 11 to 18 demonstrate that social relationships are central to a feeling of well-being among this age group. The young people accepted the public health message that they are individually responsible for their health through lifestyle choices, especially food choices, but their responses indicate that social relationships are crucial influences on health behaviour, both positively and negatively.

Email: Gary.Easthope@utas.edu.au

The Cool Teens CD-ROM: A multimedia self-help program for adolescents with anxiety

by Mike Cunningham, Ronald Rapee & Heidi Lyneham

The Cool Teens CD-ROM has been developed as a self-help treatment option for young people with anxiety. It is a home-based cognitive behavioural therapy program that helps users to develop skills to cope better with the negative feelings associated with anxiety, such as fear, worry, nervousness or shyness. It has been designed for 14- to 18-year-olds and uses a combination of media (text, audio, illustrations, cartoons and live video) to deliver information, examples, activities and exercises. The program is being evaluated for its ability to reduce the symptoms and life interference caused by anxiety.

Email: Michael.Cunningham@psy.mq.edu.au

Media inquiries: Sue Headley, Editor, *Youth Studies Australia*

P: (03) 6226 2591 **F:** (03) 6226 2578 **E:** Susan.Headley@utas.edu.au **W:** www.acys.info

The knowledge that a reliable guide can be accessed when the going gets tough can add to a young person's sense of security.

Rather than teach hedonic values of self-interest to our young people, it may be time to teach the rewards of responsibility and commitment to generative social values and social wellbeing.

The young men recognised a void in their lives that required change at a personal level and/or a social level.

'I get along with my parents really well and like I'd never do anything to hurt them, so if they don't know about it then it's not too bad.'

Our research also lays the groundwork for the further exploration of self-help computer-based therapy, including studies on the potential cost savings of this delivery method.