



## Students at risk

### Interagency collaboration in Queensland

Research indicates that collaborative partnerships between educators and other professionals are required to facilitate the successful inclusion of 'at risk' students in mainstream classrooms. The three-year Social Well-Being in Mackay Schools (SWIMS) project is an example of such an interagency collaboration. Findings from a three-year evaluation of this project are outlined in a paper by Central Queensland University researchers Associate Professor Bruce Allen Knight, Dr Cecily Knight and Dr Daniel Teghe, which was published in the June 2007 edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.26, n.2).

This project was undertaken by the Queensland Department of Families (now known as the Department of Child Safety), Education Queensland and three Queensland schools (two primary schools and one high school). It involved the development and trial of 'a model of service delivery in Queensland state schools that promotes collaboration and information sharing between the systems of support for children and youth in educational settings and the formal state protection agency'. A SWIMS worker was employed to help stakeholders develop and implement a collaborative service delivery model to address the needs of stakeholders.

Data for the evaluation were collected through annual stakeholder questionnaires, interviews with the three SWIMS workers employed over the course of the project, focus group discussions and case note analyses. Results indicated that the project was successful in achieving its goals, generating positive outcomes such as addressing school staff members' needs for information on 'at risk' issues, increasing their knowledge of community support services and increasing the capacity of schools to provide information and resources on 'at risk issues' to both members of staff and members of the school community.

The researchers attributed the success of the project to the flexibility of the service delivery model developed by stakeholders. This flexibility 'allowed for a great range of services and strategies to be implemented by the SWIMS worker in context'. Although outcomes from the SWIMS project 'varied in extent and quality' across participating schools, the project generally increased the 'speed and efficiency with which at-risk issues [were] addressed within school communities'.

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### Extracts from Youth Monitor YSA v.25 N.4

#### Year 12 results indicate likelihood of university completion

Longitudinal research released in April by the Australian Council for Educational Research suggests that students' Tertiary Entrance scores are the strongest indicator of whether they will complete their university education. The study followed the progress of students who began their university studies between 1998 and 2001. According to ACER chief executive Professor Geoff Masters, results showed that once students entered university, their socioeconomic backgrounds and whether they attended a public or a private school had little impact on their chances of completing their course. 'To improve equity in university graduation rates, more needs to be done to assist students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to complete Year 12 and go on to university,' he said (*Adelaide Advertiser*, 19/4/07, p.14).

#### Vice-Chancellors stick up for cash-strapped students

In March, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee made a series of recommendations to the Federal Government to improve the financial situation of university students. These recommendations were made in light of findings from the AVCC report *Australian university student finances 2006*, which were based on a survey of nearly 19,000 university students. The survey found 24.4% of undergraduates took out HECS loans to

# Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies

Extracts from  
Youth Monitor  
...CONTINUED

## Occupational aspirations and expectations of Australian adolescents

W. Patton & P. Creed, *Australian Journal of Career Development*, v.16, n.1, 2007, pp.46-59.

A survey was conducted among 333 students (169 females, 164 males) in Years 8-12 at a high school in suburban Brisbane, Queensland, to investigate the relationships between students' occupational aspirations and expectations and their levels of attainment of 'key career development constructs'. Both occupational status aspirations/expectations and specific job aspirations/expectations were measured. The latter were coded according to the RIASEC model (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional). Career development was surveyed using measures of career maturity, career indecision, self-esteem, career goals and school achievement. Students' occupational status aspirations were associated with their levels of school achievement, self-esteem and career maturity. Students with job aspiration/expectation discrepancies (30% of all students) were associated with career indecision, lower-status job expectations, lower self-esteem, lower career goals and poorer career development attitudes than their 'non-discrepant peers'. Those with occupational status discrepancies were associated with higher career indecision and lower self-esteem. Results indicate the need for more comprehensive career information programs for all secondary students.

## Helping Friends: A peer support program for senior secondary students

J. Dillon & A. Swinbourne, *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, v.6, n.1, 2007.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Helping Friends peer support training program as a tool to improve students' access to appropriate social and personal support, researchers gathered pre- and post-program questionnaire data from Year 11 students at 12 of the 22 Queensland schools participating in the program. The Social Provision Scale (SPS) was used to measure all students' perceptions of social support, while another scale measuring knowledge of and attitudes towards helping behaviours was completed by only students directly involved in the training program. Results showed small but statistically significant increases in three of the six SPS subscales (reassurance of worth, attachment and nurturance) across the wider student body following the delivery of the program, while a significant increase in knowledge and use of helping skills (particularly verbal and non-verbal communication and active listening) was recorded among program participants. Further research could examine how peer support networks could be used to provide early intervention for a range of issues affecting students.

pay for their studies (up from 10.7% in 2000), while 40% of undergraduate students surveyed believed that the paid work they undertook to support themselves was adversely affecting their studies (up from 16% in 2000). The AVCC's recommendations included the introduction of a university student transport pass and a 25% increase in Youth Allowance payments for students over the age of 18 who no longer live at home (*Canberra Times*, 16/3/07, p.6).

## Chronic illness and school absence

A new collaborative research project will examine the social and academic effects of young people's regular or extended absence from school due to chronic illness. The 3-year project will focus on 30 students in late primary and secondary school, examining why some students seem to cope with the consequences of school absence better than others. Researchers from the Centre for Adolescent Health, the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Education and the Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute will conduct this project (*Age*, 19/3/07, p.11).

## Metal helps gifted students

A survey of the musical preferences of 1,057 members of England's National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth found that gifted students who prefer heavy metal music have lower than average self-esteem and listen to heavy metal to relieve stress, frustration and anger. NAGTY researcher Stuart Cadwallar said that the findings contradict previous studies which link preferences for heavy metal with 'poor academic performance and delinquency' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23/3/07, p.1; *Adelaide Advertiser*, 24/2/07, p.21; *Mercury 'Magazine' supplement*, 31/3/07, p.2).



## ➤ Youth Field Xpress

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