

We are employed at Wodonga Middle Years College in Regional Victoria as part of the well-being team. Our college caters for year 7-9 (ages 12-15) with two campuses catering for approximately 900 students in total.

Wodonga is a rural city with a large low socio economic status and an estimated population of 38,000.

Brianna is the case Manger here at the college and her role is to focus on supporting students in need and place emphasis on their social and emotional development and educational needs.

Linda is the adolescent health nurse and her role is one of health promotion and also to focus on student well-being.

We are contributing this submission due to our concerns re: the number and extent of students currently engaging in self-harm.

The following submission questions have been chosen as they are most relevant to the current work of which we do with students that self-harm.

- **Why children and young people engage in intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviour.**

It is our experience that these students that primarily self-harm often have had or currently are experiencing a range of intense emotions. These emotions are often a result of past or present experiences including: abuse; family breakdown; relationship issues; identity issues; self-esteem issues; peer influence. Based on the discussion held with students, students frequently identify that self-harm is used in order to forget past experiences; make the pain feel more real; stop them from doing anything more harmful; to give them a sense of relief; they are unable to find another coping strategy that gives them the same sensation that self-harm does.

- **The incidence and factors contributing to contagion and clustering involving children and young people.**

It has been our experience in the school setting that there has been an epidemic rise in the number of students that are engaging in self-harm. Based on the current involvement with these students the influence of peers has been a large contributor to the number of students self-harming.

Within our school community we have noted that the negative impact and role that social media has on the number of students self-harming has been significant.

- **The barriers which prevent young children and young people from seeking help.**

In our school setting our policy about self-harm is that when a disclosure is made by a student parents must be notified. My experience has been that many students will avoid discussing with me their current self-harming behaviour due to the fear of their parents being notified. This in turn results in less students receiving support.

- **The impediments to the accurate identification and recording of intentional self-harm in children and young people, the consequences of this, and suggestions for reform.**

In a school setting most of the time our data is not distributed or used for statistical purposes. Because of the age of our students most of our data is not distributed anywhere. In discussion with local primary schools we are also aware that there are young people self-harming whilst in the primary school setting.

- **The types of programs and practices that effectively target and support children and young people who are engaging in the range of intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviours.**

The well-being team has developed a resource for individuals whom self-harm. This resource is called 'Keeping Myself Safe'. It assists students in identifying the reasons behind their self-harm but predominantly focuses on healthier coping strategies; how to manage these feelings; where to seek support. This resource is intended to support not just the student but parents; family and teaching staff also. It provides information and education about self-harm and information about further resources such as online information and counselling services as well as identifying the students individual coping strategies.

- **The feasibility and effectiveness of conducting public education campaigns aimed at reducing the number of children who engage in self-harm.**

Due to the rise in number of students that are self-harming we have developed a workshop that has been presented thus far to 2/3 of the student population. This workshop identifies possible student stressors and resilient behaviour. We specifically discuss what self-harm is and relate it to other forms of coping skills however place a focus on this being an unhealthy form of coping strategy. We discuss why people self-harm, the associated problems with self-harm and identify a list of alternatives to ultimately decrease and stop self-harming. We inform students of how to best support a friend engaging in self-harm and where/how to seek support for this friend. We finish the session with a worksheet that identifies many different coping skills and the way in which they may assist us.

This is the first year that we have addressed the issue specifically with such a large cohort of students. We hope that being proactive will be a preventative measure and enable students to seek support and identify other coping skills.

We appreciate being given an opportunity to discuss our current school strategies in addressing the issue of student self-harm and look forward to the commissioner's report to parliament.