

Community Changes Attitudes to Youth Mental Health



PICTURED: Mansfield's youth mental health strategy is raising awareness across the community to support the area's young people.

Central Hume Primary Care Partnership (Central Hume PCP) improves the health and wellbeing of people in its communities.

We do this by helping organisations work together on complex health and social challenges in our region. This way, we make the most of available resources, avoid duplication of effort and achieve outcomes our community needs and deserves.

While there have been improvements in awareness and understanding about youth mental health in Mansfield following initial responses to a youth mental health survey, one young person says education about mental health needs to be broadened throughout the community.

Alyssa Lamont, who is in year 9 at Mansfield Secondary College said things have improved a lot in the last six months.

"The welfare team at the school understand mental health a lot more and the teachers who previously didn't understand, or came across as not caring about it, have also changed," Alyssa said.

"I've been struggling personally with some mental health issues and it's important to acknowledge this, so that others in the community know they are not alone," she said.

Changes at the school resulted from a project that started in 2016 with a survey of young people aged 12-25, parents and services in Mansfield. The survey was designed to inform the development of a Youth Strategy.

With mental health clearly identified as an issue of concern, Central Hume Primary Care Partnership funded Mansfield Shire Council to develop a community wide strategy for youth mental health.

In 2018, the project started using the Resilient Youth Australia, Resilience Survey which measures the strengths, mental health and hopefulness of young people.

Mansfield Secondary College shares the view that youth mental health is a community-wide responsibility. Students have completed the survey over two consecutive years.

College principal, Timothy Hall said the strength of the program is in the collective ownership of the developmental opportunities in youth mental health.

"We have appreciated the opportunity to work in partnership to support the growth of our students," Mr Hall said.

Mansfield District Hospital Director of Operations, Mel Green, who was the Secondary College Board President at the time the project commenced, said it was good to see results improve from year one to year two in the areas of:

- Positive relationships
- Understanding self
- Safety
- Learning and engagement
- Positive values

"It's been an extensive response. Mental health first aid training has been provided to teachers and parents. We've established pathways for young people to have access to their doctors. There's a secondary school psychologist one day a week. Eating disorders workshops and DARTA (drug and alcohol research training authority) workshops were held for students and parents."

"The teachers also had education from Resilient Youth on the first year data and the school has introduced new programs, such as Hands On Learning."

Hands On Learning gives students from grade 6 to year 9 one day a week where they work to a focus plan and undertake hands-on projects such as building, gardening, community and youth centre projects.

Alyssa said she has seen improvements in students because of this program.

“Hands On Learning has been a big help. It’s great because there are not a lot of classes in our year level that are not academically based. Having that day out of class, and with a focus plan about what we need to accomplish in everyday life and daily school, has been really helpful. It’s helped a lot of the students; they have improved their life skills, interacting with other people and really improved their academic efforts and their behaviour,” she said.

Alyssa said there needs to be broader school and community awareness of the benefits of programs like Hands On Learning and young people’s mental health needs.

Rachelle Kinsmore, a parent and the youth group co-ordinator in Bonnie Doon is one of many who played her part in broadening understanding by taking part in the Mental Health First Aid training.

“After doing the training, I feel more confident in recognising the signs of someone who might be affected by a mental health issue. I learnt about chatting to them, guiding them to the proper channels. I learnt of more resources than I knew before. Listening to people’s experiences and sharing knowledge, built connections in the community. I feel equipped to get involved,” Rachelle said.

The Resilience Survey data enables the school to compare its students’ results to national data. The school will take part in the survey for three years.

► Funding

The project was funded by Central Hume PCP through the Mansfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership and the Mansfield District Hospital also provided funding for the project.

► PCP Role

The Central Hume PCP role was:

- Supporting the Mansfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership to collaborate on a common interest/local priority issue – youth mental health.
- Supporting the Mansfield Shire Council through the Mansfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership to implement their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021. This project focused on priority theme 2 – community resilience and connectivity.
- Supporting the development and implementation of the youth strategy through the Mansfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership.
- Supporting and strengthening the coordination and collaboration of existing services.
- Supporting the strengthening of partnerships with service providers in the area.
- Providing the platform for strategic localised planning for health and wellbeing – Mansfield Health and Wellbeing Partnership.

► **To learn more about Central Hume PCP please visit our website:**
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