

Rethink needed to help our kids cope

**CHRIS RUSSELL
REBECCA DIGIROLAMO**

THE treatment of youth mental health needs a rethink to prevent poor outcomes for an already stressed cohort of young people, experts say.

Mike Kyrios, director of the Orama Institute for Mental Health and Wellbeing at Flinders University, said prevention rather than cure and addressing less serious cases sooner would free up a clogged system and help young people most in need.

"There is a lot that people can do to rethink their futures when their world is in turmoil, but in order to do that you need to be strong and resilient," Professor Kyrios said.

"That's where preventive and early-intervention programs can be very effective."

He said that, on top of the usual pressures on teens and the anxiety that often comes at that developmental stage, young people this year faced disruption and uncertainty as a result of COVID-19,

which also prompted fears about their family and reduced job and career options.

Professor Kyrios called for a rethink of the mental health workforce so outreach programs run by, say, psychology graduates could pick up low to moderate cases, leaving highly trained professionals to deal with severe or complex cases.

"Early intervention is the key because it's always harder to bring people back once they've gone too far," he said.

He said data collected in conjunction with the South Australian Health and Research Institute shows depression, anxiety and stress levels are all increasing and "the pipeline of cases coming into mental service will grow."

"The longer this (COVID-19) drags along, there will be key groups that

will suffer more and youth is one of those groups."

Professor Kyrios said young people relied on peer relationships that were affected by diminished face-to-face contact.

And, as a result of the pandemic forcing more young people online, this allowed bullying to be more prevalent.

Uncertainty of this year had amplified stress for teens, Joe Tucci, chief executive of the Australian Childhood Foundation, said.

"And they missed out on those usual rites of passage – of playing in the top footy team, of the formal dance, graduation might not be the same," he said.

"These are all markers that they are growing up.

"If you don't have that reinforcement that change is OK, and you've got all this uncertainty going on around you, you're not going to be as positive about your future. It all becomes just a bit more threatening."

Dr Tucci urged the com-

munity to consider other ways to celebrate with young people as they hit milestones.

In launching the Sunday Mail's Let's Talk campaign last weekend, South Australia's chief psychiatrist John Brayley said mental health and drug and alcohol emergency department presentations across Adelaide hospitals increased 10 per cent in August compared to same time last year. He said half of the increase were young people aged 25 and under.

Adelaide's Wellness and Healing Centre founder, Keyvan Abak, said his service had been overwhelmed with referrals for young people this year.

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**NEXT WEEK:
MEN'S MENTAL
HEALTH**



“
Karolyn Ferguson
 Chairwoman of her school wellbeing committee. We set up a student services site so, whether students were in school or out of school, they had more access to counselling resources and IT support.



“
Angus Clarke
 Wants to study psychology. It's one of the most important jobs that you can have with the changing world.

“
Nevie Peart
 Will study biodiversity and conservation. There's going to be a lot more jobs open up in sustainability and the environment.

“
Emilia McDonald
 Wants to study creative arts. With COVID-19, I know a lot of artists have lost jobs. But I'm passionate about it and that's not going to change.

BY THE NUMBERS

42%

increase in mental-health presentations at the Women's and Children's Hospital in August compared to the same time last year.

10 PER CENT
 rise in calls to the SA Child and Mental Health Services line in May and June compared to last year.

48,000

South Australians aged 15-24 years employed full-time, September 2020. Was 52,500 in September 2019.

12.2 PER CENT
 unemployment rate for SA, 15-24-year-olds, September. Compared to 6.7 per cent for all people 15. (Original rates, not seasonally adjusted)

66%

of South Australians going without food at least once a week aged 18 to 25.