

EDUCATION

School

**BANDING TOGETHER**

Some of the state's best student musicians will take the stage at the Melbourne Schools Bands Festival. Robert Blackwood Hall, Clayton campus, Monash University, August 7-19. Details: 9905 1678.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Canada's 7 Fingers troupe will discuss and demonstrate their storytelling techniques in Physical Theatre Unleashed. Sunday Soapbox, George Adams Gallery, Arts Centre, St Kilda Road, 3pm. Free.

RULE THE SCHOOL

Professor David Hopkins will pursue the theme of system leadership and school transformation. Public Lecture Theatre, Old Arts Building, University of Melbourne, tomorrow, 6-7pm. Inquiries: 8344 8640.

TAKE THE PLUNGE

Join Melbourne Aquarium educators for professional development designed for middle and later-years teachers. September 7. Book: 9923 5911. Email events to: jgrumont@theage.com.au

Rapid growth for troubled teens

A bit of excitement can help young people with behavioural problems, writes **Margaret Cook**.

WHITE-water rafting, abseiling, bushwalking, rope courses and cross-country skiing aren't just fun activities. According to Monash University psychologist Simon Crisp, adventure-based intervention can also be a treatment for psychological and behavioural problems in young people.

"Research has found that the physical challenge and risk-taking element is important," says Dr Crisp. "However, equally important is the opportunity to develop social relationships, be part of a team, help other people and have them help you, realise that others have similar problems and be valued for your skill and achievements."

Dr Crisp started his "wilderness adventure therapy" as a day program at Austin Hospital in 1992. It has also run at Barwon Health Adolescent Mental Health Service and, for the past five years, in Victorian schools.

Generally, the students in years 9 and 10 are referred by teachers. "The indicators are students who aren't doing well and are at risk of dropping out — not because of their educational ability but because of social or emotional problems," says Dr Crisp, who has studied adventure and wilderness therapy programs in the US, Britain and New Zealand through a Churchill Fellowship.

"Some students are depressed, withdrawn and anxious, while others are disruptive and challenging for teachers and parents. Often they find it hard to adjust to a structured routine or they have poor peer relationships."

Some students may have attempted suicide or self-harm.

Dr Crisp says his program is the first of its type in Australia to show research evidence of sustained therapeutic benefits with a range of problems.

"It also appears to be as effective in alleviating adolescent depression and anxiety as the standard treatment of anti-depressant medication and counselling."

The program runs for 10 weeks with groups of eight students. It includes a clinical

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DR SIMON CRISP

assessment of each by Dr Crisp, individual goal-setting (for example, learning how to share or limit impulsive behaviour), group counselling and joint counselling sessions with students, parents and teachers.

The focus is on outdoor adventures, spread over single days, several days and a week. These are voluntary and aimed at the least able member of the group, says Dr Crisp, who is an accredited outdoor leader.

Research has found that three-quarters of mental health problems in adults begin in adolescence, he says.

Also, an estimated three-quarters of young people affected

do not receive professional support. Reasons include not knowing where to turn, the unavailability of services in their area, or a fear of being stigmatised if they seek counselling.

Sadly, these young people are at greater risk of not completing school, which affects their long-term employment prospects.

Other risks include substance abuse and becoming involved in "detrimental" relationships, says Dr Crisp.

"We're now using the program in a way to detect these young people early," he says. "Both males and females find the activities appealing and it's something they can succeed in. They don't feel very capable at school, where they tend to get attention for their behaviour rather than their performance."

Teachers and parents report better relationships with the young people and less negative behaviour after they take part in the program, he says.

The students also have higher self-esteem, are better socialised and are more emotionally resilient and optimistic. Many complete, and succeed in, school.

The program costs several thousand dollars a student, usually paid by schools from their budget or through government or philanthropic grants.

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The wilderness adventure therapy program for schools includes white-water rafting, snowy expeditions in the Alps and bushwalking.

