Colleges help mental health

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

SARAH GARVIS

CUTS to adult re-entry programs could have a damaging impact on people with mental illnesses, a leading academic says.

Flinders University Associate Professor Reg Nixon, who also is a clinical psychologist, said adult re-entry was a strong way of reconnecting mental illnesses sufferers with their communities.

"I think there's a possibility that this meets a gap that these people don't get elsewhere," Assoc. Prof. Nixon said.

"It's a different type of help.

"Rather than relying on therapy it enables clients to help themselves and they don't have to see health professionals as regularly."

The State Government recently announced it would cut $20.3 million over three years from adult re-entry schools, including Hamilton Secondary College.

Hamilton adult campus principal Peter Tucker said there were about 200 students completing SACE at the school, which left about 1100 students attending skills courses.

While he could not quantify how many had mental health issues, he said there was "quite a number of them who have written to me and said Hamilton has had a positive affect on their lives",

"Anecdotally a lot of people have said this has got them out of the house and thinking about getting back to employment," he said.

Mr Tucker said some students had issues with agoraphobia or depression.

"It is a gentle way of getting back in. It gives them confidence and a routine and structure in their life which is important when people are depressed.

"Students make that step, they see their own potential and are encouraged to re-engage with society and education.

"There has been a big handful of people who have written or sat in my office and told me that Hamilton has gotten them outside the house."

Assoc Prof Nixon said the mature-age schools were particularly helpful for people suffering any form of depression.

"Often people with depression are very withdrawn, so just being in a classroom with other people gives them reinforcement of their social relationships."

Mental Health Coalition of SA executive director Geoff Harris said education and training was an important form of recovery for people with mental health issues.

"When organisations work to support people with mental health issues they look at a range of options and for a lot of people that's working towards work-related qualifications," Mr Harris said.

"Education helps to build up their confidence and self-esteem and is a real motivator."