Changing pre-service teacher training to change young people’s lives: The Response Ability programme

**Response Ability:** Funded since 1997 by: 
Australian Government Department of Health

**A key initiative of:**
Everymind is a leading national organisation dedicated to reducing mental illness and suicide and improving wellbeing for all Australians.

**Why children and young people?**
- Half of all lifetime mental illnesses start by age 14 and three quarters by age 24 (Caswell et al., 2005).
- In any 12 months, 1 in 5 Australians experience mental illness (ABS 2007. N 4528.0).
- Mental health is important for a person’s overall physical health, wellbeing, development, social functioning, capacity for learning and ability to reach their potential.
- Research suggests that a focus on social and emotional wellbeing for all infants and children, from an early age, is associated with more positive behaviour, better academic achievement and improved mental health outcomes.

**Why teachers?**
The important role teachers play in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and prevention of mental ill-health is evident in national mental health policies and teacher accreditation standards. However research shows many teachers’ feel ill-prepared for this role and may have received little or no training at a pre-service level.

**Importance of pre-service training**
To achieve better outcomes for young people it is critical that we act on existing scientific knowledge and ‘close the gap between what is known and what is done’. In order to bring about lasting cultural and behavioural change and establish a sustainable focus on mental health in the tertiary education sector it is important that teachers are effectively introduced to the key principles and knowledge during their pre-service training.

**More change needed:**
Over the life span of the project important changes (such as increased coverage of this material in teacher training, increased confidence of lecturers and pre-service teachers) have been made however there is more to do to ensure the system continues to change in the right direction, that positive changes are sustained, and in turn support the best possible outcomes for young people’s lives. So that inclusion of mental health promotion, mental ill-health prevention and suicide prevention are a core component of all teacher preparation courses.

**How Response Ability is cultivating change:**
Continuing to work in partnership with tertiary educators throughout Australia:
1. Providing free, evidence-based multi-media teaching resources to Australian tertiary institutions.
2. Providing additional information through conference presentations, on our website, and by other means.
3. Providing professional support to tertiary educators to help them integrate mental health into their programme.
4. Maintaining partnerships with other initiatives and organisations that focus on the mental health of children and young people to enhance mental health.

**Our resources:**
**CHILD** is an innovative evidence-based professional practice framework which directs teachers and early childhood practitioners’ attention to five critical areas and outlines practical and specific strategies that staff can utilise in their daily work to best support social and emotional wellbeing.

**Multi-media resources** (including films, activities, lecture notes):
- Children’s Services.
- Early Childhood and Primary.
- Deep Breaths.

**Student resources:**

**Website:** www.responseability.org
- Fact sheets.
- Podcasts.
- Research and Conference Papers.
- Video Lectures.

**Dedicated email address:** HNELHD-Education@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au

**Suicide Prevention:**
- Response Ability was first established in 1997 under the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, with the development of suicide prevention curriculum resources for several professions, including secondary teachers. The first resources centered around. Given that schools provided an effective and efficient means of delivering prevention and early intervention with the at risk population, youth, health policy directed an engagement with secondary teachers as part of the national suicide and mental health planning.
- Resources disseminated nationally include a focus on providing information and materials to build the capacity of secondary teachers’ in training to identify warning signs of suicide in students, to improve their suicide literacy for example risk and protective factors, groups at higher risk, to respond effectively if concerned about a student and to manage and respond to a suicide death in the school community.

**Suicide fact sheet:**
- Facts and statistics about suicide in Australia.
- Guidelines for responding to a young person who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts.
- Whole school approaches to suicide prevention.

www.responseability.org/suicide