

Boffins battle suicide crisis

STRESSED, suicidal or bullied? Help could be a mouse click away for young people under revolutionary proposals being considered by a world-first research project.

Nineteen young Australians have been hand-picked to join mental health and wellbeing experts and technologists in the work which is being called a game-changer.

It is the first time young people have had such an influential role in determining strategies to address a crisis point created by a technological generation gap.

At the heart of the Federal Government-funded project is the belief that new ways must be found to help Australia's under 25-year-olds who are living their lives online.

The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre — to be launched at a summit in Melbourne on Thursday and Friday — will investigate how digital technology can be used to improve the mental health of Australia's 12 to 25-year-olds.

The centre's chief executive officer, Assoc Prof Jane Burns, said a game-changer was required for youth suicide, cyber bullying and binge drinking.

"We can't continue to do the same old things. We need to be relevant to young people so that they can connect instantly," she said.

"Unless we as a community learn to help young people at risk in their own language — that of digital technology — we are facing a lost generation of troubled youth.

"We know that while

GLENN STANAWAY

95 per cent of young Australians spend up to three hours daily engaging with different forms of technology, predominantly social media, almost none of the solutions to the issues faced by these same young people is being tailored for technology."

The 19 young Australians are being called the brains trust by Prof Burns.

A key role for them will be to advise mental health and technology experts what they think are the most productive digital ways to engage with young people.

Prof Burns envisages the research findings could be used quickly to put in place

“ We are facing a lost generation of troubled youth

new systems in the community properly embracing digital technology.

Examples of how this could work, according to Prof Burns, include:

A GIRL or boy feeling depressed or suicidal could get instant online counselling as well as answers to their questions.

A YOUNG man working hard, binge-drinking and doing party drugs could get access to appropriate online resources to help him to get balance back in his life.

OR a teenager depressed and anxious perhaps about exams could download advice on how to cope and manage their stress levels.



The world at his feet: Paul Moimo from Papua New Guinea is back on his feet, and before and after pictures of his foot. Main picture: IAN CURRIE



Happy Paul stands tall

BRIGID O'CONNELL
Health reporter

PAUL Moimo has returned to his island home walking tall on both legs for the first time after life-changing surgery in Melbourne.

The three-year-old boy from Papua New Guinea had been forced to painfully walk on the side of his foot after he was born with clubfoot and has spent his childhood so far watching other children play from the sidelines.

But through Moira Kelly's Children First Foundation, Paul and his Aunt Regina have spent three months in Melbourne while he has had surgery to reshape and stretch his foot. Through a tiny opening at the back of his heel, Cabrini orthopedic surgeon John Griffiths lengthened the tendons around Paul's ankle, resetting the joint and putting the straightened leg in plaster.

Mr Griffiths said that although it was a routine operation, with Australian children treated for the deformity in the first week of life, many orthopedic procedures were luxuries that Papua New Guinea's rudimentary health system couldn't afford.

Manager of Children First's Kilmore farm, Pat Weldon, said Paul had become the "pet" of the house, winning over volunteers and students at St Monica's College in Epping — who raised \$5000 for Paul's airfares — with his playful nature and by blowing kisses.

"He never once complained or whinged or cried. He just took it all in with those big brown eyes," Mr Weldon said.

"He's one of the bravest children we've had at the farm for a long time."

Not only did Paul go home with a splint and his first pair of shoes, he also returns with two new vocabularies — learning how to speak both in Papua New Guinea pidgin and English for the first time during the trip.

Visit childrenfirstfoundation.com
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Single males look to Clooney

AUSSIE singles are taking the lead from George Clooney and Fifi Box to live the ideal partnerless lifestyle, fresh polling shows.

Sixty per cent of men said Clooney was the best single role model and 54 per cent of single women said they'd have Box as their mentor, but most singles say they'd still rather have a partner.

Polling conducted for dating site Zoosk of 360 of its members showed about a third of single men and a quarter of single women believe it's not their fault they're alone because "all the good ones are taken".

About a third of all singles admit they are too picky and are waiting for "the one", while 20 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women without a significant other say they're too busy for love.



Right neighbourly: Megan Gathercole and Connie Sanders, with dog Apache. Picture: TONY GOUGH

Friends from next door

VICTORIANS make the best neighbours, according to a study of Australian communities.

Residents in Victoria are the most likely to live in the same suburb their whole lives and are more prone to a neighbourly chat, according to a study of more than 1200 Australians.

But 87 per cent of Victorians said they still wanted to know the people next door better.

The revelation came from a study by *that's life!* magazine, which also said Victorians were the most proud of their neighbourhood behind South Australia. Carlton resident Megan Gathercole made

ALEX WHITE

friends with her neighbours when they moved in seven years ago and they have now become the godparents of her two children.

"The secret is to just be friendly, it is not just about sharing sugar," Mrs Gathercole said.

"We didn't know anyone when we moved here but now I am friends with most of the people in our street."

The editor of *that's life!*, Linda Smith, said the study painted a surprising picture of neighbourhood life.

"The No.1 thing that survey respondents indicated

makes a happy neighbourhood is friendly and caring neighbours," Ms Smith said. "But the majority of those surveyed just don't make the time to form bonds with the people next door or across the street."

"Almost half of the survey respondents said their parents were much closer with their neighbours than we are today — and that's something that we'd love to see change."

Residents of New South Wales and South Australia were the most private but neighbourly love was weakest in the West with one in three admitting to not stopping to have a chat with people next door.