

## Conference Abstracts

**Keynote Presenter:** Associate Professor David Heyne, Leiden University, The Netherlands.

**Title:** From broad interventions for truancy to focused CBT for school refusal: What is working?

**Abstract:** When a young person has a hard time attending school regularly – for whatever reason – it becomes a serious concern for many. Parents may be confused and frustrated. Conflict can arise in a family. School staff and mental health professionals often invest a great deal of time working out how best to help. And the young person is at risk of falling behind academically and falling out socially. In this keynote address Dr David Heyne brings us up to speed on what has been found to be effective in tackling two school attendance problems, namely truancy and school refusal. He presents the positive results from recent meta-analyses of broad interventions for truancy and focused cognitive-behaviour therapy for school refusal. He also discusses some of the more sobering findings, drawing on research which shows that our current interventions are not meeting the needs of certain sub-groups of youth with attendance problems. For example, interventions are generally less effective with adolescents relative to children, especially when the adolescent experiences social anxiety. Practical solutions are then considered, based on recent national and international initiatives to improve outcomes for school-refusing adolescents. In all, the keynote offers the following take-home message: ‘There is a lot yet to be learned about supporting youth with school attendance problems, and we have a solid research and practical base from which to proceed’.

**Presenter:** Amanda Wheeler, Senior Wellbeing and Engagement Officer – North Western Victorian Region, and  
Claire Russell, Senior Wellbeing and Engagement Officer – North Eastern Victorian Region

**Title:** *‘Everyday still counts’* – A Regional perspective to attendance

**Abstract:** Supporting regular attendance is a focus area for all Victorian schools. Evidence from schools with proactive, whole of school approach can minimise attendance issues. Regional staff from the Health, Wellbeing and Engagement, Department of Education and Training will share examples of good practise that have resulted in improved attendance levels across two diverse schools and briefly outline the role of the team in supporting schools to adopt a staged response to attendance matters. The first school is situated in a rural area of North Western Victoria that was successful in involving the local community in its quest to improve student attendance. The second school is a large primary school in a regional centre of North Eastern Victoria Region where whole school strategies are used to engage and encourage students (and parents) from a range of backgrounds, cultures and socio-economic environments, to regularly attend school. Key objectives, actions/strategies and evidence of success will be presented.

**Presenter:** Simon Le Plastrier, Principal, Eltham College.

**Title:** Meeting the Challenge of Absenteeism – thoughts from a Principal

**Abstract:** The Year 8 coordinator notices Jessie is beginning to miss school. The days seem random, but the number of days missed are mounting. The Coordinator feels many of the missed days seem to be linked to assessment, but they are not sure there is a real link. Family contacted. Jessie has been seeing doctors to discover the nature of the illness. It seems very real. Stomach cramps, nausea and frequent need to go to the toilet.

By Year 9 Jessie is missing a number of sequential days, on a more frequent basis. Family are adamant that Jessie is sick but the doctors cannot seem to find any source of the illness.

Half way through Year 9 Jessie cannot come to School. She remains in bed.

This session will look at one potential school-based solution and will put a challenge to government.

**Presenter:** Lynne Venning, Senior Wellbeing and Engagement Officer, Department of Education and Training, South-Eastern Victoria Region

**Title:** School Attendance Guidelines – Every Day counts

**Abstract:** What do the 2014 School Attendance Guidelines mean for schools? How can schools use the School Attendance Guidelines to assist from prevention to intervention? What is the role of the School Attendance Officer? This session will outline the online supports for schools and the role of DET regional staff in supporting schools.

**Presenter:** Dr. Glenn Melvin Clinical Psychologist & Senior Lecturer, Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology, Monash University, and

Parent Representative

**Title:** “I just can’t get him there” Parental perspectives on school refusal

**Abstract:** Having a child who is not attending school is often a stressful and disempowering experience for parents. Insight into these experiences from a parent’s perspective can be useful for health and educational professionals when working with students with non-attendance problems. Based on data and clinical experience gathered from the School Refusal Clinic at Monash Medical Centre, this presentation will:

- 1) Describe parent’s experiences of having a child who is refusing to attend school;
- 2) Provide tips and strategies for engaging parents;
- 3) Providing a first-hand personal account from a mother of a teenager who has experienced chronic school refusal.

**Presenter:** Dianne Summers, School Psychologist, Woodleigh School.

**Title:** Supporting students to return to school: school psychologists, wellbeing teachers and health clinicians working together.

**Abstract:** This presentation will explore the integral role of each of the students support team in promoting a successful return to school. A collaborative case management model will be presented with reference to case studies. This presentation will also include tips for enhancing communication between school based personnel and external mental health clinicians and two case studies to demonstrate the model.

**Presenter:** Dr. Lisa McKay Brown, Lecturer: Learning Interventions, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, and Colleague.

**Title:** Re-engaging Severe School Refusers

**Abstract:** Coming soon!