

CLARKSON

# An eye on mental health

Lucy Jarvis

RESEARCHERS are keeping tabs on the effects of technology use on young people's mental health, including at Clarkson Community High School.

University of Western Australia professor Steve Houghton said his Centre for Child and Adolescent Related Disorders had run several study projects with the school, with 200 to 400 students involved in a current study.

"The one that we are working on is positive mental health of adolescents and the amount of time that young people spend on screens," he said.

Prof. Houghton said previous studies suggested young people should not spend more than two hours a day looking at screens, but that was before the onset of mobile phones and widespread use of computers in classrooms.

"Those guidelines are defunct," he said. "We've got kids saying they are using the screens 14 hours a day."

Prof. Houghton said this study followed 3000 students from more than 30 schools over three years and would result in a 10-year longitudinal study. "We have got children in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 – we follow them for three years; we assess them twice a year," he said.

Prof. Houghton said they were looking at the impact of screen activities on mental



**Students Shari Iabnez, Josh Rijntjes, Kate Hicks, Samantha Da Silva, Chelsea Brookes and Dylan Potter in Clarkson Community High School's commercial kitchen.**

health, and finding social networking could mainly have negative impacts on girls.

"Screens can be good but some aspects can be bad," he said.

CCHS principal John Young said being involved in research anchored the school in best practice.

Mr Young said young people had ideas that were ahead of the older generations and should be involved in finding solutions to complex problems facing society.

He said they built a commercial kitchen eight years ago where students learnt workplace skills.

"There are a lot more kids

finishing school than there were when teachers went through," he said.

"The people that we as a society are putting into trades aren't necessarily at the skills level – the key would be engaging kids.

"We can engage people and excite their imaginations."

Year 12 student Meg Robinson (17) said the school did not deserve the reputation it had in the wider community.

"What they say about it is rumours; there's nothing wrong with it," he said.

"I've learnt more at this school than I have at any other school I've been to."

Asked how technology could be used to get more children into innovative careers, she said people who wanted to get into them did not need much.

"If you just have a basic understanding of maths and you can use a computer well, you can do this," she said.

"It's just what takes your curiosity."

Construction Training Fund executive director Ralph Dawson said most schools focused on academic curriculums like TEE but there was a need for more trade schools.

"We need more schools that are committed to vocational education," he said.