Working together to reach at-risk students at RMIT Vietnam

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RMIT Vietnam is the Asian hub of Melbourne-based University RMIT, and provides a range of programs to local and international students. University students experience a range of stressors which can increase the risk of psychological distress or exacerbate existing mental illnesses. Furthermore, many university students belong to the age group most vulnerable to develop mental health problems but least likely to access support for these problems. In Vietnam, the barriers to accessing support are even more pronounced, due to a lack of understanding, and high levels of stigma associated with mental illness. As a consequence many students don’t access support until problems become overwhelming. Mental health issues impact academic success, student involvement, and retention. The longer mental health problems persist unaddressed, the greater the detrimental impact. The Wellbeing service at RMIT Vietnam has developed a range of partnerships and initiatives in order to better identify, reach, and support students at risk of experiencing mental health problems. Populations being targeted include students who live away from their support networks; have unsatisfactory academic progress; and/or do not access services due to perceived barriers. Outreach initiatives include staff training; pro-active mental health screening; collaborating with stakeholders through case management; increased focus on less formal, group based interventions; and training and mentoring representatives from the student body to become ‘Wellbeing Ambassadors’. Through these partnerships the Wellbeing service is aiming to enable students at risk of experiencing mental health issues to more readily access support, and consequently to improve student wellbeing and academic outcomes.