

EX-AFL player shares message of hope

By EMILY BRYAN
Health reporter

AS an elite sportsman in his early 20s, Nathan Thompson faced a different set of pressures from most people his age.

But the former North Melbourne and Hawthorn forward believes the skills needed to cope with mental illness are universal and should be taught during childhood.

"My take on it was to keep pushing through and don't ask for help," he said.

After retiring from the AFL in 2008, Thompson became a beyondblue ambassador, and spoke at yesterday's Richmond Fellowship youth mental health forum in Launceston.

His depression took two years to reach the point where he contemplated suicide at the age of 24.

"It became a daily fight for me," he said.

"Then you've got a pretty simple decision — to either do it, or get help."

Yesterday's forum discussed how to instil better coping strategies in children.

"Help-seeking is a skill, communicating is a skill," Thompson said.

While there is little data on the issue, the



Former AFL player Nathan Thompson is now an ambassador for beyondblue.

Picture: SCOTT GELSTON

Richmond Fellowship believes children are struggling to cope with the pace of modern life, with some evidence of an increase in learning difficulties.

"Unless a child is balanced, you can't expect them to get literacy and numeracy results," Tasmanian vice-

president Mollie Campbell-Smith said.

She said exposure to social networking and fashion trends in the media were examples of modern-day pressures.

"And yet biologically, children grow as they've always grown," she said.

Schools have been suggested as the logical starting points, including training teachers to identify children at risk.

The Education Department was represented at the forum, along with clinicians and not-for-profit mental health services.