

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings # 13

Dear Neighbour,

There's that classic old saying about death and taxes being the only two certainties in life. However, I'd argue that you could add mental health challenges to that list because at some point it's going to impact you or someone you love.

Mental health is such a broad term. It encompasses anything from serious illness to general well-being, but one common treatment that can have a positive effect on many conditions, is the act of talking.

October is Mental Health Month and this year's theme is 'Share the Journey', encouraging people to connect with others to give a sense of security, support, purpose and happiness.

One of our most valued and popular services here at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is our free counselling program, operated by four volunteer counsellors (two female and two male), and offered four out of the five weekdays. The qualified professionals support our clients in areas such as trauma, drug and alcohol, relationships, work and general mental health issues.

At any given time, our counselling service can have between 20 and 30 clients who see one of our counsellors, at no cost. We don't require a mental health care plan, nor do we stipulate how many sessions a client can access; accessibility is simple and requires a self-referral form.

Our clients are of all ages and backgrounds. Some are currently experiencing homelessness, some lead chaotic lives because of instability, some harbour complex childhood trauma, and some are dealing with the debilitating ramifications of grief.

One of our longest standing counsellors, Sophie, started volunteering at NNC in 2014.

"I was newly retired as a mental health care nurse at the time and wanted to maintain the skills I had acquired during my 30 years of employment as a social worker in various settings. I wanted to use these skills in a context where they could make a difference to people, and direct my energy towards individuals who may not be able to afford counselling."

One lady who suffered from severe social anxiety, including a fear of confrontation, struggled with daily interactions that conjured up intense emotions. She accessed the service to help equip her with strategies, and after a few months of treatment was able to enrol in further study. This was a major milestone for her.

For many of our clients it's mostly about social connection and having an opportunity to share some of their concerns and struggles with another human being, and feel like they are being heard.

Recently an older gentleman who was distraught and in tears when he initially approached NNC, reported feeling “better” and able to cope with day-to-day challenges after just a few sessions with one of our counsellors.

Many clients will see a counsellor intensively for a couple of months and then slowly decrease the number of appointments while implementing strategies to help them cope.

One client who engaged with the counselling service whilst undergoing a marriage separation, has gone from suffering daily panic attacks, severe anxiety and depression, to living a more stable and happier existence after a couple of years of seeing a counsellor.

For Chris, who started volunteering at NNC after retiring from 27 years working as a psychologist and then counsellor at Catholic Care, he says he loves NNC because “it's in the middle of a vibrant and thriving neighbourhood, the people are interesting and welcoming, and the work of the volunteers is much appreciated.”

Today is World Mental Health Day and whether it is with professional support, or with a friend or family member, we are encouraging everyone to reach out and find a way to connect to others to help build positive social connections in our community.

Mel
Community Strengthening Team

* Not actual name.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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