



## New(town) Beginnings #34

Dear Neighbour,

I love a quiet achiever. If we were to hand out awards for our programs, our Youth SMART Recovery (Self-Management and Recovery Training) would take home the title for 'most improved'. It's been one of our success stories of 2020 because delivering it virtually has enabled us to reach young people far and wide.

The free group addiction program is normally conducted face-to-face and assists anyone with any problematic behaviours, ranging from moderate to significant in scale, tackling addictions such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, food, shopping and even screens.

It launched at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre (NNC) last year after one of our key partners, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre (MYRC), approached us about hiring a room for the meetings:

"Originally it was meant to be a straightforward room hire situation but then I found out that they were struggling to find a male co-facilitator, so I jumped at the chance and offered to co-run the group as I felt it fit with our ethos at NNC," explains Colin, the program's facilitator and NNC Community Development Coordinator.

To qualify as a facilitator, you need to undertake an intensive 2-day training course. Anyone is welcome to sign up but they particularly encourage people who have successfully addressed their own addiction.

With only a handful of youth specific meetings in Sydney, most young people (those aged between 12-25) embarking on the program often end up attending 'All Ages' meetings, but anecdotally we know they feel much more comfortable discussing delicate topics with their peers.

"The group is led by the participants and starts off by everyone sharing how they're going and what their aim for the session is. For example, someone might have a big event that they want to get through without drinking too much or a court date coming up, so it focuses on the past week and establishing a small plan for the next 7 days," says Colin.

### **Newtown Neighbourhood Centre**

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Young people are often referred to SMART by school counsellors, youth workers, or even police. And while the onus is entirely on participants to attend, many have been coming back week after week.

Since the sessions moved online in March, the group has grown substantially and our reach has not only extended beyond the Inner West but even NSW. The group now includes a member from Coffs Harbour and several from Victoria!

“A young person from Victoria has been attending since before the second lockdown; they had made some great progress and set some healthy goals but since this latest lockdown they are finding it harder. The group is helping to support them with new realistic and more achievable goals considering the current situation.”

“I think it’s fantastic that we can support someone from afar, and knowing they are able to connect with us weekly, is reassuring for not only the individuals but for us as well. I feel privileged and grateful to be a part of their journey”

“We also had one participant whose court date was postponed due to COVID, so in the meantime he’s been able to attend more meetings and develop a sustainable recovery plan, which has since contributed towards a favourable outcome with the justice system. It’s also evident that his mental health and well-being have also significantly improved,” continues Colin.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with members saying:

*“It’s been helpful getting other people’s ideas or suggestions of what has helped them achieve their goals.”*

*“It’s reassuring to know that there are other people going through the same things, and that I’m not the only one.”*

*“It helped me stay on track by coming to meetings and voicing my concerns and the group keeps me accountable.”*

*“It’s a safe, non-judgemental place I can go where everyone has a common goal.”*

Well done Colin, MYRC and Youth Smart Recovery Group! You really do deserve an award.

To find out more about attending a SMART Recovery session, please go to <https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/>

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

P.S. - Today is R U OK? Day. Our Smart Recovery program highlights the power of regularly checking in and the importance of social connection, and today we encourage you to open the conversation with friends and loved ones.

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