

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings #5

Dear Neighbour

I have to admit I have a soft spot for working with women.

I feel a natural affinity with fellow mothers, daughters, and sisters as we often have many shared experiences that bind us. It's easy to place myself in their position, having an innate understanding of some of the struggles and challenges they've had to endure.

In many circumstances, the women that come to the Centre are dealing with the trauma and aftermath of domestic violence and sexual assault. I'm continually amazed by how in times of stress they demonstrate the utmost determination and resilience.

I first met Mary*, when she came to inquire about our free counselling program. Instantly I could tell that Mary had undergone immense trauma – she looked frail; defeated and terrified.

Mary fled her home last year and found herself homeless. Her ex-partner did not take his football team's loss and decided to take his frustration out on Mary in a very violent, horrific way. To this day she carries scars on her face.

She was able to flee and escape further violence but is living with the anguish every single day. Seven months on, Mary is still homeless and surviving as a couch surfer; meaning she relies on the generosity of friends and acquaintances to avoid sleeping on the street. She's stuck in a bureaucratic nightmare, trying to gather 'evidence' of the crime committed against her in order to prove her eligibility for priority housing.

She feels like she has lost everything!

Sadly, stories such as Mary's are common and are definitely increasing throughout our community. Domestic and family violence by far exceeds any other crime reported to police. The statistics are staggering.

There's not a week that goes by where I'm not confronted by a victim of domestic violence. It's overwhelming and I wish I knew how to tackle it effectively. I just hope by speaking out about it more, we as a community continue to highlight the severity and scale of the problem.

My incredible colleague, Helen, identified early on a need to have a safe space for women. So Helen created the Newtown Early Intervention Service Hub (NEISH), a hub specifically for women.

Every fortnight on a Tuesday, we connect women at risk with a range of services here at the Centre. It's one of my favourite programs and I can't wait to tell you more about it at another time.

Mel
Community Strengthening Team

*Not their real names.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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