

Arts therapy—changes to systems through alternative health and wellness program

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Introduction

Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS) in Central Victoria is committed to providing a broad range of health and community services supports, to all people living in our catchment area, predominantly servicing Central Goldfields Shire and parts of the Pyrenees Shire. Our Allied Health Professionals provide a comprehensive range of services and support to groups and individuals with a wide range of health conditions. Our staffs are currently working collaboratively with Grampians Partners in Recovery (GPIR) to provide coordinated service supports to our shared clients with mental illness and their families living in the catchment area, to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population.

Mental health and wellbeing is considered an essential component of a person's overall health and wellbeing. An individual's wellbeing is a combination of mental health, physical wellness, social factors and perceived security and support. **'People with mental illness don't want to be defined by their disability, they want to be seen as the same as everyone else and have the same opportunities.'** (1)

The Arts Therapy program is an innovative new project for MDHS developed by our qualified Occupational Therapy staff with post graduate qualifications in Therapeutic Arts Practice. The project has been running since an initial pilot project, sponsored by St Lukes Anglicare, GPIR located in Maryborough, for a six week program commencing in August 2015. An initiative to provide a local community based recovery model to address the high degree of psychological distress experienced by the population (20.3 %) in Central Goldfields reported in the region. (2) Both services considered younger people with chronic and persistent mental illness were the most vulnerable. The Arts Therapy program aims to support people to address life's challenges, to build healthy relationships and social connections through a creative arts based program.

Methodology

Social Science research conducted in the regions via the Grampians Medicare Local 2015 (3) community needs analysis reported that Maryborough had the highest rate of men and women with mental health and behavioral problems 13.8 %; these conditions are compounded by other chronic health conditions in the region such as respiratory disease, and musculoskeletal system diseases compared to state and national averages. Health in Central Goldfields Community Report, (4) conducted by the Department of Rural Health University Of Melbourne in 2015, were consulted. Analysis of the regions health and wellbeing using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), indicated persons in Central Goldfields had a higher percentage than the National percentage rate of a high/ very high degree of psychological distress, and 27% of respondents reported being diagnosed with depression and anxiety, these results aligned with the CVPCP report (2) and the Grampians Medicare Local Community Needs Analysis. (3)

MDHS community consultations in 2014 (5) reported public perceptions of the communities health needs and client experiences. The community raised their concerns regarding current local information and support about different chronic health conditions, support and advocacy for personal health challenges, impacting people's ability to attain good health and well-being in their local communities with limited resources and service supports. The community felt disadvantaged having to travel long distances to regional cities for treatments and consultations for health services not provided locally.. The community wanted access to, advocacy and information, and alternative health services locally to improve their health and wellbeing. MDHS announced a proposal of a Wellness Centre housing alternative therapies such as Arts Therapy, Mindfulness Relaxation, Tai Chi, Massage and a drop in center for information. This announcement was met with enthusiasm by the community.

A Wellness Centre committee was formed with community leaders, Allied Health Professionals, community minded residents and a project worker. MDHS Staff were consulted to brain storm how a Wellness Centre could be initiated and become operational. Discussions were led by a project worker regarding what services could be appropriate to be offered to the community, and to lead fundraising for the project.

The community rallied with their to support fundraising holding annual golf days, raffles, donations from business leaders and the general public to refurbish a disused general practice on the MDHS site. Funds raised were enough to refurbish the building opening up the space for a large activity room/ meeting space with state of the art video conferencing facilities and four consultation rooms. The building was finally transformed and fit for purpose in August 2015. The Wellness Centre was officially opened by the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews at a community based celebration in September 2015.

An Arts Therapy pilot project commenced for six weeks in August 2015, and evaluated by a satisfaction survey in November 2015. Results indicated positive benefits cited for all participants attending the program. Some benefits reported by participants have been to increase their access to a wide range of services locally for those clients' living rurally or remotely with mental illness. Other benefits cited, gaining personal insights by working through concerns and challenges, developing strategies to better cope with emotional regulation, feeling more resilient, and making social connections. All participants expressed a desire to continue attending the Arts Therapy program.

These results prompted MDHS to apply for a commonwealth funding grant offered by the GPIR mental health services, to support ongoing weekly Art Therapy programs, to meet the demand and increase in referrals for the program.

The grant application was successful for the program to continue, a program agreement was contracted between MDHS and GPIR Innovation funds. The program target group was to provide support to people and their care givers with persistent and chronic mental illness with complex needs. The program would facilitate person centered support individually tailored to the persons' needs. The program aims were to work collaboratively with GPIR to improve referral pathways for mutual clients, and facilitate access to other health services and supports locally. The program agreement with GPIR and MDHS aimed to strengthen partnerships between organizations in the region and promote a community based recovery model for participants.

Systems priorities

Grampians Partners In Recovery (GPIR) Consortium Group, in consultation with consumers and carers, had set the strategic direction for system change in six key areas.

Priority Areas for Systems Change Agreement MDHS and GPIR

1. Improve the interface between clinical and community mental health services
2. Improve the physical health and dental health outcomes of the GPIR target group
3. Increase access to service for those living rurally or remotely with mental illness
4. Increase the capacity of the service sector to respond to members of the local refugee community with mental illness
5. Building the capacity of GPIR clients to attend day activities
6. Building the capacity of GPIR clients to manage their self-care, including psychological distress

Outcomes

The Arts Therapy programs run weekly in the Wellness Centre at MDHS and in the Pyrenees shire at the Avoca information center, giving access to people living in the outer regions of our catchment area. Both groups are well attended by participants. The program runs during school terms to cater for the parents of school aged children. Participants inquire into their lived experience using creative art and facilitated by the Arts Therapist. Through the process of personal reflections of life experiencing, participants may gain insights into their states of being and patterns of behavior, which in turn can assist them to achieve optimal health and wellness.

The Arts Therapy program has met five of the six of the system change priorities outlined. Participants have experienced improved case coordination between clinical and community mental health services, including advocacy and support, better working relationships with health and mental health teams, and their local GP's. All participants have had access to and some have attended other community health programs such as physical fitness, mindfulness relaxation, tai chi, physiotherapy, dietetics, generalist counselling, community nursing, drug and alcohol services and dental health services. Most listed programs are offered in the Wellness Centre giving participants' capacity to attend day activities and engage in different health education sessions and expos. All programs promote person centred support.

Monthly service provider meetings with regional community health and mental health services, refine the scope of our service deliveries, build and establish closer links and referral pathways for our current mutual clients and future intake.

MDHS demographic profile reflects diversity of backgrounds in the population, however at this time does not have a settled refugee client base. Collaboration between services has addressed systems change and provided young people with mental illness; opportunities to understand more of themselves, engage and connect with other individuals and the broader community.

The Grampians Partners in Recovery provide an outreach support at the MDHS Wellness Centre on Fridays weekly. This service has been successful in supporting Arts Therapy clients' improved access to appropriate mental health services if required, they also support new referrals, to people who drop in enquiring about mental health services.

Since the Arts Therapy program began there had been an increase in referrals from MDHS internal referrals, individuals and other health, mental health and community service providers.

Summary

The MDHS Arts Therapy program aims and priority areas for systems changes have been achieved by; strengthening partnerships with regional organisations, including mental health services, clinical and community support organisations responsible for delivering services to the participants. Collaboration with mental health services has improved referral pathways between services, and facilitated access to a broad range of services and supports for participants.

Arts Therapy promotes a community based recovery model that underpins all clinical and community support services delivered to people experiencing severe and persistent mental illness with complex needs.

The Arts Therapy program has become sustainable for the future at MDHS Wellness Centre through collaborative working relationships between clinical and community support services and funding assistance to set up the program.

The Arts Therapy program meets national objectives by providing service supports to people with persistent and chronic mental illness who have complex needs. Through systems change we are filling the gaps identified in service delivery for people with mental illness living in our rural and remote region of Victoria.

References

1. Commonwealth of Australia. CommunityMatters: Working with Diversity for Wellbeing. Carlton South (AU): Curriculum Corporation;2001.
2. Central Victorian Primary Care Partnerships. CVPCP Health & Wellbeing Profile - updated September 2016. (internet) Vic. 2016
3. Community Needs Analysis Grampians Pyrenees Summary. Grampians Medicare Local. 2015. Report. 4 p.
4. Health in Central Goldfields Community Report. Department of Rural Health. Vic. The University of Melbourne. 2015. 8 p.
5. Community Services Client Experience Survey 2014. Maryborough District Health Service. Vic. Report 1 p.

Presenter

Jennifer Stirling graduated from La Trobe University Melbourne, Australia, with a Bachelor Degree in Occupational Therapy in 1991. Her career commenced working in metropolitan public health in Melbourne Victoria spanning 26 years, including community health and mental health services, oncology, acquired brain injury, rehabilitation services, acute and sub acute health services at various health organisations. Jennifer relocated back home to central Victoria to work in community health services at Maryborough District Health Service in 2009, bringing with her extensive work experience and knowledge, which enhance local community health services in the region. Since returning home Jennifer has continued education in therapeutic arts, through The Melbourne Institute of Creative Arts Therapy in Fitzroy Melbourne. Jennifer graduated with a postgraduate diploma in Creative Arts Therapy in 2014 and Masters of Therapeutic Arts in 2016. This new career path using arts modalities for counselling, complements well with her skills in occupational therapy interventions, and has provided the region with access to innovative mental health and wellbeing programs for young adults with mental health issues, and people with chronic health conditions. Jennifer has embraced her local

community request for alternative health services operating from the purpose-built wellness centre funded by the local community. Jennifer is passionate about providing high-quality holistic health services for the local rural community with some of the highest rates of chronic physical health conditions and mental illness than other regions in the state of Victoria.