

Healthy Lifestyles

In New Zealand and around the world, healthy living continues to grow as an area of interest. Changes in the health and wellbeing status of the world's population are causing concern. This is amplified for people who experience mental illness.

The statistics

We know that, as a group, people with mental illness smoke more than other groups, have higher rates of diabetes, are heavier, exercise less, take more medication and die younger. In fact a large number of people using Pathways services are smokers and the health impacts of that are significant. Approximately 4,500 New Zealanders die every year from tobacco related illness – incredibly, that is more than from road crashes, suicide, skin cancers, drowning, homicide and aids combined!

Why promote healthy living?

The statistics are alarming and to do nothing would be irresponsible. As a health focused organisation it's important that we walk the talk by encouraging people to be healthier. To do that, we've recognised promoting healthy living as a key focus and developed specific resources to support this.

What are we doing?

As an organisation we took the first step in 2005 by becoming smoke-free and providing practical and financial assistance to help staff and people using our services to quit smoking.

We've developed healthy lifestyles programmes that are continuing to grow. Regional healthy lifestyle co-ordinators have a dedicated role in motivating and encouraging staff and people using our services to make positive changes to support their health and wellbeing. This may include exercise, nutrition, social activities, smoking cessation and stress management – to name a few.

We've developed a dedicated Healthy Lifestyles Fund. This is accessible by staff and people using our services for a wide range of uses. It's been used for the purchase of sports equipment, swimming passes, healthy recipe books and gym memberships; we've arranged sports teams, social gatherings, dietician visits and much more!

What's next?

Pathways is committed to taking a holistic approach to wellness. In looking forward we're working to bring in regional dieticians, life coaches and personal trainers; and to encourage staff to take further responsibility for their wellbeing along with their professional and personal development.

We're also committed to capturing inspirational and motivational stories of healthy lifestyle changes. You will find two short stories on the following page.



Help 4 U

Pathways Waikato Service Leader Tracy Hudson talks with Davita and her husband about the positive difference Pathways' Healthy Lifestyles Programme has made to their family.

Davita is an inspiration to us all. She's attended three of the 10-week Help 4 U programmes in Hamilton and seen some fantastic results!

Davita proudly tells me when I arrive that she's lost seven kilograms and noticed a great change in her body shape. She's also pleased that her latest blood test results were perfect. She's feeling healthier and happier. Both her husband and doctor are proud of how she's doing.

Prior to attending the Help 4 U activities Davita stayed at home all day. She believes her medication made her gain weight as well as making her lethargic. She found it difficult to do the housework or spend time with her daughter. Now, she has more energy and is getting out of the house on a daily basis.

But it's not just a change in Davita's energy and happiness that her family has noticed. They say there's also been a big change in her confidence. Her husband believes that the Help 4 U activities have been better than medication in terms of helping with her recovery. The activities have reduced the medication's side effects and made it work better for her.

I smoked for about 30 years.

When I was young my mate used to buy cigarettes for me. As I got older I started work and was able to buy cigarettes myself. Even though it was a huge blow to my wages the habit kept on growing, until most of my money went on cigarettes and alcohol.

I never worried about the side effects of my addiction until recently. I noticed that I'd developed yellow stains on my fingers, my lips were sore, my smell and taste sensation were not good, my teeth and gums went bad and even breathing was becoming difficult. I wanted to give up and went to a two day workshop on smoking cessation. I tried, but ended up giving in to the cigarettes again.

Earlier this year I started to think seriously once again about kicking the smoking habit. I wanted to save money, improve my health, improve my taste and smell sensation, and most of all, I wanted to be a good role model for my nephews and nieces, other Pathways staff and the people who use Pathways services. Pathways was there to back me. They gave me great support.

I have now been smoke-free for 51 days (as at 25/07/2008). I'm really enjoying the benefits and feel like I have a new life!

I believe that if I can do it, anyone can do it.

Brett Melrose
Consumer Advisor
Pathways Northern services

