



New Zealand Association of Counsellors
Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa

COUNSELLING AOTEAROA

Counselling Aotearoa October 2017

The October 2017 issue of Counselling Aotearoa, the "external" newsletter of the NZ Association of Counsellors / Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa includes stories about the newest member of the NZAC Executive, Miriama Tolo; mental health being a priority for both major political parties this election; NZAC featuring prominently in recent media issues regarding bullying, suicide and youth mental health; regular mental health checkups is the message from NZAC during Mental Health Awareness Week and World Suicide Prevention Day; and a story in which George Gribbin, who after recovering from a skiing accident, developed a new sense of empathy for people struggling to return to the workforce.

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NZAC's newest executive member – a face for the Wellington region

As a born and bred Wellingtonian, Miriama Tolo wants to enhance the voice of her region, and can now do so as the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) newest executive member.

Miriama began training as a counsellor in 1996 before becoming a student member of NZAC in 1997. She became a full member in 2000 and was very active in attending conferences and events and was a branch committee member.

Miriama joined the committee three years ago and was nominated to become an executive member early this year.

When asked why she accepted the nomination, Miriama said she felt that it was time to give back.

“One of my predecessors was always a very active member and a voice for many of us in the counselling community. I liked what she did and knew I had the ability to carry that on and continue to make a difference.”

Miriama has been kept actively busy throughout her years as a counsellor and has worked in a variety of fields, from Family Court to Victoria University, but particularly with youth from the ages of 12-25.

Miriama currently works as a mental health practitioner for Primary Solutions and does family break down assessments for WINZ in the Wellington region. In her down time, Miriama also runs programmes for the Pacific community in Porirua and Wellington.

After years of juggling many projects, Miriama feels that she is finally in a position where she can commit.

“I plan on being an executive member for the long term, and be a constant and clear voice for Pacific people in my counselling community.”

“Wellington is more than the city, it's an entire region full of different people and cultures. It is hugely under-represented.”

One of Miriama's goals as an Executive Member is to work on a clearer membership process for counsellors. She also wants counsellors to be more visible in their communities.

“More and more people have mental health issues these days, and they need support.”

“It can be scary for people who see us for the first time. On top of that, they can be extremely anxious about the issue they are coming in with.”

“The more visible counsellors are in their community and the better they are known professionally, the easier it is for people – on many levels - to use our services.”



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Politics in New Zealand and the mental health crisis

Saturday, 23 September saw one of the most anticipated elections in New Zealand for a long time. With each Party came different goals and different policies. However, it was clear that mental health is a priority for all Parties, and each has its own approach.

The President of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC), Bev Weber, is pleased mental health is on the Parties' radars and hopes that action, and not just rhetoric, will follow once it is determined who will occupy the Treasury benches.

"No matter which Parties form the government, we hope they take positive steps to address the youth mental health crisis as a starting point.

"And we hope they appreciate the role school guidance counsellors play in the solution."

The \$100m social investment mental health package is National's proposed solution.

The package includes a new approach to mental health, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and building resilience for primary school children and adolescents.

Labour's 'Fresh Approach to Mental Health Services' is a two-year programme of primary mental health teams to work with GPs, PHOs, DHBs and mental health NGOs – particularly in Christchurch.

Mental health teams comprising doctors and other medical professionals will be based on site with primary care providers, to offer free and accessible help for people with mental health issues, focusing on early intervention and continuing care. This approach also includes funding to increase access to counselling.

The Green's policy is focused on investing more and improving the services already in place, by implementing evidence-based experiments. They also plan on providing free counselling for under 25s and increase funding for mental health services.

NZ First aims to increase the number of mental health service options and treatment bed numbers in child and youth mental health service. They will also commit to a suicide reduction target.

"Our mission is to demonstrate to whomever forms the government that providing more skilled guidance counsellors in schools will make a positive impact towards the mental health crisis in New Zealand," Bev said.

Currently, most guidance counsellors in secondary schools are working with about 1000 students. NZAC wants a ratio of one guidance counsellor for every 400 students.

Bev says this will provide for better support for young people who need it, and relieve stress on counsellors who are severely overworked.

NZAC also wants counsellors in primary and intermediate schools to ensure early intervention.



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NZAC advocating for those in crisis through New Zealand media

Bullying, suicide and youth mental health were very topical media issues during August and September and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) featured quite prominently in the coverage.

in mid-August, Newstalk ZB ran a story on the prevalence of bullying among children, due to the access of cell phones and online material.

A new app called Sara-Nah enables children to post nasty comments about each other.

Mike Hosking spoke to NZAC member and Mangere-based counsellor, Kathryn Barclay, about the app and how kids have been using it in a negative way.

"It happens when kids get cell phones and get access to internet and things like that so I think we are seeing it particularly hitting the younger kids more because they don't have as much resilience," Kathryn said.

"It's easy for kids to say things via cyberspace that they would never say face to face.

"It's social humiliation and kids go to school feeling really uncomfortable because they know all their friends have seen the posts.

"They need emotional support and I think that's where counsellors play a really important part."

To listen to the article, click [here](#).

Sunday, 10 September, was Suicide Prevention Day and NZAC President, Bev Weber, spoke to Newshub about youth suicide in New Zealand and the need for more guidance counsellors in primary, secondary and intermediate schools.

"We've always had a "she'll be right" or harden up attitude in New Zealand. This is prevalent for our elderly, who have always lived by this mantra. The elderly go through changes in their health and bottle up their feelings so they don't burden their families.

"This attitude is also being passed on to our youth. Along with their changing social environment, this is a toxic combination."

When discussing the ratio of one guidance counsellor to every 400 secondary school students, Ms Weber said it would benefit students because "the school guidance counsellor is able to work more in-depth with that number of children – rather than trying to spread themselves thinly to help everybody."

To read the full article, click [here](#).

Also in September, Radio NZ published an article entitled 'Pasifika candidates face off in Christchurch.'

The article discusses an event where over 100 people gathered in Christchurch to learn what the two biggest political parties could do to help their community.

School guidance counsellor, and NZAC member, Sarah Maindonald, asked the candidates what could be done to better support the mental health of Pacific youth.

"I am really concerned we have the highest rate of suicide in Canterbury for young people, but I only know of two Pacific counsellors in schools," she said.

National's Alfred Ngaro discussed a Pasifika charity, Le Va, which has launched a suicide prevention training programme.

However, Labour's Aupito William Sio said that isn't enough, and that there must be someone on site at school for one-on-one discussion.

To read the full article, click [here](#).



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Suicide Prevention Day and Mental Health Awareness Week

Kiwis must treat their mental health like they do their physical health – get a regular check-up.

That's the message from the NZ Association of Counsellors (NZAC) which contends that prevention is better than cure, and that applies to both physical ailments and emotional and mental wellness problems.

The Association was drawing attention to World Suicide Prevention Day (September 10).

New Zealand has by far the highest rate of suicide in the developed world according to a recent report by UNICEF. Chief Coroner Deborah Marshall has also stated that a record 606 people committed suicide in 2016/2017, which is an increase of 27 deaths on the year before.

Children as young as nine and 10 years old have also been showing suicidal behaviours.

"Our young people are under tremendous social pressures and they are not always as well equipped as we'd like to handle those pressures," said NZAC president, Bev Weber.

Ms Weber said much more needs to be done to protect younger people and to support them when they have emotional issues.

"It's never too late to ask for help or to see a counsellor – it's imperative people get help when they need it."

A number of NZAC members banded together to make a video ([insert hyperlink](#)) to mark World Suicide Prevention Day. The Association also issued a press release on the subject ([insert hyperlink](#)).

Ms Weber said NZAC is also participating actively in this year's Mental Health Awareness Week (October 9-15).

Organised by the Mental Health Awareness Foundation, the Week is endorsed by the World Federation for Mental Health, and is recognised in more than 150 countries.

The theme of this year's Week is **Nature is Key: Unlock your Wellbeing**.

The theme brings focus to how nature can enhance our mental health and get us out of a bad place through connecting, giving, taking notice, learning and being active.

Even just going for a walk or listening to the birds can do wonders for lifting your mood.

Ms Weber said a person's emotional and mental health is just as important as their physical health, and it deserves to be made a priority. Not only within ourselves, but also at a governance level.

"It is clear from the statistics that Kiwis aren't prioritising their mental health. There is an element of personal responsibility involved, but the services and systems need to be in place to ensure appropriate support is available when it is requested."

For more information, visit the Mental Health Awareness Week [website](#).

For activities organised by NZAC for the Week, visit the NZAC Facebook page



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Counselling helps Kiwis enter the workforce

After recovering from a skiing accident, George Gribbin has developed a new sense of empathy for people struggling to return to the workforce. He has an increased understanding of the traumatic lives with which some clients present and has lived the experience of the returning to work process. He now uses his specialised counselling skills to increase clients' readiness for work.

Now nearing the completion of his Masters in Counselling, George is an employment counsellor at Catapult Employment Services in Christchurch, and a provisional member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC).

He works with clients who are looking to return to work but who have a diagnosed disability or a mental health challenge. He provides Solution Focussed Brief Therapy (SBFT) mixed with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and mindfulness as part of a powerful counselling mix designed to get his clients work-ready.

SBFT originated in the USA in the 1980s. It is a method of therapy that focusses on the solution, as opposed to the problem.

He says many of his clients have anxiety about returning to or starting work, and it can be a frightening experience for them.

"SBFT encourages the client to find their own solutions. We will co-construct a preferred future (what a client wants more of). A SBFT practitioner may use a variety of specific questions and tools, for example; miracle questions, problem free talk, scaling questions and searching for exceptions.

"I will often listen to answers of SBFT questioning and link in the Five Ways of Wellbeing. This is a simple way to assess what a client is or is not doing for their own wellbeing."

The Five Ways was originally developed by the Unit Kingdom's New Economics Foundation research on what people need to do to flourish in their own wellbeing. This is now promoted by The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand. The Five Ways are: give, be active, keep learning, connect and take notice.

"Where clients present as low in mood, this can help identify exactly what areas a client wants to work on."

For some clients, George uses the Te Whare Tapa Wha Model in a similar way. It is a guiding model for clients of all cultures. If the Five Ways are not working for a client, the Te Whare Tapa Wha model may resonate better.

He says the 'connect' component of the Five Ways model is a particular focus area. He often finds his clients struggle to identify people with whom they feel connected, and as a result they express feelings of isolation.

"If you dig a bit deeper, a parent or even a person they said "hello" to in the supermarket is a connection. Even online connections are important."

"I've had many interesting conversations with clients about their connections with people online. Regarding what kind of person they're looking for, how they make the connection, and if the connection is something the client wants to work on face to face."

"People always want to be connected; that has never changed, it's just the rapid nature of and the form of the connection that differs."

SBFT and a focus on wellbeing models such as The Five Ways and Te Whare Tapa Wha, complement each other because they both focus on enhancing the client's strengths, coping strategies and wellbeing, as opposed to concentrating on the problem. This encourages co-constructed solutions.

"It's better for the client to come up with a solution, with me facilitating the process, than for me to provide the solution."

"The only times I find SBFT challenging is when clients are dealing with underlying trauma or grief. In these situations, we spend more time on the problem because they are not yet ready or willing to find their own solution."

Although he is excited by this approach, which is a growing area of research, it doesn't yet have a high profile and many counsellors are not yet familiar with it.

George said there is a stigma associated with counselling in New Zealand, and the common perception is 'you only see a counsellor if there's something wrong with you'.

"SBFT is a more collaborative approach to counselling. Once it gains a bit of exposure, it will help to address the stigma

issue.”

