

Innovative ways of working with young people:

Utilising a modified therapeutic community approach to treatment

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I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.



Meet Claire

15 y/o, female, Australian Aboriginal

Foster care from 2 y/o, 20+ placements

Abused in foster care

First suicide attempt age 8

Escalating drug use – cannabis, MDMA, ice, GHB

Mental health, self harm, suicide attempts

Abusive romantic relationships

Current treatment due to homelessness



PALM

Program for Adolescent Life Management (PALM) is a 3-month residential rehabilitation program for young people age 13-18

Designed to address serious drug and alcohol difficulties

Specific focus of working through trauma, challenging behaviours and complex needs

The program includes twice weekly counselling sessions, case management, family support, group work, living skills, recreational activities, and vocational/educational support

Modified therapeutic community model of treatment



PALM Demographics

34% Aboriginal and/or Torres Straight Islander

93% have an underlying mental health diagnosis

63% medicated

66% self harm

52% attempted suicide

90% reported exposure to trauma

63% physical assault from someone they know

34% sexual assault from someone they know*

5% have been arrested, **40%** have been incarcerated



Motivators for Seeking Treatment

Bail from juvenile detention centres

Conflict with family

Homelessness

Being kicked out of school

Underlying mental health conditions

... ongoing AOD use rare!



Challenges

Client resistance

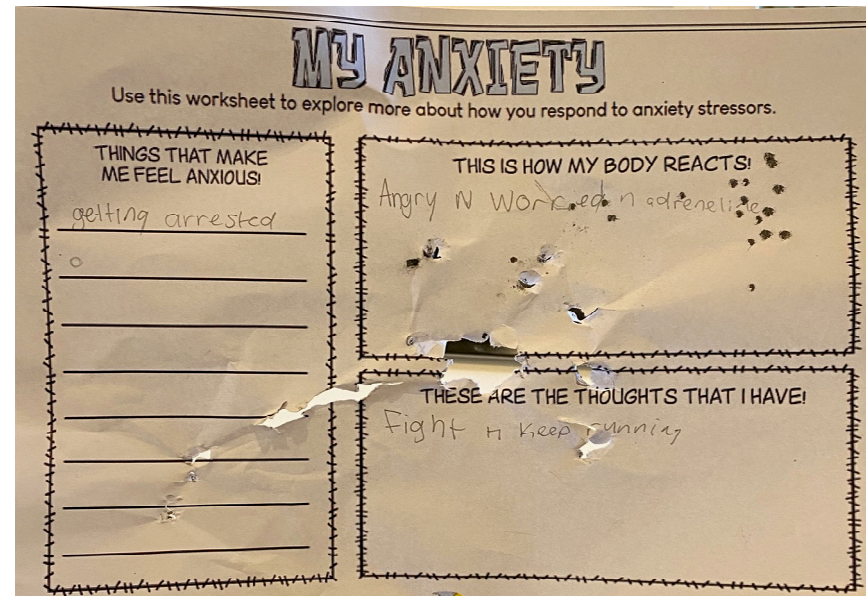
Coercion to participate - low buy in!

Developmental Stage of Adolescence

Seeing it as a game / joke / challenge to overcome

Positive views of AOD use

Impulsivity

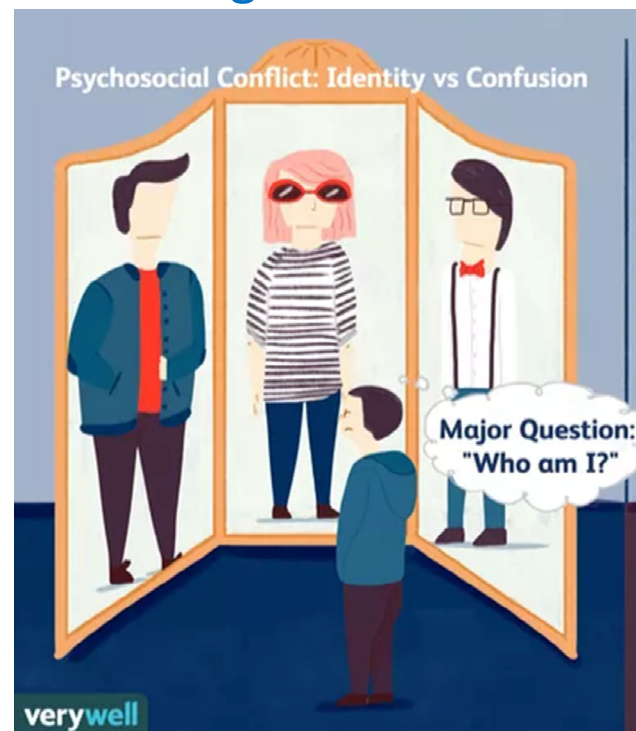


Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

Identity vs Identity Confusion

Desiring independence and developing a sense of self while also desiring a sense of belonging

Asking "who am I?"



Working with Resistance

So how do you work with young people who don't think they have a problem?



Working with Resistance

So how do you work with young people who don't think they have a problem?

We work to create a sense of safety, home and belonging. We build trust through showing care and providing consistency. We provide positive reinforcement to instill hope and build self-esteem.



Modifications of the TC Model

Individualised focus and treatment planning

Heavy use of staff to direct and lead the program

Introduction to safe adults & role models

Reflective conversations about behaviours

Hurdle helping...building self esteem

Program management!!!

Focus on responsibility

as



TC Model Applications

Using the community to promote growth and healing!

Providing sense of family and community, breeds belonging

Staged level of approach

House meetings

Mediations

Feedback

Home promotion

(ALM - Assistant Liasion) & senior residents



Why it Works!

Identity development: Helping to promote self-confidence and self-worth

Respect for responsibility and authority: Challenging previous beliefs of authority being bad or mean

Experience of safety and belonging: learning that there are new ways to live apart from belonging through AOD use and crime

Utilising positive peer pressure for positive growth and change



Case Study - Claire

Struggling with interpersonal relationships

Frequent emotional dysregulation – self harm

Unaware of how her behaviours were impacting others

Constant conflict with others, often leading to verbal and physical abuse



Claire – Processes & Treatment

House meetings to address behaviour and voice concerns

Individual counselling to help Claire reflect on behaviours

Receiving feedback from others – at least 4x/day

Being PAL and learning responsibility

Mediations, mediations, mediations – 3 hours long!



Claire – Outcomes

No self harm or suicidal behaviours for over 12 months

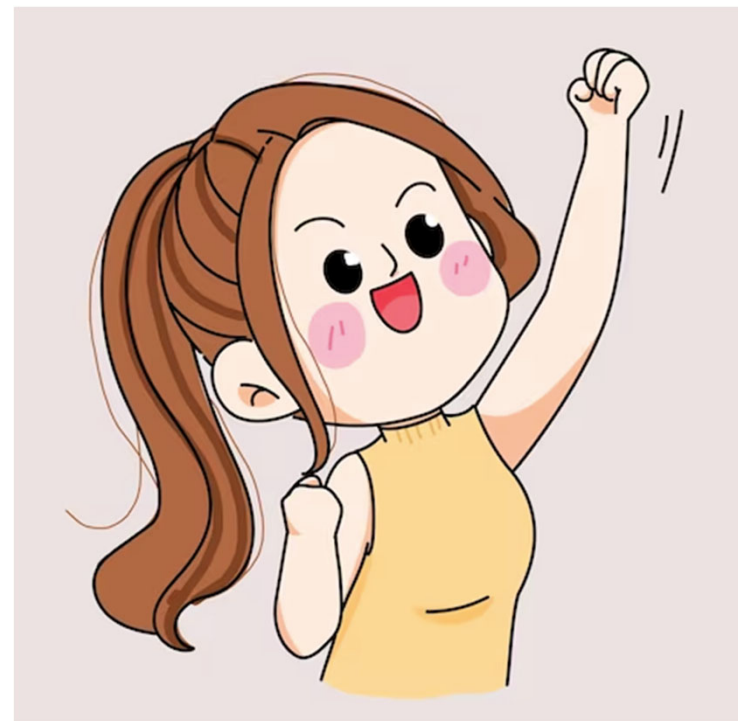
More aware of triggers and greater ability to manage interpersonal conflict

Studying

Stable accommodation

working

post-treatment



What Claire says she's gained from PALM

Write a small letter addressing 5 reasons things you learned this palm stay:

1

The first major thing i learnt at palm was how to trust, i feel before coming into palm i believed- that everyone had negative intentions for coming into my life but palm has honestly done nothing but prove that theory wrong.

2

i also have learnt how to be hopeful its something i still need to work on quite alot but i now try to see the positives in what i have learnt & accomplished in my stay at rehab and i really hope & believe in a better future for myself.

3

palm has taught me how to have gratitude & really be grateful for the little things i have been blessed with that 3 months ago more than likely would have been ignored

4

palm has taught me how to be self-aware of some of the positive & negative characteristics about myself i am no longer in denial of things i would usually never own upto about myself

5

palm has taught me the positives of being sober they never failed to show me what my life may look like if i decided to finally give up thing i really let controlled me, they taught me how to be happy & sober which i didn't ~~that~~ think was possible

Research Outcomes

Reduced future crime (Whitten et al., 2023)

high incline convictions trajectory

Reduced hospitalisations (Whitten et al., 2022)

Physical injury

Mental health problem

Substance use issue

Organic illness



Observed Outcomes

Growth in self-confidence

Reduced aggression/anger

Greater ability to communicate assertively and resolve interpersonal conflict

Child-like behaviours

Desire to please and do well

Ability to reduce drug use & crime

Prize for accomplishments

Improved family relationships



What our YP say about PALM

“You have helped shape the person I will become and the life I will lead in the future”



“You guys completely changed my life and the way I look at things”



“This program is the best thing that has ever happened to me”



“Noffs has changed me into the person that I want to become”



noffs™

THANK YOU!



References

- Whitten, T., Cale, J., Nathan, S., Williams, M., Baldry, E., Ferry, M., & Hayen, A. (2023). Influence of a residential drug and alcohol program on young people's criminal conviction trajectories. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *84*, 102026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2022.102026>
- Whitten, T., Cale, J., Nathan, S., Bista, S., Ferry, M., Williams, M., Rawstorne, P., & Hayen, A. (2022). Hospitalisation following therapeutic community drug and alcohol treatment for young people with and without a history of criminal conviction. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, *231*, 109280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2022.109280>

