# "GRASPING THE STRINGS OF BALLOONS": KIRKETON ROAD CENTRE'S GROUP COUNSELLING MODEL OF CARE TO IMPROVE WELL-BEING DURING COVID AND BEYOND

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# KRC (Kirketon Road Centre)



- A NSW Health primary health care service in Kings Cross
- Free, anonymous and no need for a Medicare card
- Multidisciplinary team of Doctors, Nurses, Counsellors and Health Education Officers
- Client priorities include vulnerable and marginalised populations especially:
  * those with AOD issues, including those who inject drugs
  * those with fragile mental well-being
  * those who are employed in the sex-work industry

*Additional priority* is given to those members of the following communities:
- Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and LBGTQIA+ peoples
- Rough sleepers
- At-risk youths
- Those living with HIV/Hep C

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# Background:

- People who inject drugs (PWID) may experience isolation and loneliness with few supports and connections with others
- Impacts of these on health and well-being were exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions
- Trauma histories of clients often result in a lack of skills to create and maintain healthy relationships
- A support group was established to develop connections beyond those already existing, identify skills needed to build positive relationships, and enhance their communication skills.

# Description of model of care/intervention:

- Clinicians assist group members to identify their most pressing issues, help make sense of their issues and problem-solve while eliciting mutual support and feedback from group members
- While the group often begins with a pre-planned preparation the focus may change depending on what is brought to the group
- Role-plays and brainstorming in pairs are often used to facilitate functional behaviours in their relationships and to create connections
- Educational topics included substance use, healthy boundaries, assertiveness and relationship skills

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# Effectiveness:

- Thirty (COVID-safe) group sessions have been conducted since September 2020 averaging 4 participants (range 1-5 people). Stages of change varied.
- On first attendance a loneliness questionnaire was completed which highlighted lack of connection and isolation.
- At the end of each session participants completed the Group Session Rating Scale (GSRS). Scores consistently reflected high levels of satisfaction.
- Return attendance was common signaling the potential value and benefit of accessing the group. Many report this group was their main source of social support during COVID-19.
- Flexibility has allowed innovative strategies to be employed as the group evolves. The consistency of the weekly group is proving beneficial to building trust.

# Conclusion and next steps

The need for this group clearly exists for this marginalized population of drug users.
In the immediate future, post-lockdown, KRC plans to expand the group membership to include referrals from other agencies.
And hopefully further into the future, the number of groups held weekly can be extended.

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