

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Helping our clients deal with trauma

HERBAL MEDICINE, dietary guidance, massage therapy and shiatsu, are just some of the Complementary Therapies (CT) available at Foundation house.

CT clients can access traditional medicines to improve their health as well as relieve and manage trauma symptoms. The CT service aims to provide clients with a safe space to acknowledge and pay particular attention to the impact of the refugee experience on the body and the mind/body connection. In 2011–2012, the CT service helped 304 clients referred by counsellor-advocates and Foundation House mental health clinic practitioners.

In September 2011, the CT team was pleased to expand into the newly established Sunshine office. This complements existing CT services in Brunswick, Dandenong and Ringwood.

In January 2012, the Brunswick office welcomed physiotherapist Lester Jones, who joined the team on a pro-bono basis. Lester works from a biopsychosocial perspective (that is, the belief that health is best understood as a combination of biological, psychological and social factors, rather than purely in biological terms). This approach lends itself well to refugee health and treatment of body pain.

CT and insomnia

Insomnia is a common reason for CT referral, with clients frequently reporting many months or years of disturbed sleep. This may stem from a traumatic event or period, such as being held in appalling prison conditions. Ongoing physical pain and tension, distress about family in danger overseas and nightmares, can all compound and perpetuate insomnia.

For some people, preparing a tea in the evening from a prescribed blend of medicinal herbs creates a positive relaxation ritual. Certain herbal medicines act as gentle, non-addictive nervous system relaxants or sedatives. Advice to clients often includes avoidance of caffeine and other stimulants, and encouragement to undertake physical activity such as brisk walks or swimming. The



> A selection of herbs dispensed by naturopaths at Foundation House for making medicinal teas.

combination of herbal relaxants and physical activity can help the body to 'let go' into a restful state at night.

Massage can also promote sleep by reducing

anxiety and increasing feelings of relaxation for the body and mind. Remedial massage can be of significant benefit where musculoskeletal pain or physical tension are barriers to sleep.

Refugee Mental Health Director visits Foundation House

AMBER GRAY, the Refugee Mental Health Director at New Mexico Department of Health in Santa Fe, visited Foundation House in August 2011 to meet with staff and discuss her approach to working with torture and trauma. Amber was in Australia to run workshops on body-centred and movement-based therapy for health professionals. She was particularly impressed by the CT program at Foundation House, noting that it was unique to offer therapies such as massage and herbal medicine in a torture and trauma organisation.

Amber met with 15 counsellor-advocates, managers and others to discuss somatic,

complementary and creative arts therapies for survivors of war and torture. Specific topics included:

- the challenges of providing a therapeutic response with high numbers of survivors in catastrophic contexts;
- the unique needs of cross-cultural therapies with survivors;
- how current research increasingly endorses the use of these therapies for work in trauma contexts.

The meeting provided an opportunity to share and 'cross-pollinate' ideas, theories, research and practical application of these therapies and the unique work of Foundation House.