Mindful mums have strong sense of community

Pregnancy and childbirth is a wonderful experience for many, but for some, it can bring anxiety and stress.

To help guide expectant mums through pregnancy, Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) has implemented an innovative program to reduce anxiety and equip them with strategies to support their mental wellbeing.

Facilitated by Clinical Nurse Consultant Chris Dawber and Midwife Amber Jenkins, the Mindful Mums program provides interventions to reduce worry and depression symptoms throughout pregnancy and after birth.

Mr Dawber said mindfulness was about focusing on non-judgemental awareness of the present and could help expectant mums feel better within themselves and reduce stress.

“A number of factors could contribute to mental illness in pregnancy including changing body shape, transition to motherhood, relationship issues and career changes,” he said.

“Researchers have also found that the practice of mindfulness and related techniques such as relaxation can help treat some mental health conditions.

“Mindful Mums provides a safe, supportive environment for expectant mums to not only share their experiences, but to also learn new ways to manage their anxieties.”

Ms Jenkins said the program included six, one-hour sessions comprising guided mindfulness practices and group sharing.

“By providing women with extra choices to address their mental health needs, we can also improve their satisfaction with the journey through pregnancy.

“Social support is recognised as a protective factor and groups such as Mindful Mums can improve a woman’s perinatal mental health issues by providing a supportive space.

“For the women in our group, providing a strong sense of community through the sharing of the experience of pregnancy enhances the benefits of the mindfulness therapy while reducing the stigma associated with mental illness.”

Penelope’s story:

Twenty-five-year-old Penelope Clearwater (not her real name) has always struggled with anxiety and depression.
For her, Mindful Mums was a way to help her manage her anxieties in a supportive environment.

“I tend to get caught up in things I cannot control. Mindful Mums has really helped me connect with other women who are experiencing similar things. It’s nice to know that you’re not the only one going through these things,” Penelope said.

“The program has helped keep me on track and better manage my anxieties.”

Rochana’s story:

For 25-year-old Rochana Bell, a yoga teacher, the Mindful Mums course provided an opportunity to meet other expectant mums, with similar interests.

“I have a strong an interest in mindfulness and I wanted to be able to meet other like-minded people,” she said.

“Mindful Mums has given me a great sense of community. It's a bit different to birth education classes and it's connected me with others experiencing similar things.

“It’s also a nice way to designate time for yourself…to relax and learn. It’s amazing a hospital provides such a program.”

Tiffany’s story:

Tiffany Ring, 31, says the simple act of being around other pregnant women was calming for her.

“Knowing that what I’m going through and feeling with my pregnancy is completely normal is just wonderful. It makes me feel much more comfortable with my journey," she said.

“The mind-body connection I feel through Mindful Mums is very empowering and the techniques I’ve learnt through the program will only help to provide me strength throughout pregnancy and birth.

“I’ve also made some really great friends from this class. We catch up after class and that support we feel in Mindful Mums continues outside the classroom. It’s really fantastic.”

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