

# TERESA'S TURNAROUND

## THROUGH CONNECTED CARE



### General Practitioners and Social Workers collaborate to improve lives in Sydney's North

Teresa Caruso, a 62-year-old mother of two, grandmother of three and wife to partner Frank, couldn't get off her couch. Outside her home, in the suburbs of Northern Sydney, the local community was largely unaware of Teresa's difficulties.

Teresa's health condition had deteriorated over time. Her physical and mental health complications resulted in days increasingly spent at home in the living room, watching television, with limited sunshine and social interaction except with her immediate family. Frank, Teresa's husband of almost 40 years, had become her full-time carer. "Frank does all the cooking and cleaning. He's a very good man," says Teresa.

#### As Teresa's health declined, she decided to reach out to her General Practitioner (GP).

Besides attending to Teresa's immediate medical needs, the GP recommended a more holistic care approach for Teresa, referring Teresa to the "GP Social Work Connect" program. This program is delivered by not-for-profit local health organisation Primary and Community Care Services (PCCS) and commissioned by the Sydney North Primary Health Network on behalf of the Australian Government.

Sarah Melvin from PCCS was appointed Teresa's social worker. "Working in partnership with Teresa's GP, I am here to help Teresa and her family navigate the complex social services sector – helping her to be more independent and socially active. Working with her GP, I am addressing psycho-social<sup>1</sup> issues, helping to resolve these with personalised support, and helping Teresa access complimentary services in the local community and beyond."

"If a patient goes to a GP with particular health and medical issues, the GP may identify the GP Social Work Connect program to better support the patient and send us a referral. Once we receive the referral, we allocate a social worker to the patient. We then meet with the patient at their home to talk about addressing their needs and develop an action plan together. It is a step by step process that closely involves the referring GP. By working as one team, the GP and myself – as well as other members of the extended care team as needed – are better



#### Teresa Caruso

GP Social Work Connect program client

“ Sarah sometimes helps by telling my GP what things she needs to do to help with the services and she helps us with a lot of the paperwork. She helps me to relax. I feel like with the help of my GP and Sarah I have a team. My team helps me with the NDIS and my health. ”

<sup>1</sup> The concept of psycho-social health addresses the state of an individual's mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. It relates to a combination of social factors and individual thought and behaviour.

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## GPs & Social Workers Connect for Better Care

able to provide the right information and help patients to access the right social services and supports in their local community. The GP Social Work Connect program runs for eight weeks and PCCS regularly updates the GP via securing messaging services on the patient's progress during that time," says Sarah.

Sarah is passionate about the program, having seen the positive results. "When I first came to meet Teresa, she told me she never left the house. So, one of my suggestions was to help her to access and participate in local community activities. Originally Teresa resisted the idea, but after six weeks of working together, I now receive phone calls from her about what social groups and activities she might be able to attend next. Teresa is much more confident, social, and wanting to get out and about and try new things. We have also just received the news that Teresa will now receive the Disability Support Pension which we have been working on together. Her husband Frank needs a break from time to time as well, so we are working on getting a carer's allowance for him."

For Teresa, things have changed for the better, she says, "As a result of my GP and Sarah working as a team, my health has improved. I feel more alive, I feel better, and life is beautiful again. Thanks to my GP and Sarah, Frank and I go out most mornings walking, shopping, watching people and enjoying a cappuccino. With the social groups I have joined I have been able to talk to more people, go to dinner at the local club, visit Sydney Harbour, and see the Christmas lights."

As a husband, grandfather, loyal Manly Sea Eagle's fan and carer, Teresa's husband Frank wears many hats. He is clearly thankful for the assistance the GP Social Work Connect program has delivered. "I do most of the cooking, cleaning and take Teresa to all of her appointments. It's easier now. This service has helped us so much!".

**Teresa's life has turned around, moving from being socially isolated and suffering from poor health, to a more healthy, independent, and socially active member of the Northern Sydney community.**

"The idea of the GP Social Work Connect program is for the GP to focus on the health and medical needs of the patient and refer to the social workers to assist with social services needs. These may include the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), My Aged Care, Centrelink, Department of Housing, community transport, helping people who have become dependent on drugs or alcohol, or even supporting carers suffering from stress and burnout. It's coordinated care in action," says Cynthia Stanton - General Manager, Primary Care Advancement and Integration, Sydney North Primary Health Network.

Sydney North Primary Health Network, an Australian Government funded initiative, established the GP Social Work Connect program in response to its 2016/17 local area health needs assessment. This annual population-level assessment identified people with chronic disease,



### Cynthia Stanton

Primary Care Advancement & Integration Manager, SNPHN

“The idea of the GP Social Work Connect program is for the GP to focus on the health and medical needs of the patient, and refer to the social workers to assist with social services needs.”



### Sarah Melvin

GP Social Worker at PCCS

“We work with GPs to achieve better outcomes for clients by addressing psycho-social issues and, in turn, trying to reduce hospital admissions. We support clients and their carers to access services that they may not have previously had access to or even known about.”

## Naomi Bee

Senior Care Coordinator for GP Social Work Program at CCNB

“ It is about working as a team and coming up with an agreed plan and goals with the client. We believe with the support of both the GP and social worker, the client can achieve the best outcome and live their best life. ”



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GPs & Social Workers Connect for Better Care

### RESULTS (At six months)



304

Patients referred to the social work program



195

General Practitioners taking part in the program

dementia or who are ageing as having a potentially greater risk of lower health outcomes in certain settings, and a higher need for acute care intervention and hospitalisation.

The GP Social Work Connect program has helped the more vulnerable members of the Sydney North local community achieve better health and care where and when it is most needed. At the end of December 2017, the program had assisted **304** patients who were referred by **195** General Practitioners.

The key benefits of the GP Social Work Connect program include:

- Timely and flexible access to holistic, practical support to ensure the social determinants of good health are identified and managed to improve patient outcomes;
- Regular appointments and visits offered by a mobile Social Worker team; and
- Support for patients to develop strategies to build their capacity to self-manage their condition, take control, and reduce stress.

The Sydney North GP Social Work Connect program is delivered by the following not-for-profit organisations:

#### Primary & Community Care Services (PCCS)

Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Ryde and Hunters Hill

**Phone:** (02) 9477 8700 (ask for the GP Social Worker)

**Email:** [intake@pccs.org.au](mailto:intake@pccs.org.au)

#### Complete a GP Social Worker Connect Referral Form:

[www.pccs.org.au/programs-services/gp-social-work-connect](http://www.pccs.org.au/programs-services/gp-social-work-connect)

and fax to 1300 067 747.

**Note:** All referrals will receive a confirmation via secure messaging (GPSocial).



#### Community Care Northern Beaches (CCNB)

Lower North Shore and Beaches region

**Phone:** 1300 002 262 (ask for the GP Social Work Program care navigators)

**Email:** [referrals@ccnb.com.au](mailto:referrals@ccnb.com.au)

**Website:** [www.ccnb.com.au/gpsocialworker](http://www.ccnb.com.au/gpsocialworker)



For more information on the **GP Social Work Program** including eligibility criteria and how GPs can make a referral please refer to our website [www.snhn.org.au](http://www.snhn.org.au).

