

Zeb art therapy

Innovative therapy brings insights and resilience

ART therapist and counsellor Zeb Brierley specialises in using visual cues to help children and adults of all ages to identify and objectively express problems or issues in their lives, reach insights and become empowered to deal with crises and troubling situations.

Her business *Zeb and the Art of Personal Maintenance* has been operating throughout South Gippsland's primary and secondary schools assisting children with family problems, mental health issues, self-esteem, confidence and the like.

She has also worked with Meeniyan's cancer support group and people going through transition periods such as a death in the family, a marriage breakdown or loss of employment as the therapy helps people to reconnect and rebuild new lives.

A Foster North resident, Zeb is now looking to expand into assisting more people, whether as individuals, in small groups at community house classes or health support groups and in aged care facilities.

The visual cue techniques can consist of using special sets of cards with pictures and photographs, three-dimensional objects, drawings, doodles, cut-and-paste or other art forms. The cues can be used as prompts to start the session off and commence focusing on relevant issues, and as the session progresses then leads on to 'unpack' the client's story.

Zeb explained, "The visual stimulation works on a lot of levels as metaphors.

"It helps distance the client from the problem in a concrete form that brings objectivity and pictures say a thousand words.

"This often helps people find the words that have been evading them."

She added, "What people select is often an unconscious process that helps the counsellor enter into the client's world by picking up on concrete feelings.

Zeb said that she chooses a method or methods that the client is most comfortable with, and uses tactful, carefully worded prompts to support people to find a way in mapping a path through an emotional maze to their own wisdom and understanding.

"I focus on what is working in their lives so they can see what they are doing right," she stated.

"This builds people's confidence in realising that they are doing better than they often think they are.

"The counselling helps them to use the skills they have to apply to areas that are not working in their lives, which means that people can re-apply those skills in future situations."

Zeb continued, "Since people are so close to their own experiences and often have conflicting emotions, so it helps to use a creative method that gives them permission to open up and find clarity."

She has witnessed art therapy helping to ground elderly people in the present, give a reprieve to people suffering depression, build resilience in adolescents, encourage children to tell their stories and help males articulate their feelings.

"I feel that one's own life experiences help with empathy, and I have had some tough times myself in the past with cancer and the loss of a 15-year marriage," Zeb confided.

Professionally, Zeb commenced as a Drama and English teacher, but following her developing interests, progressed into completing a Graduate Diploma in Counselling and a Masters in Art Therapy, with the latter qualification including intensive clinical placement under supervision.

She has nine years experience as an art therapist and counsellor – a job also known as art psychotherapy – and has worked in psychiatric hospitals, drug rehabilitation centres and schools.

Zeb has also lectured at the Masters in Art Therapy course at Latrobe University and will be teaching an introduction to Art Therapy at GippsTAFE.

Presently *Zeb and the Art of Personal Maintenance* is based one day per week at Koonwarra Day Spa, but if the demand for her services supports it, she plans to open a base in Foster. Meanwhile, if circumstances require, Zeb can travel to other locations and be flexible about her hours of operation.

Both South Gippsland Secondary College School Nurse Anna Stefani and Leongatha Primary School Assistant Principal Grant Kuhne are happy to act as referees should anyone wish to hear impressions about Zeb's methods at firsthand.

Anna said, "After working with Zeb at three eight-week session courses with small groups of teenagers, I can attest that she builds a trusting environment where young people feel safe to open up and learn self awareness, build esteem and develop confidence and communication skills through the art therapy methods.

"You don't have to be artistic to use the methods successfully."

Grant related that Zeb's innovative and creative methods made a big difference to primary school students so that they were "happier, able to mix better with their peers, build self-esteem and consequently learn better."

Zeb can be contacted on 0413 705 246 for inquiries and appointments.