ONE IN SIX WOMEN EXPERIENCE PERINATAL ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION DURING PREGNANCY OR CHILDBIRTH[1]

SAFE SPACE

SAFE SPACE, BLACKTOWN

Stride is a mental health charity delivering services to support people experiencing mental health concerns. Safe Space in Blacktown is one such program, and is designed to support a range of individuals. The Safe Space house is equipped with sensory rooms and staffed by peer workers, support workers and mental health specialists who offer care outside of a clinical environment.

Mental health is a priority health improvement area for Western Sydney Primary Health Network. WentWest commissioned Blacktown Safe Space - the first of its kind service in NSW - following successful pilots in QLD. The success of Blacktown Safe Space has helped secure the rollout for three additional Safe Space houses across NSW and QLD.

Victoria* was brought to Safe Space when she was 14 weeks pregnant by her neighbour, who was concerned for her safety. The Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDs) measures the intensity of distress in people with social anxiety. When Victoria arrived at Safe Space, she was visibly upset and rated 100 out of 100 on the SUDs scale.

As a mum of a three-year-old and one-year-old, Victoria reported suffering panic attacks during her previous pregnancies. She stated this time felt much worse, in part due to the trauma of prior childbirths. Victoria acknowledged that she had a history of self-harm and that she currently felt suicidal. She was worried that she was developing psychosis as she had intrusive thoughts that she was dying, which further convinced her to take her own life. Her concern for her existing children prevented her from reaching out for help, as she feared that they would be removed if authorities learned of her suicidal state.

Safe Space staff recommended that Victoria be cared for within a hospital setting. However, Victoria felt that an ambulance or hospital admittance would be too emotionally triggering in her current state.

Victoria was provided with techniques to lower distress and anxiety symptoms and psychoeducation to reduce panic attacks. After practising various relaxation techniques, Victoria chose to discuss her options with her neighbour, supported by Safe Space staff. Victoria decided that she would be comfortable being transported to her local hospital by her neighbour, and Safe Space staff connected her to the Mental Health Access Team ahead of her arrival.

Victoria was much calmer when she left Safe Space after staff provided her with a non-judgemental space to share her story and formulate a support plan. In a follow-up call, Victoria shared that she is now linked up with the perinatal mental health team and feels she has all the supports she needs.

For more information about how WentWest supports Western Sydney, visit www.wentwest.com.au.