

MEDIA RELEASE

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Lifeline launches first 'Family as Motivators' course to help with distress of hoarding disorder

How do you help a loved one with a hoarding habit – someone whose compulsive collecting and inability to declutter causes tension and distress?

“Don’t get angry with them,” says Judy Nicholas, of Denistone East, whose own unrestrained ‘collecting’ once caused significant marital strife.

This month, Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury will launch a unique Families as Motivators support group for people who live with or care for someone with hoarding disorder.

“Doing so can be very physically and emotionally demanding,” said psychologist, Simone Isemann, Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury’s head of clinical services.

“For most families, this is a whole new, uncharted area of experience. Where do you go for sound advice, guidance, specialist knowledge, and information you can trust? And where do you turn, when you yourself need some form of emotional or psychological support?”

Ms Isemann sees the new Family as Motivators program it is an important step towards providing better support and guidance for people in the Harbour to Hawkesbury area who might feel at their wit’s end trying to help someone living with hoarding disorder.

Believing it to be the first of its kind in Australia, Ms Isemann devised it as a natural progression from the centre’s existing treatment programs for people with a hoarding problem, and training programs for professionals in the areas of mental health, community services and housing.

Judy Nicholas twice attended the treatment program for people with hoarding disorder and now considers herself a discerning collector who has learned to declutter. Her advice to the loved ones or carers of a person like her?

“Try to put yourself in their shoes,” Judy said. “Try to understand how they feel and why they do it. Be patient. Maybe you could talk to them about it.”

“Show empathy,” said her daughter, Leanne, adding that she has also learned to throw out her own collections of magazines and the clothes she no longer needs.



Both mother and daughter have obsessive compulsive disorder and are 'lived experience' mental health advocates.

"My husband would get very angry about me collecting more and more things, but in fact, his anger only increased my defiance," Judy said. "For me it was about filling a house I disliked intensely with things that I did like, that reflected my personality."

Lifeline harbour to Hawkesbury's first-ever Family as Motivators support program will run for 10 weeks, starting on Monday, March 27.

Bookings are essential and can be made by calling Lifeline on 02 9498 8805 or emailing appointments@lifelineh2h.org.au.

Picture caption 1: Simone Isemann, Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury Clinical Services Manager and hoarding disorder program coordinator.

Picture caption 2: Judy Nicholas, left, one-time collector who couldn't declutter, with her daughter Leanne, at home among the possessions she says reflect her personality - but no longer cause problems in her life.

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