



CONSUMER INTERVIEW

“The Coronavirus has made me feel more alone than ever before”

The current Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Australia and the ensuing lockdown and social isolation has created an environment where Yasser, a man living with HIV and who lives alone started reliving past traumas.

His counsellor reminded him of the joys of connecting with others and this as well as his own resilience helped get him through to the other side.

Yasser Ibrahim arrived in Australia as a humanitarian refugee in 2017. Yasser who was, in his own words “persecuted and stigmatised in my own country” has an incredible story of survival. He shared some of his experiences growing up in Egypt where stigma and discrimination about HIV and sexuality increased the suffering he endured as a young man.

Yasser, a proud Egyptian man in his forties, has three sons, all of whom live in Egypt. Yasser lives alone in a small flat in Western Sydney. He does not have a big circle of friends, rather just a few and to quote Yasser “Coronavirus has made me feel more alone than ever before”.

Yasser who has been diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and a major depressive illness, described to me that on a “normal day” he struggles with feelings of loneliness and isolation and that the current situation does not help with his feelings.

During the current pandemic with the social distancing and lockdown, Yasser described to me that he started suffering from flashbacks associated with his past traumas, whilst living in Egypt. These flashbacks have become more frequent and also more detailed. Yasser spoke about how this interrupts his sleep significantly and how sometimes in the morning he doesn't want to get out of bed.

We also spoke about, how during this time Yasser has been having times of real anger. These feelings of anger are not necessarily associated with Yasser's past but more related to the current situation of isolation and not having close relationships with people who he can share his current experiences with. “I would love to have someone special, to share things such as walks, a companion”. I couldn't help but feel for Yasser at this moment.

During his time here in Sydney Yasser has linked up with a counsellor whom he sees regularly. It was during one of these sessions that Yasser was reminded of activities he enjoyed. Activities Yasser could still practice whilst social distancing. Simple activities like going for walks, yoga and connecting with his online friends to share his feelings are activities Yasser can do while social distancing.

Throughout this difficult time, Yasser spoke from the heart about the joy he is getting from recently reconnecting with his three sons, his mother and sister, all of whom live in Egypt. This reconnecting has allowed for his family to feel somewhat reunited, and reminded Yasser of the importance of family. “This brings me the greatest joy and is something I look forward to”. Yasser also connects with young people, students and offers them support and mentoring via the internet. He shares with them his experiences and offers advice on issues they face as young people living in a modern Egypt.

Lastly, we spoke about the future and Yasser's hopes and dreams for the future. Yasser spoke with excitement about a course he is studying to become a counsellor. This course is something he feels suits his desire to genuinely help and connect with people. The course is full time and allows Yasser to attend classes on campus at Macquarie Park, three days a week. He also has the opportunity to meet and connect with other students and is thoroughly enjoying his time studying. He looks forward to completing this Diploma and working with young people.

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences Yasser.

Talk about your worries and share how you feel

Looking after yourself



Discussions around the COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) outbreak and practising social distancing can be stressful and impact our mental health and wellbeing. It's natural to feel a range of emotions such as stress, worry, anxiety, boredom or low mood. Many people feel distressed by the constant and overwhelming amount of information and the rapid pace at which the information can change.

It is important to seek support if you are feeling overwhelmed. Speaking with friends or family can help and they might also appreciate talking to you about how they feel. There are also many services that you can access online or over the phone, or you can connect with a health professional such as your GP, a psychologist, or other mental health professional using telehealth. (see page 3 in this newsletter)

As the social restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic unfold, the potential for harms associated with alcohol and other drugs may increase. Some people may find themselves drinking or using substances more to cope with our changing environment as well as anxiety, negativity and stress.

While it is important to stay informed, the following are some mental health and wellbeing tips to help living in these difficult times.

- **Get the facts:** Get factual information from respected websites and services that will help you to accurately determine your own or other people's risk of contracting COVID-19 so that you can take reasonable precautions.
- **Talk about your worries:** Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone, so sharing how you are feeling and what you are doing to cope with family and friends can help them too.
- **Keep appointments with your doctor(s).** Call to make an appointment and call to confirm appointments. Check the way your appointment may happen e.g. via a telephone consultation. Keep up with your medications, prescriptions, and flu vaccination.
- **For those working from home,** try to maintain a healthy balance by allocating specific work hours, taking regular breaks, and if possible, establishing a dedicated work space.
- **Set a limit on your drug and alcohol use** – what you take and drink, and how much – and think about who can help you keep on track.

Some useful phone numbers and websites are listed below for your information:

- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **Positive Life NSW:** www.positivelife.org.au
- **Head to Health:** www.headtohealth.gov.au

Celebrating Men's Health Week amongst the hustle and bustle of COVID-19

**WORKING TOGETHER
FOR MEN'S HEALTH**

**PREVENTING SUICIDE
TOGETHER**



**MEN'S HEALTH WEEK
15-21 JUNE 2020**
menshealthweek.org.au

Men's Health Week (15-21 June 2020) is an opportunity to raise awareness about the state of men's health generally. This year NSW Men's Health Week are calling for men and women from all cultures to work together to raise awareness about men and suicide.

Did you know that in Australia in 2018 the rate of suicide among men was 3 times higher than for females - 75% of people who died by suicide were men and 25% were women.

We all need to encourage men to ask for help when they are depressed or feeling isolated and alone. Historically men have often found it difficult to express their feelings and this means they don't always ask for help when they need it.

The reason that men suicide is complicated. This week allows us to spend time talking about the issue among friends and family members. Suicide is devastating for those left behind so we need to work together to make sure that we look after male friends and family members.

There are many services available and phone lines to access for people who feel they are in crisis or a feeling depressed and/or suicidal.

Call Lifeline 24/7 on 13 11 14.



What is telehealth?

Telehealth is a health service that is delivered by a video or phone. In Australia, it has traditionally been used with people who live in geographically isolated areas and cannot easily visit a GP or a health clinic.

However during the current COVID-19 pandemic the federal government has extended access to telehealth to include all Australians with a Medicare card.

The aim of this is to reduce exposure of COVID-19 within the community.

People who are worried about travelling, are isolating or have a difficult time getting out and about can now have a consultation using video conferencing (if accessible) or telephone. These changes will remain until the 30 September 2020.

What can I use telehealth for?

Telehealth can be used for general health consultations as well as HIV-specific consultations with your HIV doctor. If you are living with HIV and you have seen your doctor at least once on a face to face basis in the last 12 months, you can have bulk-billed phone consultations. You can also use it to talk to your GP about other non HIV-related conditions.

Your doctor can also help organise your scripts by sending prescriptions electronically to your pharmacy. Your medication can then be delivered to your door so make sure your correct address is on the prescription.

How do I organise a consultation?

To organise a telehealth consultation ring your doctor and let them know you would like to make a time for a telehealth consultation. You can read more about telehealth on the Pozhet website page about COVID-19.

If you usually access a sexual health service or HIV Clinic give them a call to see what is available. Most are offering a mixture of telehealth and face to face services depending on what is required. Sexual health services also provide counselling over the phone or video.

There is something I have to tell you...

'There's something I have to tell you' is a collection of personal stories from Australian women who have experienced their relationship breaking down due to their male partner coming out as gay, or the discovery that he has been having sex with men. It follows the success of his Secret, Her Story, which was published in 2009 and was the first Australian publication of its kind.

In these personal stories, each woman describes how she discovered her partner's secret, her attraction, her reaction and those of her family and friends, and how she navigated her way through a sea of emotions to her new reality.

The title of the book reflects a comment often made by women partners of gay and bisexual men, and that is that they with their partner had said earlier 'there's something I have to tell you'.



The Women Partners of Bisexual Men Service has been at Leichhardt Women's Health Centre for 20 years. It provides counselling and support for women partners and have recently published their second book of interviews with women.

The Women Partners of Bisexual Men Service, funded by Sydney Local Health District, has released a new book of interviews with women who share their experiences of their relationship breaking down due to their male partner being same sex attracted. "There's something I have to tell you" follows the success of their previous book "His Secret, Her Story" and is a collection of 20 women's personal stories, in which each woman describes how she discovered her partner's same sex attraction, her reaction and those of her family and friends, and how she navigated her way through her emotions to her new reality.

Available in the publications section at www.womenpartners.org.au

New Pozhet Factsheets

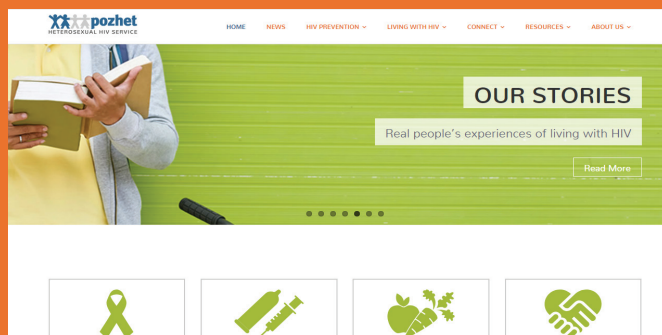


Advances in treatments mean that people living with HIV can have healthy children. This topic and others are discussed in two new Pozhet factsheets.

Advances in HIV treatments mean that men and women living with HIV can have relationships, sex and children without passing on HIV to their partner or baby. These topics are discussed in two new Pozhet Factsheets: *HIV and Having a Baby* and *HIV and Relationships*, which were developed in partnership with the Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service. The factsheets provide basic information and useful contacts and are the first in a series of factsheets that will be developed for people living with HIV and their partners in 2020. These resources are also useful tools for the general community as they provide easy to read facts for people who might not know a lot about HIV.

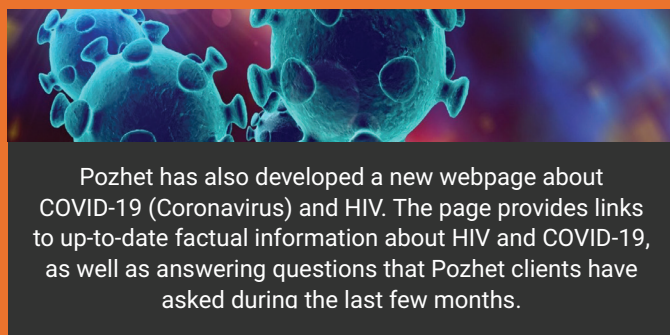
The factsheets can be downloaded in the resource section of the Pozhet website www.pozhet.org.au

New Pozhet website



Pozhet has a new refreshed website.

Stay up to date by checking the website regularly to get news and information about issues relevant to people affected by HIV.



These questions include queries about treatments, doctor consultations, accessing scripts and using telehealth. You can find this page at www.pozhet.org.au