

Michelle, 49

Teacher & mother-to-two who strongly advocates the use of tele-tech services for psychological support, SYDNEY

Teacher and mother-to-two, Michelle, 49, Sydney, loves Zumba, painting, jewellery-making and glasswork.

Just over seven weeks after the birth of her first child, Michelle followed her husband and his career to Malaysia. Living so far from home for the first time in her life, with a newborn in her arms but no support network, thrust Michelle into post-natal depression.

Over the ensuing 10 years, she continued to wrestle with her mental health, and developed chronic insomnia, which had a snowball effect on her health and wellbeing. Then one day, Michelle's life came crashing down around her, when her then husband of 12 years abandoned her, resulting in a near "mental breakdown".

Michelle sought help from a range of mental health professionals at the time, including a psychologist, who helped keep her "afloat" during the aftermath of her failed marriage.

Nowadays, Michelle is keen to share her story of psychological distress, to help raise community awareness of the importance of seeking proactive, mental health care. Given the current, ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and in the face of a mental health crisis, Michelle maintains there is no better time for every Australian to seek mental health tele-tech support.

This is Michelle's story.

Prior to the birth of her first child, Michelle had two miscarriages, before enduring heavy bleeding 12 weeks into her third pregnancy. The fear of losing her baby while also struggling with her mental health, culminated in a very traumatic birth.

"The birth itself was extremely difficult. I then ended up haemorrhaging profusely, to such an extent that I thought I was going to die," said Michelle.

Less than two months after giving birth, Michelle, together with her husband and newborn, moved to Malaysia to further her husband's career. Up-rooting her entire life soon after experiencing a difficult birth, and relocating to a foreign country without a much-needed support network, threw Michelle into post-natal depression.

"In hindsight, I think I was showing symptoms of post-natal depression before moving to Malaysia, given the anticipation of all of the upcoming lifestyle changes, while also juggling my first baby.

"Once I arrived in Malaysia, I developed chronic insomnia, and my mental health began to spiral out of control," Michelle said.

"Lacking a support network at the time, and not knowing where to seek help in a foreign country, forced me to endure my psychological distress."



Fortunately for Michelle, less than six months into the move, her husband's overseas business venture failed, and her family moved back to Australia.

"When I returned home, I knew I had to seek professional help, because my mental health was affecting my entire life.

"I saw a psychiatrist, and found it very beneficial to have a professional to talk to," said Michelle.

Over the following 10 years, which included the birth of her second child, Michelle was left to raise her two young children predominantly on her own. Her insomnia continued, and her mental health and wellbeing suffered intermittently.

Then, 12 years into her marriage, Michelle's husband chose to walk out on his family.

"I was very close to having a mental breakdown. I was terrified, as I had two young children, I hadn't worked for more than a decade, and my husband had handled all our finances. I was barely able to cope.

"I visited a counsellor because I knew I needed psychological help. However, I wasn't able to afford a psychologist at the time due to my financial situation. I was just trying to keep my head above water," Michelle said.

After her divorce, Michelle began to make regular, in-person visits to a psychologist.

"Visiting a psychologist helped me realise that throughout my marriage, I had been subjected to a form of domestic violence. Gratefully, I was able to work through this with her, which helped to unburden my mental health," said Michelle.

More recently, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, Michelle has turned to telehealth to secure mental health support for her youngest daughter.

"Telehealth can prove limiting when applied to physical health issues, because there is sometimes a need to see a doctor in person for tests, or to show a physical ailment.

"However, with psychology, there are no real limitations to accessing the professional help you require via telehealth. Most importantly, you need to find someone to speak to, who can listen to you, and help you manage what you're going through," Michelle said.

"With the current COVID-19 pandemic placing additional pressures on our mental health and wellbeing, and imposing physical restrictions on our lives, there has never been a better time, or reason, for Australians to utilise mental health tele-tech services."

Michelle is excited by the ability of My Mirror – an Australian, digital mental health clinic that strives to normalise the process of talking to a mental healthcare professional – to improve Australians' access to psychological support.

"Everyone can benefit from seeing a psychologist. After all, we're all human, and we all experience certain days when we struggle with our mental health.

"Don't be frightened to seek professional support. A psychologist can help you to realise you're not alone, and can support you with whatever you're going through, without judgement," said Michelle.

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