

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT – April 2020

Well the world has really turned on its head since our last newsletter in January. At that time, we were reeling from the bushfires across the country, but now we are faced with the dire circumstances of the COVID-19 virus and its invisible spread, which has forced us all into self-isolation and social distancing.

We do not know how long these circumstances will need to be in place, which can seem particularly daunting.

Here at ADSSA we are working remotely, but are still available on our usual phone and email contacts at all times. We recognise that our clients with already compromised lung function are particularly vulnerable and we hope that you are keeping yourselves safe. This can be a frightening time and our Social Worker is available to talk to if you are finding it overwhelming.



I am sad to report that Phil, who spoke so eloquently at our Memorial Day in November, passed away earlier this month. Unfortunately, his condition deteriorated quite rapidly.

Are you thinking of making improvements to your home?

During this time of social distancing, you may be thinking this is the perfect opportunity to make some headway on your renovations or home improvements.

However, it's important to know that many houses built before 1990 contain asbestos cement materials, especially in the eaves, ceilings, internal and external wall cladding (particularly in wet areas such as bathrooms and laundries), as well as under tiling and lino. Old sheds and fences may also contain asbestos.

These can often be in poor condition due to age or weather exposure and pose a significant risk if asbestos fibres are released, become airborne and then inhaled. Breathing these fibres can cause a range of life-threatening diseases including mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis.

If you think there may be asbestos in or around your property, you should contact an asbestos professional (asbestos assessor or licensed removalist) before starting any work on your home.

Engaging professionals who know how to manage this work safely will protect you, your family and your neighbours from this risk. Currently, asbestos assessors and licensed

removalists are continuing to work. Still, some may choose not to come to your house as a precautionary measure.

If you do arrange for an asbestos professional to come to your home during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a number of precautions you should take to ensure correct hygiene and social distancing measures are in place:

- Check-in with the asbestos professional before they visit to ensure you are both feeling well and are not showing symptoms. If anyone in your home is showing symptoms linked to COVID-19, ask the asbestos professional to advise you on how to control the risk of asbestos exposure until you are able to have the professional attend.
- Remember don't shake hands, you can wave hello instead
- Maintain a safe distance at all times in line with current social distancing guidelines
- Provide facilities for the professional to wash their hands before and after the job is done and, if possible, supply alcohol-based hand sanitiser for them to use
- Clean and disinfect the surrounding surfaces if work is to be carried out (unless suspected asbestos has been disturbed or is in poor condition)
- Ensure everyone in the household practises good hygiene at all times, including covering coughs and sneezes with an elbow or a tissue and regularly washing hands with soap for a full 20 seconds

There are resources available to help you to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in circumstances where you must have professional tradespeople attend your home. [You can find an example of such information here.](#)

Remember - if you are unsure if something contains asbestos, treat it as if it does and call a professional. It's just not worth risking your health or the health of your loved ones.

Please look after yourselves, and get in touch if you need support.

Peter Photakis – President

From the Social Worker - Like so many others, I am not having 'live' contact with my clients at the moment. I am only able to phone clients. It feels very strange, and is less than satisfactory. It feels shallow and remote, but one must abide by the authorities and hope for better times, sooner rather than later!!

Human beings are many-faceted, complex creatures. We operate on a multitude of emotional levels, not all of which are put on public display. I shouldn't be amazed, having worked with the asbestos cohort for so many years now, but I have to say, again and again, you are a hardy, resilient lot! The overwhelming response I am getting when I contact a client is, "We're doing ok, all things considered".

Dr Martin E. Seligman, the modern scholar most often associated with studying the traits of optimists, and former president of the American Psychological Association and Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, has devoted decades to studying optimistic people. He [reports](#) three traits they have in common:

They view adversity in their lives as temporary, specific and external, that is, not entirely their fault, as opposed to pessimists who view adversity as unchangeable, pervasive, and more personal. In the face of setbacks, challenges or difficult jobs, pessimists are more likely to do worse than predicted and even give up, while optimists will persevere. Optimism, therefore, is also an important component of achievement, and is especially important in times of chaos, change and turbulence. Those who have an optimistic outlook will roll with the punches, will be more proactive and persistent and will not abandon hope.

One thing everyone seems to be in agreement with, is expressing gratitude that they live in Australia, and for that matter, South Australia. Many of us have backyards and space. We are not living in densely populated cities, in high rise apartments. The simple act of being **grateful**, has been shown to have powerful effects in stressful, uncertain times. I know it is not a panacea, and don't want to sound like a 'Pollyanna', but it can be a useful tool, to have in your bag of coping arsenal! I am grateful that I can go for a walk most days, either along the beach, along the Esplanade, in the Onkaparinga National Park, in the Aldinga Scrub, along the Linear Park near my daughter's home, complete with feeding the ducks with the grandchildren! I am eternally thankful for my grandchildren.

I have been thinking about how I have been feeling during this pandemic. We are now entering the 6th week of a restricted lifestyle. You may or may not have similar feelings. For me, it is a form of **grief**, on a number of levels. The world has changed. We know it is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way. There is a loss of normalcy; the fear of the economic toll on society and the loss of human connection. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air. I have not lived through a World War or the Great Depression. These crises went on for years!

I am also feeling some 'anticipatory grief'. With this virus, this kind of grief is confusing, because we know something bad is happening, but you can't see it. There is a feeling of loss of safety on a micro level (the people you know) and on a macro level (people all over the world). The goal is to find BALANCE in the things you're thinking. To calm yourself, you need to live in the present, and let go of what you can't control. What your neighbour is doing is out of your control. What is in your control is to stay 1.5 metres away from them, and wash your hands!

It's also a good time to stock up on some COMPASSION. Everyone has different levels of fear, grief and coping. Try to be patient!

One troubling aspect of this pandemic is the open-endedness of it. It will be a temporary state, but how long is temporary? It is good to verbalize this. The precautions we are taking are proving to be the right ones, in terms of how SA is tracking. This is survivable. This is a time to overprotect and not OVER-REACT.

Once we've accepted, we might even find some new found meaning or 'light', in all of this. People are using technology to connect in ways they never thought was possible, to counteract 'remoteness'. Having long talks on the phone- I do this!. One of my parent's friends said, "it is giving the plane some breathing space". I saw on television where an Indian man had seen the Himalayas from his town for the first time in his life, because there was less smog!

If you're still feeling overwhelmed with grief, just acknowledge it, verbalize how you are feeling, and then move on to the next small step. **I often say to my friends, "I don't like it"! It's absurd to think we shouldn't feel grief right now.** It is an uncomfortable time for most of us. None of us know how long this crisis will last.

I know life isn't tied with a bow, but it is still a gift. Our 36-year-old son said to me this morning, when we were talking about the 'corona time' we are living through, "Every day's a good day, Mum". I found this simple, home-spun response very comforting.

I wonder what I will be writing about in the Winter edition of our newsletter?! Stay safe and take care.

Penny Jacomos, B.A.Soc.Wk.,MA(SS), Social Worker

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