

CARE & COUNSEL

There was a time when psychiatric counselling was equated to being treated for insanity, fortunately, perceptions have changed today and an increasing number of people are overcoming the social stigma of seeking professional help for emotional and psychological difficulties. **Mina Bhatia**, one such professional, has made it her mission to passionately promote mental wellness through her psychological and cognitive wellness centre, **AddLife Caring Minds**, the first of its kind in Kolkata.

Talk to **Joseph Rozario**
Photograph by **Rajesh Gupta**

THERE ARE FEW OF US who haven't enjoyed the Bollywood sagas *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, when, at one point, the endearing protagonist of the film laments and is on the verge of giving up, exhibiting his moodily-singing, Gandhi visions to "donoon ke shonkar chokh". Equally memorable is the hilarious episode of a terrified Lucky Singh, who is on the verge of a nervous breakdown with everybody waiting here to "get well soon" (from his disease of delirium).



THE LIFE OF MINA BHATIA

AddLife Caring Minds is probably the first organisation that caters to those in need of cognitive, emotional and psychological support across the state. This is an extremely well-structured and well thought out programme, free, aimed to ease the emotional and mental stress experienced by the elderly, Bhatia and her team in the mental wellness sector, and her therapy to be popularised with ARBBS as 'Great Therapy'.

While both Munnabhai and Lucky Singh seem oddly off the hinges in the movie, such oddities are not uncommon in real life, as Mina Bhatia knows as well after her prolonged quest to understand the human mind and the many disorders that it is vulnerable to. Ask her about these and she rattle off a string of names. A scientist can suffer from dyslexia, for example; a youngster could read "squash and occupational therapy", or an executive may feel it imperative to undergo sessions on "anger and trauma management". It is to Mina Bhatia's long-standing desire

to holistically address such lesser-known conditions and other clinical and non-clinical aspects of mental wellness that her cognitive wellness centre, AddLife Caring Minds, owes its being.

A passion of a lifetime

"AddLife Caring Minds is my passion and a fulfilment of my dream of doing something path-breaking in the field of mental health," says Bhatia, talking about her inspiration behind AddLife, which incidentally stems from her predilection for the medical profession. "I was always fascinated by the medical profession," she continues, "and the all-consuming passion to understand the very of the human mind and body [has] never left me." It was in pursuit of this irreplaceable passion that she underwent formal training in child brain development in Philadelphia, USA, followed by a basic counselling course from Krupa Foundation, Mumbai, and then a cognitive behaviour therapy course from London. During a brief stint at Kolkata's reputed Belle Vue Clinic, she acutely felt the lack of a comprehensive mental wellness facility in the city. This piping hot prospect led her to start

AddLife—first from her home and then professionally from her clinic on Kolkata's Santa Rose Road. "People would come to me with various problems and I would refer them to different therapists, especially in areas I don't have expertise," says Bhatia, recalling those early days of her practice at Belle Vue. "I realised that the city needed a dedicated facility with a wide base of competencies in the psychological and psychiatric fields. This inspired me to open my own centre where all the services related to mental health would be provided under one roof."

A dream fulfilled

AddLife Caring Minds was formally launched on April 26, this year, in the gracious premises of Honourable Governor of West Bengal, Shri M K Nagarkar, who is also its chief patron.

The inauguration coincided with her husband Sanjay Budhia's birthday, whose support towards the initiative, both at the personal and corporate levels—he is the managing director of the renowned Patcon Group—has been substantial. Spread over 5,000 sq ft, it has parking facilities, easy wheelchair access, provision for hot beverages, a workshop and a bright, clean and soothing atmosphere that imparts instant positive energy.

A holistic approach to wellness

Though a no-profit-no-loss organisation, AddLife boasts of a team of expert practitioners who operate under its clinical and non-clinical wings. "In the clinical wing, we focus more on physical and mental health-related issues like counselling, psychotherapy, psychometry, psychiatric consultation, speech-occupational therapy, women's issues, etc.," says Budhia. "The non-clinical wing is more about soft skills, where we conduct training programmes for schools and corporate bodies."



Anita & Sanjay Budhia

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"Over the years, like a chrysalis unfolding and taking wings, I have seen Anita Budhia transform from a shy bride and diving mother into a confident and dynamic, woman of substance, who is determined to make a positive difference in the lives of others. After decades of training in India, USA and UK, as well as experience in psychoanalysis, Anita has started AddLife Caring Minds, to impact individual lives for holistic development. We are all proud very proud of her and wish her success."



To cater to the needs of corporate staff, AddLife offers pre-employment selection processes, as well as a host of other tailor-made programmes such as the 'Employee Assistance Programme', where one-to-one counselling sessions are held to address issues such as self-esteem, stress, anger management, trauma management and time management. For group therapies, prior discussions are held with prospective clients, modules are presented, and once mutual agreement has been arrived at with respect to topics and possible outcomes, the training programme commences. Similarly, for school children there are special skill training programmes to help them make the right career choices, cope with exam anxiety, handle bullies and tackle other adolescent issues. Among some of its corporate clients are Ambuja Neotia Group and T M Logistics. The centre has also conducted team-building and stress management workshops for Kolkata Police, CISF and the Asian International School.

Miles to go...

All said and done, the fact remains that the concept of mental wellness still has a long way to go, especially given the woeful lack of awareness that a little professional counselling can go a long way in setting many psychological and psychiatric ailments right, which are otherwise overlooked. Moreover, there are conditions like autism and learning disabilities which Budhia feels need to be resolutely addressed rather than pushed under the carpet. Consequently, apart from actually treating individuals, a part of her overall endeavour is directed at increasing sensitivity and awareness about the importance of mental wellness through promotional exercises. Her message is simple: "Get your loved ones the help they need." And irrespective of age or geography, she tirelessly tries to take this message to all, sometimes even to the farthest reaches of the country and beyond, driven by her long-cherished desire to help those in need. ☺