

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. **Minu Budhia**, 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.

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THERE ARE FEW OF US who haven't enjoyed the Bollywood megahit *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, where, at one point, the endearing protagonist of the film feels defeated and is on the verge of giving up, attributing his morally-inspiring Gandhi visions to "*dimaag ka chemical locha*". Equally memorable is the hilarious episode of a rattled Lucky Singh, who is on the verge of a nervous breakdown with everybody wanting him to "get well soon" (from his disease of dishonesty).



SRI M K NARAYANAN
Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal

"AddLife Caring Minds is probably the first organisation that I am aware of which is trying to empower people across social strata. This is an extremely well-conceived and well thought-out programme. I am pleased to see the commitment and dedication displayed by Mrs Minu Budhia and her team in the mental wellness sector, and feel happy to be associated with AddLife as Chief Patron."

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 Budhia, 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 ways of the human mind and body [has] never left me." It was in pursuit of this irrepressible passion that she underwent formal training in child brain development in Philadelphia, USA, followed by a basic counselling course from Kripa 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 gaping void prompted her to start

AddLife—first from her home and then professionally from her centre on Kolkata's Sarat Bose Road. "People would come to me with various problems and I would refer them to different therapists, especially in areas I didn't have expertise," says Budhia, 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 presence of Honourable Governor of West Bengal, Shri M K Narayanan, who is also its chief patron.

While both Munnabhai and Lucky Singh seem oddly off the hinges in the movie, such oddities are not uncommon in real life, as Minu Budhia knows so 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 rattles off a string of names. A scientist can suffer from 'dyslexia', for example; a youngster could need 'speech and occupational therapy'; or an executive may feel it imperative to undergo sessions on 'anger and trauma management'. It is to Minu Budhia's longstanding desire

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 Patton 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.”



Minu & Sanjay Budhia

DR PRANAB DASGUPTA

MBBS, DGO (CAL); MD(G & O); FACOG, MRCOG & FRCOG degrees from UK & USA

“Over the years, like a chrysalis unfolding and taking wings, I have seen Minu Budhia’s transition from a shy bride and doting 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 psycho analysis, Minu has started AddLife Caring Minds, to impact individual lifestyles for holistic development. We are all indeed 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. *