

Help for the helpers

By Serena Seyfort

Customer service staff who find themselves emotionally supporting their clients can access their own form of help.

Occasional Counselling is a free service on offer to staff in frontline roles, such as hairdressers and bartenders, who often hear their customers' dilemmas and challenging circumstances.

"It's a support network for people who support the community," said Bruce Howard, owner of Sunbury's the Angry Butcher Bike Shop and a Sunbury Business Association member.

“ We all want to help, but sometimes the helpers get worn out ”

- Bruce Howard

Mr Howard initiated the Occasional Counselling program after hearing retailers say that stories from customers – sometimes of extreme hardship, grief, and even domestic violence – often left them wondering what they should do.

He said service staff often build rapport with customers who then feel comfortable sharing personal stories.

Occasional Counselling sessions would help those staff point their customers in the direction to seek assistance from professionals with relevant skills. They also support the mental health and wellbeing of service staff who can become burdened by exposure to other's issues.

Mr Howard said he hoped the sessions would give participants the confidence to pass on advice about seeking the next step.



"Sometimes in the retail world, we take it all on board," Mr Howard said.

"We all want to help, but sometimes the helpers get worn out."

Mr Howard said he was motivated to start the program as a way of giving back to the community which he said has supported him

and his children in recent years since the death of his wife.

Occasional Counselling is run by Sunbury Community Health, Sunbury Business Association and CoHealth.

To book into a session call Amanda, 9744 9593.