

## The significance of working with couples early in the relationship cycle



Since our inception in 1978, our programs and services are primarily at the prevention and early intervention stage of service provision, targeting the significant family transition points of relationship formation, getting married, living together, becoming parents and maturing in the couple relationship. Essentially, providing couples with the skills to deal with life challenges and changes before they become big problems and issues as healthy relationships are a crucial component of health and mental well-being.

### ***Why sail into an iceberg and cause an unexpected disaster in your relationship?***

Working with couples from the onset of their relationship, at the premarital and cohabiting stage, RelateWell aims to provide people with an awareness and understanding of the generational and cultural processes and influences which are deeply embedded in their behaviours, beliefs and attitudes. Being aware of which patterns are the source of an issue in a relationship will allow a greater opportunity to work through those patterns which will then lead to a healthier relationship between partners.

From our work, couples are vulnerable to future relationship problems because of their avoidance to deal with these issues in the early stages of their relationship. The avoidance of these issues is further compounded when they become parents.

A mapping exercise of participant feedback in our premarital program - Let's Make It Work - highlighted that partners did not want to dive below the surface of their relationship, that is, see the rest of the iceberg metaphorically speaking, of which only the highest point is visible whilst a massive component remains unnoticeable below the surface of the water. *Why sail into an iceberg and cause an unexpected disaster in your relationship?*

This is where our work in the relationship space is so significant. Changing cultural mindset that a healthy relationship involves more than meeting “the one” and convincing people that obtaining assistance NOW will be a significant strategy to offset future problems.

*Sowing the seeds* to ongoing support to the prevention of problems is significant in reducing risk factors as well as enhancing protective factors in the couple relationship.

The challenge for Government in this space is to change the culture from late intervention with its associated social and economic high costs (to families and taxpayers) to prevention and early intervention policies and practices in the area of relationship education and counselling. This requires strong leadership to change prevention and early intervention from a viewpoint to a properly funded, sustainable, practical program of investment and social and economic returns which when taken to measure will alter the social and economic capacity of a generation of children.

**For all relationship issues, phone RelateWell on 03 9354 8854 or email [relate@relatewell.org.au](mailto:relate@relatewell.org.au)**

Angela Damianopoulos, is the Executive Director of RelateWell