

# Introducing...Norfolk General Hospital's newest mental health social worker

Meet Valerie, Norfolk General Hospital's (NGH) newest social worker.

Valerie provides counselling and support to patients and their families. She helps patients access the resources they need, like mental health services.

Valerie became a social worker to help others.

*"I consider it a privilege to be given the opportunity and trust from patients with their most personal and confidential matters," said Valerie. "I recognize for some individuals sharing intimate knowledge about themselves can be truly difficult. There is often an element of gratification when an individual shifts perspective regarding their problems/issues when normalization, problem-solving alternatives, and personal strengths are brought into conversation."*



Throughout her career, Valerie has worked with at-risk adolescents, vulnerable individuals, people not criminally responsible in the forensic system, chronic pain patients, and the general population.

With such an impressive background, we asked Valerie why she wanted to join the NGH family.

*"My Master's Degree specialization is mental health in healthcare so a position in a hospital environment seemed a natural transition to allow me to continue to utilize that training and skill set. More importantly, I considered this role an attractive opportunity to broaden my mental health experience and present some new professional challenges and responsibilities."*

Valerie was born and raised in Norfolk County. She has a strong passion for rural healthcare and forming relationships with patients.

*"Ask any mental health professional and they will tell you their job is never routine. Undoubtedly, I love that my role has so much variety on a given day and that my job allows me a considerable amount of direct patient interaction."*

Valerie joined Norfolk General Hospital near the end of May and says she felt welcomed to the team immediately.

*"Reflecting back, my first day at NGH went by in a blur! What does stand out from that day was feeling welcomed from the minute I arrived. There were so many introductions and offers to help and direct (p.s thank you, admittedly I am directionally challenged lol) that made my first impression of the work culture and atmosphere here at NGH very positive and promising one."*

Valerie's advice for those having a difficult time during the pandemic:

First off, it is natural to feel stress and anxiety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One reason for this is that human behaviour finds a certain level of 'comfort' in predictability so as the pandemic escalated, it brought about considerable uncertainty about our health and well being and that of our friends and family, financial stability, social distancing, and what, if, and how a return to the familiar will look like.

Some things to consider if you or anyone you know is feeling anxious:

- 1. Limit exposure to news and radio: Minimize social media.** It is great to be informed however constant messaging can become reinforcing and lead to feeling overwhelmed.
- 2. Prioritize self care: Plan for "You Time."** We need to be our best selves to be able to be fully present for others, particularly in healthcare! Common self care strategies are deep breathing, mindfulness, meditation, regular exercise, nutritious diet, and plenty of zzz's.
- 3. Remember your inner child...find time to frolic!** This can look different for each of us from enjoying music, hobbies, diy projects, gardening... whatever your passion, it's all about engaging in activities that bring pleasure and being in the moment on a regular basis
- 4. Stay connected:** Pick up the phone and call grandma or arrange a video chat with your daughter living on the west coast. Texting is a great and convenient method to communicate however it can't entirely replace the quality of verbal and visual connection.
- 5. Break out of routine:** Research shows that one key to happiness is personal investment. Try something completely new that maybe you wanted to attempt but keep putting off. Go beyond your comfort zone, maybe a new interest
- 6. Break up with perfectionism:** Be mindful where you can accept compromise on high expectations of yourself. Although attention to detail is admirable, placing too high (and sometimes unrealistic) expectations on ourselves escalates anxiety and robs us of valuable time. Make "Good-enoughism" your new mantra.
- 7. Talk it out:** If anxiety and stress is mounting and it is interrupting routines, sleep, or mood connect with your bff, someone you trust with a empathetic ear or a mental health professional.
- 8. Try Gratitude:** Recall 3 good things about your day...everyday
- 9. Spend more time with the fur babies:** Pets have a powerful effect on mood regulation and stress reduction.
- 10. Get a puppy!**

Thank you, Valerie, and welcome to Norfolk General Hospital. We are so happy to have you working with us.

