

A pivot to virtual appointments

By **Abbey McDonald**
Coast River Business Journal

Rather than watching for hand-wringing and shuffling feet, teletherapy makes Wynne Preston rely on tone of voice and pixelated eye movement.

Some younger clients need a parent with them to keep their attention on the screen. Others take breaks to run around the house before returning to the computer.

The coronavirus pandemic caused Preston, who owns Kaleidoscope Therapy Services in Astoria, to turn to teletherapy. The virtual appointments came with challenges and new rules she had to learn quickly to serve a growing client base.

Local therapists have faced increased demand during a pandemic that rewrote the way they practice.

Preston has had her Astoria practice for over 15 years. She said the switch to remote services required a quick transition to manage the learning curve.

“Fortunately, there’s a good support system and I was able to get information from local therapists to get me started,” Preston said.

Setting up a teletherapy appointment isn’t as easy as creating a Zoom link or dialing the phone. Medical privacy laws require the use of approved, secure platforms.

Though she was able to adjust to online appointments with the help of her network and instructional courses, the issue of broadband remains.

“Some lower-income families in this county don’t always have laptops, or internet on their phone,” Preston said. “Sometimes I shorten the session. I bill for half an hour instead of an hour because the reception was so poor. They would freeze up, or I would freeze up, or we wouldn’t have touched it at all and suddenly we’re kicked

out and had to get back on again.”

She said online sessions have been helpful in some cases, especially for clients who are more vulnerable to COVID, or have anxiety about in-person meetings.

Camille Holland, who owns Counseling Solutions NW in Warrenton, increased her client load and adjusted her services during the pandemic.

“I was concerned how the pandemic would impact anxiety levels with clients who were already in therapy for anxiety,” she said. “Initially, most people actually handled it well with a check-in and assessment type of session before moving on, but after several months, the cumulative stress took its toll on some clients and we reevaluated therapy goals to incorporate that into the treatment plan.”

Holland already had a telehealth portal ready before the pandemic.

“At that point, I had not worked remotely with clients on a consistent basis, though, and was unsure how well telehealth would work in the areas of counseling efficacy and ease of service delivery compared to in-person sessions, but we had no choice in the matter,” she said.

Holland said that she has received feedback from her online clients, who find the online sessions productive and successful. Some have chosen to continue teletherapy, even though Holland reopened her office in April and follows COVID safety protocols.

Preston also reopened her office to in-person sessions, pushing the couches to either side of the room to allow for social distancing. She has put away the Legos, which were too difficult to clean, and keeps hand sanitizer ready. She said most kids are comfortable in masks because of school, but some adults have frustrations about them, which they talk through.

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Wynne Preston, Astoria therapist

Tips for mental health

Wynne Preston, owner of Kaleidoscope Therapy Services in Astoria, and Camille Holland, owner of Counseling Solutions NW in Warrenton, shared some mental health tips for people feeling the pressures of another pandemic year.

Holland said to remember to think through responses to anxiety-provoking situations and people.

“This can include doing a self-check for signs of anxiety in the moment and deciding if the response required is immediate or a pause can be taken. Doing a quick 10 second body scan can be helpful,” Holland said. “Taking self-care steps to include remembering to breathe ‘low and slow’ and respond not react, when faced with stressful situations, can make all the difference in how that situation turns out.”

Preston said to not let too much time pass between social interactions, and to have regular phone conversations and Zoom parties if possible.

She also said to take advantage of the coastal area. For her own self-care, she takes her dog on walks and chats with neighbors who play bingo outside.

“If you can get outside and talk to someone, like the people who would play bingo — and they were all at least I would say 15 feet away from one another and outside — if you can do something like that as much as possible. Because we are social creatures,” Preston said.



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