

Goodness Rippling through Victoria



There's a ripple -effect created by the Centre's Counsellor Training Program

Mike and Natalia kayaking

It's probably true that most people think first of our clients when considering who benefits from Citizens' services in the community. Yet as central and crucial as our clients are to our mission, our volunteer counsellors are equally important to us. Citizens' has therefore always focussed on providing excellent counsellor training, within a supportive framework, that is both challenging and rewarding for the volunteers. Part of our reasoning is that our graduates will give back to our community, not only through providing quality counselling for our clients, but also because through their own self-development they will in turn strengthen their own family and community connections.

Like ripples in a pond, the positive effects will spread far and wide. A recent graduate of the 2012/2013 Counsellor Training Group, Natalia Burns, agreed to speak to us about her own experience of personal growth through the training program, and how its ripples are already showing up in her life in significant ways.

Natalia and her husband Mike graciously and enthusiastically sat down with me this week to talk about what the whole training experience was like for them. They are both in their thirties. Natalia has a background in financial man-

"...the skills she was able to share with me, ... enriched us both"

agement and in working for the Provincial government. She wanted to take the Citizens' Counsellor Training three years ago, after being inspired by her own positive experience as a client. That year her attempt was frustrated because Citizens' lost its funding and the training program was cancelled. It wasn't until this past year that Natalia was finally able to take the course.

To become a volunteer counsellor at Citizens' requires a big time

commitment on the part of our trainees. It also requires considerable emotional and personal investment, so the support of partners and families is very important.

I was curious to speak with Mike, because rather than feeling frustrated at losing his partner two nights a week for ten months in a row, he had sent an email to everyone involved in the Citizens' training to thank them for strengthening his already strong relationship with Natalia.

"I never felt her time away from 'us' as any kind of loss," he explained, "because throughout the whole process I was witnessing Natalia's personal growth, and benefiting from it almost as much as she was.

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**Citizens
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We will build capacity through state of the heart counselling.

Reflecting on a mindful group

Reflections on the Centre's Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Anxiety and Depression Group

By Richard Piers

I have been practising mindfulness meditation since 1985 and have a deep respect and reverence for this practice and for the Buddhist tradition from which it comes. I was aware that mindfulness had been applied to the treatment of stress and chronic pain since the 1980's, and that there had been an explosion of interest in mindfulness over the past decade. Corporations such as Google and Monsanto had adopted mindful practices, and even the U.S. Marine Corps was using mindfulness-based mind-fitness training — "MBMFT for warriors." I was concerned that these secular applications of mindfulness were missing much of the richness of the practice.

When I became involved as a volunteer with Citizens' Counselling Centre, I learned that Citizens' offered a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) group for anxiety and depression, and had been doing so since 2008. I was intrigued but also somewhat sceptical: how could the profound depth of the meditation practice be respectfully conveyed in just 20 hours of class time? I signed out the textbook upon which the Citizens' course was based — Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression and reviewed the facilitator's course materials provided by Citizens'. I was relieved to discover that the practice was, indeed, being honoured through the MBCT approach. I followed the advice of one of my teachers that we "proceed as if we are needed" and I offered to co-facilitate a group. I was surprised and excited to have that offer accepted immediately.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to things as they are."



"It taught me how to escape the torture of useless, painful self-rumination."

"The MBCT program provides participants with a wide range of opportunities to practice and develop that awareness, and to use that awareness to cultivate a profoundly different relationship to anxiety and/or depression."

It has been both an inspiration and a privilege to co-facilitate this program at Citizens', to witness our clients' willingness to explore a radically

different approach to dealing with issues of anxiety or depression, and to see their practice transform over the course of the 8-week program. Mindfulness meditation practice is simple but not easy, and most participants struggle at some point with the daily practices associated with the program. Benefits accrue over time, and may not be immediately evident. Those who persevere and integrate even a few minutes of practice into their daily lives seem to benefit most from the course. Here are some comments from the participants:

"It taught me how to escape the torture of useless, painful self-rumination."

"I've been searching for the 'How-To' wake up all my life and finally found it."

When my mind is worrying or obsessing I am now better able to choose to direct my thoughts to the present — and feel more sense of peace. I also notice I feel more energy as a result."

"This group was the first 'social' outing with strangers after my very deep depression. I've been surprised that I've had laughs, enjoyment and fun! It's been serious learning, but in the way children learn..... immersing into a new experience because it's what you want to know about. I still needed support and this group has given me that."

"It calmed me right down. I am less afraid of being nervous around my friends. I have increased self-esteem."

"I am more assertive, have more clarity, am being less the victim and more in control. I can respond with choices/options. My mind is not so scattered."

(Richard trained as a volunteer counsellor with Citizens' in 2011/12 and has facilitated two of our Mindfulness Groups so far.)



The Attenders - our 2012/13 grads!

Admin staff and managers, a retiree, health practitioners, a teacher, a writer, a stay at home mom, and students — a varied group of volunteers who started a journey last September and graduated June 2013.

Strangers in the beginning and intimates by the end of the ten-month training program, 17 new volunteer counsellors have joined the over 100 other volunteers as active, graduate counsellors at Citizens'.

Congratulations Attenders - we're very happy to have you!



Ripple Effect cont'd from page one

I learned some of the skills she was able to share with me, and so the course enriched us both. We already had a very strong bond that I didn't think could become any stronger. Yet, here we are - stronger as individuals and as a couple. That is how change in communities begins!"

Despite work and family commitments, the volunteers show up week after week, sometimes with major upheavals happening in their own lives. Natalia explained that: "The group became a source of support for us. We helped each other through many different kinds of crises, including relationship breakdowns, chronic illness, and in my case, an exploding condo. In some ways having the training program each week helped us to keep going, despite what might be happening in our lives."

I asked Natalia what other benefits she got from the training. "I learned a whole lot about counselling theories and concepts," she said, "and of course about the skill sets associated with the theory. The skills training taught me even more about myself. For example, I thought I was already a good listener, but I soon realized that wasn't quite true! And I think I'm more patient and compassionate with other

people now. It's definitely improved my relationships with my friends and co-workers, as well as with Mike."

What was the biggest lesson she learned?

"That it was okay to be just the way I am, that I didn't have to perform for others, and always be the hyper, strong, energetic person I'd taught everyone to expect me to be. And as I learned to 'just be me' I found I was a lot more relaxed both mentally and physically, and I was more energized."

I asked her if people other than Mike had noticed a difference. "Funnily enough, a friend told me recently that I seemed more alive," she said, "and I'm still processing what exactly that means. I mean, I've got a lively personality, and I've not changed in that way, so I'm not quite sure what she meant."

"Perhaps it's the difference between 'being yourself' and 'performing a part'," said Mike, wisely. Natalia added, "Another really important step for me was when I realized that it was okay for me not to solve other peoples' problems - and that is such a huge relief — I learned a lot about boundaries."

I asked Mike if these were the same things he'd noticed in Natalia, and he nodded. "Yes. She is able to give me more space somehow, and that has really helped me work some things out for myself."

"I've learned to let out the reins a bit," said Natalia, "I realize that some things he can take care of or learn for himself, so I'm able to back off a lot more. It's all part of not having to solve everyone else's problems."

So would she recommend the course to others when it has such a big commitment attached to it? "Oh absolutely," she said fervently, "It's been such a fantastic experience. And I am so enjoying the actual counselling now that this part of the journey has started. I think it's a shame everyone can't take a course like this — what a great world it would be if they did."

Written by Chris Hoyer



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IN THIS PAST YEAR:

- over 8,200 hours of counselling
- over 980 clients served
- over 100 volunteer counsellors

THE AVERAGE:

wait time: 21 days

number of sessions: 7.3

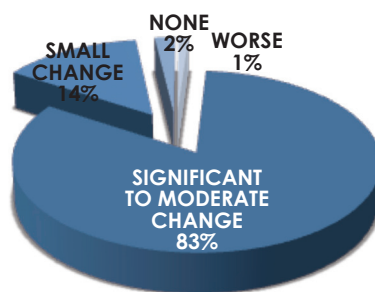
DID YOU KNOW?

100% of direct service to clients is provided by our trained volunteer counsellors.

\$1,000,000 is the market value of counselling services provided by trained volunteers

34% of our clients are between the ages of 18 and 29

CLIENT REPORTED CHANGES AS A RESULT OF COUNSELLING



Please consider becoming a monthly donor to the Centre. www.citizenscounselling.com

Keeping Capital Region Families Together

Low-cost couples counselling in high demand

Hopefully, every two years, (depending on whether we are successful in obtaining a grant to do so), the Centre offers our volunteers and practicum students a 14 week couples counselling training, which equips them with the skills to begin counselling with couples through the Centre.

This past year, a grant from Green-shield Canada enabled us to offer a training from January to April. The result: seventeen more individuals able to provide couples counselling, paying back 50 hours each of couples counselling through the Centre, offering low cost couples counselling to families in need.

Two professional counsellors, Arla Sinclair M. Ed. RCC (who has offered parts of this training several times now) and Lilli Ruth Rosenberg PhD, RCC (who is also a CCC Supervisor), adopted the curriculum that had been previously developed and then reworked and divided it to suit their strengths, schedules and the needs of the participants.

Lilli describes her experience co-facilitating this training as well as seeing the counsellors in supervision:

"I am passionate about couples counselling as well as passionate about teaching; the opportunity to combine these led to a very rich and lively training experience. The participants applied themselves to the teachings with enthusiasm, curiosity and a willingness to learn. Their cooperation with one another allowed for the collaborative cultivation of the essential tenets of couples counselling. It is truly a joy to witness their growth into competent couples counsellors."

This past fiscal year (2012/13) 97 couples called the Centre and they waited an average of 28 days to get connected with one of our volunteer counsellors. This waiting time can feel very long when there is tension in a relationship. The seventeen additional couples counsellors on our roster will help us improve our ability to shorten that wait time.

Here's some wonderful feedback from one of the couples:

"My partner and I were close to quitting. We just couldn't talk to each other without one or both of us losing it. I'd yell, he'd withdraw or walk out the door and not come back for hours. With a child on the way we knew we had to 'shape up' but we didn't know how. Sometimes we didn't even know what we were fighting

about. Our counsellor 'got' us right away and made us feel like what we were going through was pretty normal and not a reason to end the relationship. We worked hard, she worked hard, and though I can't say everything is now perfect it is SO much better. With her help and her reminding us to concentrate on this, we actually remember what we love about each other. I am so grateful to Citizens' for being there when we couldn't afford much in the way of fees and to our counsellor for giving her time to volunteer there. It's an awesome place."

Centre Welcomes its 2013/14 Board Members

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