

A Holiday Wish for our Community

by Amanda Farrell-Low

There are a lot of great reasons to give to Citizens' Counselling: they're a volunteer-based organization, they're involved in the community, and they offer their services on a sliding scale so anyone can receive counselling if they need it. But the main reason I make my monthly donation is that I've come to truly appreciate just how important their services are — after having used them myself.

About three years ago, my life was pretty normal—great, even. I had a steady job, my husband and I were settling into our newly purchased home, and I'd just celebrated Christmas with my close-knit family.

But about a month after Christmas, I got a phone call that changed everything: my younger brother, who I'd just visited a few days earlier, had died suddenly.

Our family was devastated.

A couple months later, the company I was working for closed down and I was laid off. My husband became very ill and had to spend a good chunk of time in the hospital. Countless job applications were sent out and very few responses came back. It felt like things were just piling on and I couldn't take it anymore.

Normally a very social person with a large group of friends, I started to withdraw. I would struggle to find a good reason to bother getting out of bed in the morning.

Then I stopped bothering at all.



I knew I needed help getting back on track. But what could I do?

I'd tried a couple counselling sessions when I was employed, but even with a job I had a hard time affording it—and the idea of trying to jump through hoops to try and access low-cost services was extremely intimidating.

"What happened to me could happen to anyone."

Then I heard about Citizens': it was affordable, accessible—and conveniently located in my neighbourhood. I started going to weekly sessions to help deal with the hole the loss of my brother had left in my life, and the lives of our family and friends. I got to share who my brother was with someone new, and talk about how he

had impacted me and so many others around him.

I gained new coping tools and strategies and realised a lot of things about myself. I reconnected with my friends, started working again and just began feeling more like myself. The light at the end of the tunnel got a bit brighter every day.

When Christmas rolled around again, I became a monthly Citizens' donor to not only support an organization that had supported me through the most challenging time of my life, but to honour my brother, who was always there for a friend in need.

My monthly donation may not be a big one, but if it means Citizens' can offer counselling to just one more person in need, it's more than enough. The services that Citizens' provides have been very important to me personally. I can only imagine how many other lives they have touched.

I wanted to share my story because what happened to me could happen to anyone. I strongly believe that everyone deserves affordable, accessible counselling and mental-health services.

My only wish is there were more places like Citizens' out there.

**Citizens
COUNSELLING
CENTRE**



We will build capacity through state of the heart counselling.

Over 2,000 hours of service... so far

Citizens' Counselling has over 100 volunteer counsellors active on average and every counsellor has a story of what brought them to the Centre, what keeps them here, and what they love about the Centre. Here's one such story.

Jill Armstrong trained as a volunteer counsellor at Citizens' in 2003, having retired to Victoria after a career with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Her goal then and now in her role as a counsellor, is the maximization of choice for all people.

"Adapting to a new post-retirement life was my millennium project," Jill said. "I'd left Toronto, which was home for 35 years, my mother had just died, and I got some therapy to explore ways to feel more sure-footed as I entered this new life stage." She heard about CCC from her therapist, and found the ten month counsellor training fascinating: "It was my first experience of learning how I come across to others, in a variety of situations."

"As an introvert, I seek authenticity and depth in my relationships, and counselling gives me that. I'm also a donor every year, because I see first hand how Citizens' Counselling fosters a process for clients to develop an enhanced relationship with themselves and with others."

Jill is a lifelong learner, feeding her thirst for knowledge with university courses in psychology and social psychology. But nowhere is the learning richer for her than with her clients because the delicate trust involved in building the client-counsellor bond contributes to both the client's growth and her own.

"I used to have unrealistically high expectations of myself," she said. "I have worked with many clients who also evaluated themselves according to inflated performance standards."

"The little victories prepare us for the bigger challenges."

In working with them to develop more reasonable guidelines for assessing their behaviour, whether in setting more self-protective boundaries or managing triggers, I could identify and point out the small triumphs upon which they could build a sense of mastery. How we spend our days is how we live our lives, and the little victories prepare us for the bigger challenges."



Jill Armstrong, Volunteer Counsellor

Another instance of learning from her clients involves the often-opposing struggle between passion and reason. Jill worked with a couple who navigated their relationship from opposite tendencies: D's brakes were on; she stayed in her head. G, on the other hand, was a runaway train hurtling downhill, awash in his emotions. "I saw myself in both of them," Jill said. "Too much emotion made me feel vulnerable and unregulated; too much rationality felt sterile and artificial." The three worked together, and D and G came to see how unbalanced their relationship was: They learned, and so did Jill, that too much of one extreme brought on the perception, "What I see is how it is or should be." The couple learned to make room for each other's reality, and Jill benefitted from seeing herself in both of them. "The three of us learned to toggle between reason and passion with greater ease."

All of the counselling at the Centre is offered by our very precious volunteer counsellors. Without wonderful citizens such as Jill there would be no Citizens' Counselling.



friends of the centre

Juggling for Counselling

It seems what's needed to keep the lights on and the counsellors trained and supervised is a whole host of big-hearted and dedicated people, some bright ideas, a fair amount of luck, some innovation and most of all, some generosity and a commitment of the community to ensure that its' people have a place to go for help when they need it most.

Currently the Centre is juggling more than a few balls in the air:

Tip a Fool

Please mark your calendars and make a plan to attend our major fundraiser, Tip a Fool on April 11, 2015. We're back at the Union Club again under the leadership of community leader Kyara Kahakauwila along with a full cast of enthusiastic celebrity waiters. Event alumni Deanna Young, Jack Knox and Randy Wilson have already signed on for the evening as has Victoria's new Mayor Lisa Helps and Esquimalt Mayor Barb Desjardins.

Mark your calendars! Super Early-bird tickets are on sale now: tipafool.ca

GivingTuesday

This social media campaign follows two extreme shopping days, Black Friday and Cyber Monday and asks the community to make a donation to the charity of their choice as a gesture to start the season of giving. The Centre is very grateful to have been the charity of choice for many generous folk again this year. givingtuesday.ca



#UsedHelps

On the innovation front, Used Victoria has teamed up with BeGiving.ca and created #UsedHelps - the perfect union of soul-soothing purging and philanthropy.

The project offers you the option to list and sell items on UsedVictoria - as you normally would - and make the Centre the beneficiary of the purchase. Unlike regular Used Victoria sales, the money-part of a UsedHelps transaction is done online, so the seller never has to deal with the money. And - you get a charitable tax receipt. Usedvictoria.com/UsedHelps

We have two other exciting balls in the air: Heroworks and 100 Women Who Care.

Heroworks

Our lovely building is being considered for a Heroworks Radical Renovation. Heroworks founder Paul Latour and Lead Project Manager Kent McFadyen toured our well-loved building this past Fall to see what we're hoping to improve (replacing 25-year-old carpet, adding a small kitchen, building security, interior and exterior paint). We should hear back from Heroworks early next year so - fingers-crossed that you'll be hearing from us about a capital campaign as we raise money to pay for supplies (~\$15K).

100 Women

Much to our delight, we have a growing cheering section of smart and compassionate women in the exciting new 100 Women Who Care project (now turned 250 women and \$25,000!) We're hopeful that we'll be the focus of their affection at one of the four meetings that they have planned for 2015. 100womenvictoria.com.

And while all this sounds like a lot of fun, and we love connecting with the amazing community that we have here in the Capital Region, at the end of the day, we need \$270,000 every year in order to provide over 1,200 people the quality counselling that they need and have courageously asked us for.

Part of that \$270,000 consistently comes from our community partners and leaders. The United Way, the Victoria Foundation and the BC Gaming Commission are all very supportive of our work knowing how much community-based mental health services are needed.

After grants, fees for service and rental income, we still need about \$80,000 each year from the community - from donations and our fundraising efforts. So we practice our juggling skills and hope to catch your attention.

If any of this sounds like something that you'd like to support or could help with - please get in touch.

If you'd like to make a single or better yet monthly donation, no juggling involved, please know that we would be ever-so-grateful.

Signed, *the Centre Juggling Team*



We acknowledge the financial support of



United Way
OF GREATER VICTORIA
COMMUNITY PARTNER

The Province of British Columbia Gaming Commission



VICTORIA FOUNDATION

THRIFTY FOODS

And caring community members, like you

Friends of the Centre is published twice per year



Your donation grows a long way!

IN THIS PAST YEAR:

- over 9,000 hours of counselling
- over 1,200 clients served
- over 100 volunteer counsellors

THE AVERAGE:

wait time: 31 days

number of sessions: 7.7

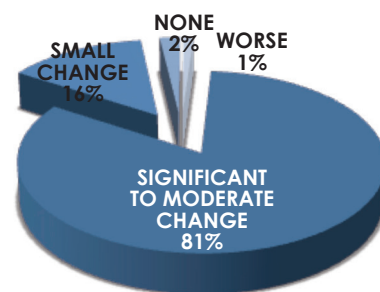
DID YOU KNOW?

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

"She helped me to see my life in a more positive light. I found better ways to manage my life"

Citizens' Counselling Centre's Board Members

- Chair: John Gawthrop
- Vice-Chair: Chris Hoyer
- Treasurer: Lisa Underdown
- Secretary: Sara Comish
- Special Advisor: Eliza Bates-Smith
- Andy Wachtel
- Arla Sinclair
- Derek Collins
- Carla Smart
- David Hume

Counsellor Reps

- Melanie Siebert
- Nabihah Rawdah
- Shannon Arnold

Penny the Wonder Dog

Penny ably assisted volunteer counsellors Meg and Brandi in this fall's Moving Beyond Stress, Anxiety & Depression Group lifting everyone's spirits each week with her particular brand of therapy which is all about love. And cookies.

The evaluations from participants offered Penny some sweet feedback: "Penny helps break down barriers and brings good energy." Another said, "Penny gets along with all humans. Provides comfort and understanding."

Though we don't have Penny or any of her furry friends in any other of our groups we do get consistently wonderful feedback about the content, the facilitators, and most importantly the benefits people are seeing for themselves as a result of their learning and participation in these groups.

Our group program continues to be a central compo-

nent of Citizens' services. Three times a year we offer a set of eight-week sessions, both day and evening groups.



Our core groups are: Building Self Esteem; from Exploration to Empowerment; Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Anxiety & Depression; Exploring Anger; and Moving Beyond Stress, Anxiety and Depression.

Last year we offered 16 groups and 147 clients participated.

In the final evaluation one of the questions we ask is: Was this group valuable to you? How? One participant summed it up perfectly hitting all the bases we hope for:

"I left feeling positive & empowered."

"Extremely valuable! Not only did I learn skills, I worked through problems, found support, met wonderful people, gained trust in the counselling community/process, and most importantly, left feeling positive and empowered."

Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre

941 Kings Road, Victoria, BC, V8T 1W7 • 250.384.9934
info@citizenscounselling.com • www.citizenscounselling.com

Look for Citizens' Counselling Centre on

facebook