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Taking Steps for Mental Health



10,000 Steps for Shalom: Participants of all ages, from children in strollers to seniors, enjoyed the beauty of the Iron Horse Trail, while supporting Shalom in making counselling affordable for all.

If you travelled on the Iron Horse Trail on an overcast Saturday morning, September 17th, you would have seen a community of caring people passing by, smiling, laughing and supporting each other at the first 10,000 Steps for Shalom: A walk/run for mental health. A little rain didn't dampen the enthusiasm of over 60 people of all ages who walked, ran and hand-biked 10,000 steps and more in support of affordable counselling.

Many groups of dedicated Shalom supporters were out on the trail, interacting with trail users and helping increase awareness of the need for mental health counselling services in our community.

Participants went the extra mile to bring attention to mental health, and along with donors raised over \$25,000 in support of affordable counselling for everyone.

We want to thank all of our event sponsors, donors, volunteers and participants for supporting people's journeys toward peace and wholeness. We look forward to seeing you next year!



Learning and growing: An intern's experience at Shalom

By Neil Thomas

Four months ago, as I began my internship at Shalom I was excited for the prospects the next months were going to hold. I was confident that I was going to be in an environment where I would be learning from a compassionate group of professionals, very skilled in the process and art of psychotherapy. In the past four months I have been greatly impressed by the community of compassion and exceptional care that exists at Shalom.

The work that is done at Shalom is done in an effort to walk alongside people, taking steps to get to a place where people feel a sense of healing and well-being. This walk often involves both tears and laughter but always requires a devotion to the process from the person who is struggling and the counsellor. It is this devotion to the goal of healing that brings about and nourishes the community of care present at Shalom. The healing and growth that happens is made possible by the combination of therapeutic interventions in a context of significant caring. This is why I have enjoyed and grown during my time at Shalom.

In school I read the textbooks and learned about the theory that informs the work of counselling. At Shalom I have learned how to put the theory into practice. Not only how to do the job of a counsellor, but how to do it in a way that fosters

growth of self and growth of community. The supervision, guidance and oversight from Brian and Susan during my placement have enriched and enlightened my experience.

Shalom is a special place, one I have been blessed to be a part of. I know the learning and experience I received at shalom will be a benefit for the work I do going forward in my career of working with people as they seek a sense of peace.

Neil is completing a Master of Theology in Spirituality and Psychotherapy at Wilfrid Laurier University.



Neil and supervisors Susan Schwartzentruber and Brian Laverty.

Encouraging Feedback for Shalom

Based on our commitment to effective service, each year we seek anonymous feedback from those who receive counselling at Shalom. It is important to us to know that counselling is making a difference in people's lives.

Here are a few things we learned this year:

96%

Reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the counselling they received at Shalom.

96%

Would recommend Shalom to others in need of counselling.

What we heard...

- Gratitude for Shalom's counsellors.
- Deep appreciation for the sliding fee scale that makes counselling affordable.
- The value in Shalom's faith-based foundation and the ability to bring faith and spirituality to the counselling process.
- The bright, spacious and inviting space as a result of the renovations and expansion that were part of "A Growing Home for Shalom."

Struggle and Hope: One family's journey with mental illness

By Melody Leclair, MA, Registered Psychotherapist

I had the privilege of speaking at the Shalom Fundraising Breakfast in May 2016 on the topic of our family's journey with mental illness. As a counsellor and someone who has personal experience supporting a family member, I felt compelled to share from these dual perspectives.

According to statistics, one in five people will have a mental illness in their lifetime. This means that we are all affected in one way or another. Rationally, it should not have come as a surprise when one of our children was diagnosed with a serious mental health disorder, yet emotionally we were completely unprepared.

You can well imagine the shock we felt as parents facing the diagnosis of our child. No amount of psychology training, work experience or parenting could have ever prepared us for the ambiguous journey that would ensue: crisis, shock, grief, inpatient/outpatient care, doctor/psychiatry appointments, medication; all a part of our child's experience of a "new normal".

Initially, these were dark and difficult days for our family; for what happened to one of our members happened to all of us. What we needed most was, and continues to be; safe places to talk about our experiences and get support.

The diagnosis and treatment of mental illness is complex. Recovery is a process and ambiguity is part of the journey. For this reason, some people are uncomfortable talking about their mental illness and/or supporting someone who has one. It has been said, people coping with mental illness have a lot more to deal with than the disorder itself. Some say that the stigma of mental illness, and the prejudices they encounter because of it, are nearly as bad as the disorder's symptoms themselves.

As I reflect on my experience of stigma, I am struck by its complexity. For me to accept the reality of my child's diagnosis meant I had to confront my own biases, beliefs and assumptions about mental illness. You may not know you have them until it happens to you.



For me this included the cultural stigma of silence and shame, self-stigma, and disbelief that this could be happening to our child, to me, to us, and the myth that faith makes us immune from pain. Thankfully, as we dared to share our pain, people shouldered our burdens. Meals, cards, prayers and visits sustained us during the uncertainty of crisis, and in time brought us to a place of hope.

It has been three years since our child's initial diagnosis. While there have certainly been ups and downs, as parents we are learning that mental illness does not have the last say. Diagnosis is an important part of the solution. There is life after diagnosis. Things change and can get better. We can adapt and do things differently. New dreams are possible.

As we accept the reality of the situation we can empower ourselves, our child, and others to find the courage to fight through and talk about it. By talking about mental illness we can create more safe spaces to become part of the solution. This is why my family and I chose to share our story. For us, talking about our experience is healing. By giving voice to our pain we hope to help others to do the same, so that nobody has to stand alone.

I encourage anyone who is struggling or supporting a person with mental illness to reach out and get support. Courageous vulnerability is all that is required. Consider the benefits that counselling, community, and medical supports can have in improving the quality of your life or your loved ones.

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***Helping People Grow Toward
Peace and Wholeness***

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Get to Know Shalom: New Staff and Board Members

Shalom welcomes the following individuals who have joined the Shalom team.

Joining the Staff team...



Joelle Martin-Root MSW, RSW

We are delighted to welcome Joelle as the newest member of the Shalom Counselling team. Joelle has a Master's of Social Work and comes with 15 years of counselling experience to her role at Shalom.

Joining the Board...



Susan Doerksen Castro has recently left her role at Kindred Credit Union as Vice-President, Human Resources (an organization she loves dearly) to embark on a new entrepreneurial journey to support women in cultivating and improving their health. She has worked for a range of profit and not-for profit organizations and is excited to join the Shalom board.

You Can Help

Shalom relies on the financial support of our community to provide counselling subsidies to ensure that counselling is accessible to all, regardless of income. This mutual aid, supporting others in a time of need, is important to enact Shalom's mission, "Helping People Grow Towards Peace and Wholeness."

If you are interested in donating to the ongoing work of Shalom Counselling, you can donate in the following ways:

Cheque

Cheques can be made payable to:
Shalom Counselling Services Inc.

Credit Card

Credit card donations can be made online or by phone:
www.shalomcounselling.org
(519) 886-9690

Legacy Gifts

Legacy gifts (estates and wills) can be made through Abundance Canada (formerly Mennonite Foundation of Canada)