

Shalom Counselling staff working for positive changes in people's lives

BY MARK WEBER

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Shalom Counselling has a mandate of helping folks reach a place of healthy, abundant living.

Shalom became a registered charity in 2006, although its roots stretch back to the late 1990s, explained Bonnie Joyes, community relations manager.

The year 2006 was also when they set up shop in their current location at 5515 - 27th Ave. (Just behind Balmoral Bible Chapel).

"Last year, we served 946 individuals through counselling. Another just over 300 were served through our wellness education programs," she said, adding that in 2015, they opened their Olds satellite office as well.

The demand for services continues to grow, added Benno Fath, executive director.

"We do draw from Central Alberta," he said. The spectrum of areas that counsellors address focuses on everything from trauma that is affecting a person's ability to have a full life, addictions, anger management, stress and parenting skills to pre-marriage support, depression, grief/loss and relationship problems.

"One of our goals is that we want to be available to whoever comes," said Fath, referring to how fundraising helps to ultimately subsidize Shalom's services for those who need that extra financial help.

"The cost of counselling can average \$140 a session - some people can afford that, but there are many people who can't," he said. "So through the graciousness and goodness of people, we are able to raise funds that allow us to offer a session that is \$25 per hour for those that can't afford more. But they have the same emotional or relational concerns and needs as others.

"So we are very grateful for those that support our work."

To the point of raising funds, Joyes described a garage sale coming up in the fall with items currently being collected via a donation drive in partnership with Value Village.

"There is also a silent auction at the ATB (on 67th St. and Gaetz Ave.) through to June 15th, and we are the beneficiaries of those funds," she explained, adding that they also do bottle drives with Cosmos.

Meanwhile, Fath said there have been talks about the mandate and vision of Shalom Counselling, also in light of the fact that next year marks a major milestone - the organization's 20th anniversary.

"We are faith-based, and at Shalom Counselling we believe that God meant for all people to have a full and abundant life. Living full and abundant lives leads to stronger individuals, stronger families and that contributes to stronger and healthier communities," he explained. "So that's really why we exist.

"There are times in people's lives when something comes up - it might be trauma or they might be struggling. Counselling is one thing that can be helpful for them to get through those times to a healthier place again.

"It's also why we believe counselling needs to be available to those who also don't have the financial resources," he added. "We believe every individual is of great worth and value."

Joyes agreed.

"Our philosophy is to help them find solutions based on their values and their belief systems," she said.

Another arm of services that has a tremendous impact on the community comes via Shalom Counselling's wellness programs. "These are topics that are related to emotional or relational well-being," said Joyes, adding that staff members are often invited to run presentations at schools, businesses or agencies on everything from

stress management to healthy relationships for teens. "We've done sessions on responding to bullying in schools and in youth groups as well."

There is also a session for seniors called 'Downsizing and Moving Forward 1' set to run June 8th at the Golden Circle from 1 to 3 p.m.

There is no charge, but those interested are asked to RSVP to 403-342-6074.

Also, 'Downsizing and Moving Forward 2: Navigating the Emotional and Relational Challenges of Assisting a Loved One to Downsize' runs at Revera Inglewood June 12th and 14th from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Again, there is no charge but a request to RSVP to 403-342-0339.

Meanwhile, exploring what the benefits of counselling might actually mean can be a daunting prospect for some. "It takes courage to make yourself vulnerable," said Joyes. "But vulnerability gives us opportunity to help people." Fath agreed.

"Therapy is about changing, growth and problem solving. Sometimes we get stuck in patterns that aren't getting us what we are happy with. People can think of it as, "I need to find some more tools for my toolbox. Counselling gives me an opportunity to discuss where I am at, what can I learn that will give me more skills, more abilities, and more flexibility in my responses?"

"We are here to help you find new ways to address emotional and relational challenges in your life, and to give you more tools that will help you be more successful."

