

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT (2017)

(This report covers the period from August 31 2016 to March 31 2017 to align with the fiscal year. Activities prior to August 31 2016 were reported in the 2016 annual report).

Preamble:

The year has been full, busy and rewarding with some new programme additions and encouraging client outcomes. New Start has been a key participant on several conversation tables including Restorative Practices, Domestic Violence Court, The Minister of Justice's Roundtable and the Metro Interagency Committee on Family Violence. We have been promoting several key messages such as:

New Start is a place where change begins. People who use abuse and violence find a place at New Start where they can interrupt their violent behaviour and start to heal the harm they have created.

When people who have harmed other people have the courage to seek counselling, the people they have harmed can begin to feel more safe and secure.

The healing journey for women begins when men step up and take responsibility for their abusive behaviour towards them.

Staff Engagement:

There have been no staff changes this year and staff continue to build a strong practice with positive feedback from clients. The leadership of Jane Donovan as Clinical Supervisor provides a professional and encouraging learning environment. Interns from Acadia University have grown in their understanding of the nature of this work and have completed successful internships through Jane's direction and support of staff. Staff have been invited to present to various professional groups and New Start has agreed to co-host with Bridges the National Domestic Violence Conference to be held in Halifax in 2018. Staff will be responding to the call for papers.

With the support of an intern we were successful in receiving a small grant from the Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia. With this grant a six week women's group was designed which is still underway.

We received the second year of funding from the Sexual Violence Strategy and continue to support men who have been affected by sexual violence.

Professional Development for staff has included attendance at the "Roots and Branches: sustainable approaches to gendered violence" hosted by Mount Saint Vincent University. Staff have been briefed on the amendments to the Children and Family Services Act.

Liaison with Department of Community Services and the Department of Justice:

In September of 2015 New Start's ability to continue to provide individual counselling to men who were on probation was over capacity. We can only provide group counselling to men on probation. However, as a signatory to the High Risk Protocol we continue to see men deemed to be High Risk for individual counselling. This greatly eased up the waitlist for referrals from Child Protection and the community at large. But, as times goes on, the waitlist has continued to grow and we are currently once more at a place where we are at full capacity with wait time of over three months. The obvious solution is more clinical staff. The announcement and now the implementation of a Domestic Violence Court in metro may add additional pressure on New Start and we are developing a strategy that will prevent us from becoming overwhelmed. Attached separately are some statistics.

Closing comments:

Feedback from clients is extremely important to give us a sense of the helpfulness of counselling. Here are some comments men have given us over the last year.

The following is an example of a letter of apology written by the men in a recent group at New Start Counselling:

"I am writing to you because I feel I let you down. I was sharp with you; I cut you off, and insulted you by swearing at you. I am taking responsibility for my actions. I know how much my actions hurt you because I sense you feel insecure in our relationship. I am taking responsibility by going to group and trying to change and better myself. I am learning new skills to help alleviate situations. If abuse happens, I will take responsibility and deal with it in a better manner. My intention is to treat you respectfully in the present and future. I am promising not to swear at you again."

Here are some individual comments:

"The most rewarding part of counselling was going home and my partner and family noticing a difference."

"The most difficult part was sitting in front of a group of guys expressing my feelings. But the most important thing to do in the beginning was to accept what you did and own it."

Here are some comments from men to future group participants:

"Give it a chance. Everything to gain, nothing to lose. Even if you think you don't need to be here, it's so beneficial, you have to try."

"Regardless of your situation, it's all helpful. Even men who have not been abusive stand to gain something from group."

Many thanks to staff for their amazing passion and support of this work. They hear incredible narratives of people's lives every day; they support each other and take care of each other; they have an authentic presence and it continues, for me, to be a joy to come to work each day. My thanks are also extended to the board who make it easy for me to take their direction. We have all been touched by the fact that New Start reaches out to many, many people to help them heal and repair the harm. When we see this happen for families we know why we do this work.

Respectfully submitted

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Executive Director

June 20 2017