



## Special 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

~ Proud of our Pearl Anniversary ~

Pride, excitement, gratitude, nostalgia, anticipation – just some of the emotions I am experiencing while sharing the news with you, our valued members, that Upper Island Counselling Services (UICS) is celebrating our

### 30 YEAR ANNIVERSARY!!!

In 1980 MacMillan Bloedel Ltd (now part of Western Forest Products Ltd) and its five Canadian unions pioneered an Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) that in every sense of the word was a cooperative effort. On October 1, 1987 UICS, then called Campbell River Assessment and Referral Services, was established to provide an EFAP here on upper Vancouver Island. Thirty years and a couple name changes later, we have expanded and developed in so many ways while remaining grounded in our values of prompt and professional counselling for our employees, families, and communities.

There have been challenges over the past 30 years given changes in the economic and industrial landscape of our communities, and we have adapted accordingly. The ebb and flow of the economy and the different industrial sectors we serve has been juxtaposed with the ebb and flow of the movement toward health and wellness, and psychological wellbeing in the workplace. Despite these challenges, UICS has maintained stability and consistency through these waves and continues to see the increasing value and necessity of our service into the future.

2017 marks my 10<sup>th</sup> year counselling with UICS and my 1<sup>st</sup> year as Executive Director. In our increasingly busy, stressful, and anxious society the role of compassionate counselling is more prevalent than ever. I look forward to leading our amazing team as we continue to support the health and wellness needs of our member organizations. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any concerns you may have about health and wellness issues in your workplace. We are here for you now, as we were 30 years ago, and will continue to be.

Wishing you a warm and healthy summer,

*Kelsi Baine*

Executive Director

The staff at UICS would like to extend their deepest thanks to the Board of Directors for their continued support and Governance over the last 30 years.

Current Board Members include:

*Yves Vachon – President*  
*Russel Pearce – Treasurer*  
*Cathie Emms*  
*David Harper*  
*Brian Rose*

*Dave Lovely – Vice President*  
*Lisa Condrotte – Secretary*  
*Linda Gardiner*  
*Darcy Nyman*

## **The Growing Acceptance of Mental Health & Wellness**

*Graham Walker, MA, RCC, UICS Counsellor*

Much has changed over the past century with regard to the common understanding and social acceptance of issues related to mental health and wellness. Let's take post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as just one example. One hundred years ago was just past the middle-point of the First World War. The concept of PTSD was not defined at this time in history and very little was understood about the effects of overwhelming experience on the human mind. Soldiers fighting in WWI were forced to endure horrors and atrocities that – thankfully – few people living today can even imagine. Due to the devastating impact of battle and other war-related hardships, many soldiers found themselves psychologically debilitated and utterly incapable of further participation in the war effort. Today, the symptoms these soldiers exhibited would quickly be recognized and diagnosed as those of PTSD and the soldiers would be prescribed treatment. Unfortunately, in 1917, such understanding and acceptance was not present in the minds of the medical and military authorities and, as such, not only were most soldiers afflicted with post-traumatic symptoms left untreated, many were executed for cowardice. Even during the WWII, from 1939-1945, soldiers were still being executed for cowardice – a phenomenon that many psychologists and psychiatrists today believe was due to misunderstanding and ignorance about the effects of post-traumatic stress. The psychological and psychiatric communities have come a long way since 1945. Although there is still much research and innovation yet to be done, the clinical treatment of PTSD has developed to the point where it is possible for a person diagnosed with PTSD today – given the right treatment and care - to experience a significant recovery that frees them from debilitating symptoms.

A similar story can be told about issues across the spectrum of mental health and illness. Psychological conditions such as depression, anxiety, addiction and

grief, as well as many others, have all undergone a continual shifting over time into greater understanding and acceptance as legitimate human experiences that can be treated and managed. While clinical research is an important part of this process, so too is the de-stigmatization within the general population that allows people afflicted with distressing psychological conditions to come forward, free of judgment and condemnation, to seek the help that could bring them a greater sense of wellbeing in their lives.

More and more people are coming to regard mental health conditions in a similar way to physical health conditions: no reasonable person would accuse someone struggling with a broken limb or a bad bout of the flu as being weak, cowardly or flawed in some way. Thankfully, this same level of understanding and acceptance is increasingly being applied to mental health issues.

So, what can we do to help this positive trend to continue? We can educate ourselves about mental health and wellness and we can speak up to normalize these issues for each other. The more we, as a society, understand about mental health issues, the less stigma and judgment there is attached to them, and the more we all benefit as a result. Just as anyone can break an arm or get the flu, so too can anyone be impacted by a mental health issue. It can be useful to ask ourselves: if a mental health issue was to impact my life, what kind of social environment would I want to find myself in? One that is misunderstanding and judgmental or one that is understanding and accepting? I think the answer is clear. So, let's all keep educating ourselves and speaking up for each other, and soon stigma and judgment will simply be things of the past.

Use **STOP** criteria to recognize attitudes and actions that support the stigma of mental health. It's easy, just ask yourself if what you hear:

- Stereotypes people with mental health conditions (that is, assumes they are all alike rather than individuals)?
- Trivializes or belittles people with mental health condition and/or the condition itself?
- Offends people with mental health conditions by insulting them?
- Patronizes people with mental health conditions by treating them as if they were not as good as other people?

Start with yourself. Be thoughtful about your own choice of words. Use accurate and sensitive words when talking about people with mental health conditions.

Adapted from the Canadian Mental Health Association

## Defining Mental Health

~ Jennifer Mansell, MSW, RSW, UICS Counsellor

Mental health has become a common phrase in the media these days. There has been an increase in awareness of mental health issues over the last decade. We hear about mental health on social media campaigns such as Bell's "Let's Talk." We hear about mental health in our doctors' offices. We hear about mental health in our schools and workplaces. We hear about mental health through various celebrities coming out about their own, personal struggles. We even hear about mental health around the table at our family dinners. So, what exactly is mental health?

Mental health is defined as "the condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterized by the absence of mental illness (a diagnosed condition) and by adequate adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Traditionally, mental health has referred to the overall functioning of one's psychological and emotional capacities. However, today we use the term mental health broadly to describe the overall functioning of one's mind, emotions, body and spirit. Science has now shown us that a limited capacity in one of these areas will affect our mental health. So, really we are talking about overall wellness; the integration of our social, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual health.

Mental health issues vary broadly, from generalized anxiety or low grade depression to psychosis, or a loss of connection to reality. We know that mental health issues do not occur in isolation. Usually, there are a number of factors which contribute to mental well-being, including our relationships, our sense of satisfaction at work, physical health ailments, loss or transition, as well as crisis or trauma.

There are often some key signs that our mental health is suffering, and we may need to access treatment such as counselling. Symptoms may include:

- not feeling like yourself
- feelings of melancholy or lack of motivation
- decreased sense of joy
- increased irritability or frustration
- feelings of anxiety, nervousness or restlessness

- difficulty eating, sleeping, resting
- increased relationship conflict
- limited capacity to respond to people the way you would like
- unable to access coping skills that you would normally utilize
- decreased feelings of worthiness or value

So, the converse is true when we refer to our mental health functioning well. We should expect to feel:

- a strong and secure sense of self
- ability to experience joy in life
- meaningful relationships
- a sense of purpose or identity in life
- physical well-being

- restful sleep and healthy eating patterns
- healthy coping strategies
- overall feelings of competence, value and worthiness
- ability to function day-to-day (ie. get to work or school)
- ability to cope with stress and crisis effectively

If you are worried about your mental health and unsure whether or not it could use a tune-up, this "Mental Health Meter" from Canadian Mental Health may be a good tool. Check it out: [http://www.cmha.ca/mental\\_health/mental-health-meter/](http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/mental-health-meter/)



## **How Do I Know If I Need Counselling?**

- adapted from article by Gill Wier, MBACP

Perhaps you have been thinking about having counselling for a while. Some days you feel really low and feel like you need to speak to someone as soon as possible. Then the next day you feel OK and the thought of ringing a counsellor goes away. But the issues that made you feel low are still there and you inevitably feel worse again in a few days time.

What stops you from biting the bullet and making an appointment? Feeling apprehensive about seeing a counsellor for the first time is common. Also it can be hard to accept you might need help. Asking for help can make the problem seem more real.

If you've not had counselling before you may have questions about what it involves. You may feel uncertain about committing your time to see a counsellor when you don't know much about counselling and whether it will help.

People often ask, 'do you think I need counselling?' It's difficult to answer this. If someone tells you "you need counselling" it can make you feel that your problems must be really bad. The decision to see a private counsellor is always a matter of personal choice rather than something you "must" do.

A better question is, 'might I benefit from trying counselling?' Many people, whatever their situation, have found counselling extremely helpful. It tends to be more useful, more effective and more successful if you have chosen to come because it feels like the right thing for you, rather than someone else telling you to go.

Counselling might be beneficial for you if...

- Something has been troubling you for some time and you're having difficulty finding a solution on your own
- Things are piling up and affecting your well being, for example, causing depression, anxiety or stress
- You find it hard to talk to friends or family because they are directly involved in the issues
- Issues from the past are having an impact on your day to day life
- Things that are troubling you are having a negative impact on your relationships or work

Counselling can help you reflect and make sense of difficult life events and find a way to move forward. Some of the benefits are...

- Talking to someone neutral, outside of your immediate situation, can show you a different perspective and help you find a way forward
- Talking with a trained counsellor can help you to process difficult thoughts and feelings
- Sharing your worries helps you feel less alone with the problem
- You can gain a better understanding of yourself and a clearer sense of what you want and need
- You can practice communicating more clearly and honestly in the safety of the counselling relationship

If you're still not sure, the best way for things to become clearer is to book an initial session with a counsellor. That way you can find out more about how counselling works and the counsellor can help you decide if it would be useful for your particular situation.

We would like to express our gratitude to the long list of Member Companies that have entrusted UICS to meet their EFAP needs. Without your continued commitment to UICS as well as your ongoing care for the well-being of your employees & families, we would not have reached this 30 year milestone.

