Annual Report 2019-20

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am pleased to present the Comox Valley Family Services Association (CVFSA) 2019-20 Annual Report to our community.

This last year has brought about many changes. CVFSA celebrated its 45th anniversary of providing services to the Comox Valley. We also said good bye to our long serving Executive Director, Gillian Normandin who retired in the fall of 2019. Shortly there after we welcomed Lisa Iverson into the leadership role while I took on the interim role of Board Chair.

Then, as the world knows, COVID-19 occurred with all its catastrophic changes. I speak on behalf of the entire Board when I say how impressed we were on how Lisa and all of the staff rose to this challenge and managed to rapidly support families and clients in innovative ways. We are thankful for the CVFSA team.

As I write, the future is uncertain but the Board is determined to continue planning to ensure CFVSA remains a vital resource to the Comox Valley. This includes serving our families efficiently and effectively allowing everyone the opportunity to thrive. Thus, the Board's priority now is to look at the changing needs of the community for the future.

To that end, this coming year we will proceed to develop and engage in a strategic planning process. This plan will guide our Association for the next several years to come. CVFSA will also be undergoing re-accreditation as part of its commitment to continued funding and providing quality service. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders as we celebrate and strengthen our community partnerships through this process.

We are very proud that 2019 marked our 45th year of providing service and we look forward to continuing to provide vital and effective services that make a difference to the families in our community.

Sincerely,
Karen Chrysler
Interim President
CVFSA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Karen Chrysler	Vice-President: Vacant
Treasurer: Brett Walker	Secretary: Janet Murphy
Director: Tracey Lawrence	Director: Dan Alexander
Director: Georgette Whitehead	Director: Suzanne Grant

'A Unique Type of Parking Lot'

PROGRAMS

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What If:

Everyone was living in a safe and healthy relationship?

Every young person felt that they mattered?

Our community was one where all families thrive?

FAMILY SERVICES IN THE COMOX VALLEY

Since the opening of CVFSA's first program in 1974, our association has grown and evolved into a supportive, caring and thriving social service organization that provides a comprehensive range of programs.

We are a non-profit, charitable society governed by a volunteer board of directors. We are pleased to be accredited through two agencies - CARF (Commission for the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) and the BC Association of Family Resource Programs.

We provide support to families in the Comox Valley and surrounding areas that include the City of Courtenay, the Town of Comox and the Village of Cumberland. Other areas include the northern communities between the valley and Oyster River and the southern communities as far as the Union Bay area.

We are made up of people who truly care. This includes the community members on the Board, our professional staff and our dedicated volunteers. We care about what we do, we care about the individuals and the families we support and we care about the community in which we live.

In life, anyone can experience challenges and may need help. We understand. Our priority over the past 45 years has been to support and build healthy, happy families in the community.

We offer a holistic approach that recognizes that everyone is unique and resilient. We use a strengths-based approach that offers ways of working with people where the focus is on abilities and potential rather than problems and deficits.

'Our mission is to build on individual and family strengths which support growth and healthy lifestyles'

GILLIAN NORMANDIN RETIRES

This past year, Gillian announced her retirement as Executive Director for CVFSA.

Gillian is a long serving member of the CVFSA team having worked on the frontlines, management and then in a leadership role for a total of 28 years.

Gillian (left) with incoming ED Lisa

She has been integral to CVFSA gaining accreditation by developing and improving the many policies and procedures that guide the organization in all programs and operations.

She also developed and improved the standards followed by the Board and human resources as a couple of examples. Listing all improvements would be impossible in this short space.

Gillian always maintained an open door policy and the team always knew she had the clients, volunteers and staff's best interest at heart. No matter who, Gillian was always there to help and her legacy is one of giving to anyone and everyone who needed it.

Anyone picturing Gillian's retirement as one of sitting back with a cup of tea and the book, are sadly mistaken as she will now be taking this passion for helping others one step further.

Gillian has taken her vast experience and ability to help others into the realm of mentoring and coaching. The perfect fit for her passion.

At the same time, she will be missed by everyone at CVFSA. Although the new ED has some pretty big shoes to fill, she also has already benefitted from Gillian's help in her new role.

CVFSA Central Location

1415 Cliffe Avenue

MEET THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LISA M. IVERSON

As the Executive Director for the Comox Valley Family Services Association, Lisa is responsible for ensuring the ongoing operations and growth of the association. Experienced in team -based leadership, she continues to research and implement innovative approaches to supporting healthy families.

Her role is also ensuring capacity, developing goals, maintaining vital partnerships within the community and working with supporters while continually advocating for the diverse needs of families in our community.

"I believe the Comox Valley is unique in that our community is one that celebrates nature, healthy lifestyle, diversity, and compassion for all. We have an opportunity before us to continue on a path that leads to a future where all families are happy, healthy and thriving in our beautiful valley."

THE HEALTHY FAMILIES PROGRAM

This program supports pregnant women, parents and caregivers to provide children with a strong foundation in life. The overall goal of this program is to contribute to the healthy development of children and families who may be living in conditions of risk or facing challenging life circumstances.

We offer weekly drop-in groups, access to community resources and opportunities to develop new social connections that grow into meaningful, long-lasting relationships.

Additionally, program participants can talk with our team of nurses, nutritionist, infant development consultants and outreach workers for individual support. Individual support is available on-site or on an outreach basis to provide every participant with personalized support. We strive to reduce systemic barriers that interfere with a family's navigation of community services, with a goal of increasing involvement in community programs that were previously difficult to find and access. Program staff works diligently to develop and maintain community partnerships that will strengthen the capacity to increase wrap-around systems of support to those in-need.

Parents/caregivers learn more about parenting & life skills, child development, nutrition and healthy living. Parents can participate in a cooperative group environment that promotes learning, well-being and personal growth. Ideas and information are shared by parents, facilitators and guest speakers.

Safe and stimulating childcare enables groups to be parent-focused while giving children the opportunity to play with age-appropriate toys and to participate in free-play, songs and story-time with our amazing support team. Healthy meals and transportation to groups are provided.

"I'm a single mother and I was told about this program from a nurse. I didn't know anybody in the valley and felt very lonely. After being in this program with both of my children the Healthy Families Program has made a tremendous positive change in my life. The program has given me support, constantly learning how to be a better parent. They support me through the good times and the bad. One of the best things about this program was feeling connected to the local resources and making friends with whom I have developed deep friendships with. This program is much needed!"

THE CARING CONNECTIONS (HAMPER) PROJECT

This innovative program was developed by our outreach team in recognition that many of the more vulnerable families in our community were not accessing emergency food resources in the community.

The Healthy Families Program places a strong focus on activities and services that emphasize improved food security with an aim to remove barriers that interfere with a household's ability to access safe and sufficient food. We offer healthy meals at weekly support groups, cooking classes plus nutrition education, free prenatal vitamins, community garden activities, distribution of farmer's market coupons and grocery gift cards, on-site emergency food hampers and coordination of a hamper outreach program with the food bank.

Not only does this outreach program ensure that families have easy access to healthy food by bringing the food to households in need, it creates an opportunity to connect with our outreach team members who are all experienced resource and support providers. Staff develops a helping alliance and this connection is the key to our success. This has grown into a vital component of how our outreach team supports vulnerable families as well as those that may become vulnerable due to isolation.

www.comoxvalleyfamilyservices.com/services-and-programs/healthy-families-program/pages/hamper-

HOP WITH ME! SUMMER PICNIC

This beloved tradition also known as 'Hop in the Park' is an event that our community looks forward to every summer.

Our Community Partners at Lewis Park

This no cost 5-week summer program has been developed for families who are raising children between 4 months and 6 years of age.

Each session takes place outdoors with a focus on creative activities that will guarantee lots of fun in the sun!

Participants enjoy a healthy picnic lunch, with a tasty selection of fresh fruits and vegetables.

It is also an opportunity to meet our team of community partners who join together to share new ideas about things to do and places to go in our community. This is what community is all about!

If you are a community minded business that is looking for an opportunity to sponsor a local charitable event. This could be the match you have been looking for. Give us a call! 250-338-7575

HEALTHY BABIES PRENATAL NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) is a community based program that supports women through their pregnancy and the first year of their baby's life. The program provides resources and support in areas such as nutrition, health issues, mental wellness, breastfeeding and infant growth & development that put their health and the health of their infants at risk.

For more information:

https://www.comoxvalleyfamilyservices.com/services-and-programs/healthy-families-program

THE FRIENDSHIP GARDEN

Busy, busy, busy……

is the only way to describe when little ones are in the garden.

Fresh fruit and vegetables and spending time with other families.

It is easy to see why this is another favourite in our community!

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

This past year, access to food is significantly improved due to numerous initiatives that are unique to our community. These include participation in the BC Farmers Market Nutrition & Coupon Program, Food Skills for Families cooking sessions, Food Hamper Outreach Program and the Friendship Garden.

We have also seen improved communication, advocacy and service coordination with MCFD social workers – our program has a specific liaison social worker who is available to provide guidance to staff and the social worker is a member of our Healthy Babies Steering Committee.

Program participants continue to build a trusting relationship with front-line service providers and these women in the perinatal period greatly benefit from the supportive programming that is available to them in our pregnancy outreach program and within the community. Women are more likely to access community programs that are designed to strengthen their ability to parent positively and to support healthy lifestyles.

Availability of daycare and preschool continues to impact families. Large wait lists (pregnant women are registering their unborn children!) due to lack of spaces for children and lack of qualified staff/ECE. Our CAPC families with children ages 3-5 years, whom we can no longer serve due to lack of adequate financing from PHAC, might qualify for subsidized childcare in the community but there are no openings available at childcare centres.

We received funding for the Healthy Weights for Children, Healthy Together Program. This project allowed us to explore new and innovative ways to engage families outdoors over a 15 week period of time. We brought on to our team a parent "champion" who assisted in developing weekly activity sheets and connecting with families on our closed Facebook page.

Last year, we also developed weekly "Healthy Habit Hero" worksheets that incorporated healthy lifestyle choices as well as a variety of community activities that promote physical activity and healthy eating.

We introduced geo-caching, exploration of Play Boxes, parks and scavenger hunts at the farmers market. Families were encouraged to send in pictures, recipes and other fun ideas to share with others. Weekly incentives were offered to encourage participation. We were thrilled with the concept and the enthusiasm of parent participation!

"There are countless ways in which our lives are enriched by the Healthy Families Program. Being a single parent I have found the support of other mothers and the outreach workers priceless. Starting from when I was pregnant they provided me with so much information and support. There has been so much information, ideas, tools and resources to help me. I am so thankful. Some of my favourite things....the lunches and snacks, playtime, workshops, other parents, healthy parenting tools and the farmers market coupons in the summer. "

Center: Carol with our volunteers in the Healthy Families Kitchen

MEET THE HEALTHY FAMILIES TEAM

This team has been proven to be dedicated and caring when it comes to helping families in the valley.

Innovation, passion, determination and plenty of creativity are evident on how this team makes sure no family is left behind when it comes support and access to healthy food.

Left to right: Rachel, Shoshana, Michelle and Jane at the Friendship Garden.

THE FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Family Development Program provides support to families involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). This partnership is unique in that our team only works with very specific referrals stemming from this collaboration.

Although the basis of this program is intervention to help both children and youth who may be at risk of being placed in alternate care, we see it as a much more complex issue that goes beyond the 'child's needs' and more of the 'family needs'.

Innovation has helped to develop this program into one that offers holistic outreach and support reflecting on the individual needs of each family and takes into consideration culture and values. Family history, divergence and trauma are also crucial when creating individualized plans to support families in achieving their goals.

The Family Development Team views the family as much more than the simple dictionary definition and considers all the individuals that make up a family group when providing support. By type of parent; whether a single, couple, foster, adoptive, grandparent(s), these are just a few examples that show the complexity in who may be part of a family dynamic.

When working with children that have been placed in alternate care due to health and safety concerns, the team works on ensuring families have access to one another while prioritizing reunification. Mental health concerns, such as past and current trauma, anxiety and depression, are always taken into account when providing support to families.

Practical support, such as creating healthy and safe home environments, is also provided. This includes connecting families to local community resources such as housing, mental health, addiction, income assistance, food security and counselling.

Youth Workers are also unique in how they provide support to youth who are, or have been, in alternate care. Many youth are dealing with past trauma while at the same time experiencing the anxiety that comes with maturing into adulthood. It is crucial that these youth have a secure connection to trustworthy individuals that they can talk to whenever needed.

Everyone should be provided the opportunity to be healthy and happy. Being healthy requires strong human bonds and security. We believe in resilience and most of all, we believe in families.

MEET A TEAM MEMBER: KRISTA SMITH

Krista Smith earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours degree from the University of Victoria in 2002. She spent the next 15 years working as a professional artist while creating and facilitating art outreach programs that provided opportunities for community members who wouldn't normally have access to art education, because of socio-economic barriers, to engage in art making practices. The unique stories and perspectives that were revealed during these outreach programs inspired Krista to begin working in the Human Services Field.

While raising three children on Cortes Island, Krista began supporting women and families who were living with mental health issues, income barriers, the cycle of abuse, substance misuse, intergenerational trauma, and parenting struggles. When Krista and her family moved to Campbell River in 2017, she earned her Human Services Diploma and spent time supporting Women in transition at the Campbell River Women's Resource Center. Krista believes strongly in walking beside her clients while using a trauma informed practice that recognizes each individuals' strengths and supports them on their journey of change. Krista honours that we each have our own path and timing and advocates strongly for each individual to be treated with respect regardless of how they choose to walk their path. Krista is a Family Development Worker because she believes strongly in the power of change and recognizes that change for families begins with parents.

As a part of her work with Comox Valley Family Services, Krista works with the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness. Working on the coalition is important to Krista because she believes very strongly that every single human deserves the dignity of a home. Krista has worked with the coalition to advocate for safe spaces, food security and wrap around services to support people who have been pushed to the fringes of our communities and are not able to advocate for themselves. This work has become increasingly important during COVID 19.

COMOX VALLEY
Coalition To End
HOMELESSNESS

https://www.cvhousing.ca/

CIRCLE OF SECURITY

Our CVFSA team is a proud supporter and advocate of the Circle of Security Parenting Program.

"This technique is a map for us parents developed out of 50+ years of attachment research. Attachment research is the Science of how we love and what gets in the way of expressing our love. Most parenting information, books and methods are technique based. As in, do this, don't do this. COSP is definitely not a checklist of To Do's. I wish life were that simple. If we could say – hug your child 3xs a day, say I love you at least once a day, always put your child in bed by 9pm, feed him 3 well balanced meals, daily vitamins and read 20 minutes per day and your child will grow up to have a good job and great relationships. DONE! A direct clear To Do list may be of great comfort to some of you (and give the 'hee bee gee bees' to the rest of you). I'm sorry, (or great news), COSP does NOT provide any of these types of guidelines.

Instead, what makes Circle of Security Parenting different is that the information is presented in a way that gives us parents a clear map of your child's needs. But how you use the map is up to each individual. No techniques. No To-Do's. Said plainly, COSP is not a list of techniques like Sticker charts, Swaddling, or rigid bedtimes. However, it is a map with a mirror, that asks you to reflect on your own self. What are you bringing to the table with your history growing up? Are there traumas there that affect how you parent? Of course, everyone has things that they wish were different about their childhood. Circle of Security Parenting allows us the wisdom to parent with reflection and growth – to move beyond being reactive parents."

More Information: https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

This past year, Family Development Program staff were part of various committees, including the Coalition to End Homelessness, Early Years Collaborate, Comox Valley Community Health Network, and the Aboriginal Advisory Committee.

Our team has worked hard to implement the new database system, CAMS, which is already proving to be an asset to the administration process that includes allowing for more accurate record keeping and reporting.

There was in increase in accessibility initiatives this past year that evaluated processes and forms with the goal of ensuring all clients feel respected and comfortable at all times when working with our team. This includes removing unnecessary language and sections from forms in consideration of language and reading comprehension barriers while implementing Trauma Informed Practice at all levels of the process.

An online client feedback survey has been created and will be sent to clients every six months, starting in August 2020. The Program Manager will reach out to clients who wish to provide feedback in other ways, such as over the phone or by regular mail.

CVFSA has renewed their Local member status with BC Federation of BC Youth In Care for another year (April 2020 – March 2021). Two Family Development Workers offer monthly activities, snacks and most importantly a safe place for youth in care. This is a youth driven group dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from government care in BC, between ages 14 and 24.

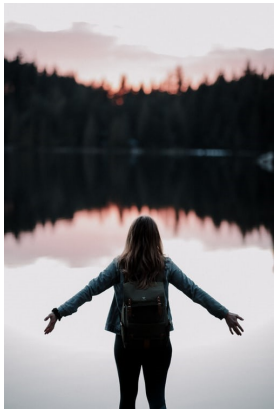
We are also pleased that 3 more staff members are scheduled to become trained Circle of Security facilitators (July 2020).

Challenges noted included an increase in our community in regard to substance use, mental health issues, family violence, poverty, limited parenting skills and/or capacity to parent which continue to be prevalent in the referrals.

We are also seeing the need for more supports such as mentoring as some referrals for children and youth would benefit from a mentor in addition to outreach. CVFSA does not currently provide a mentoring program.

At the tail end of the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the Covid-19 Pandemic surfaced. This resulted in an abrupt halt to in-person work being done by Family Development Workers. However, the transition to phone and virtual communication has been well-received by most clients. Emergency work focusing on the basic needs of clients, such as food, shelter, and physical/mental safety, has become the primary focus during this crisis.

COMMUNITY BASED VICTIMS SERVICES



This program is a no fee service open to both self and community partner referrals. The program provides emotional support, justice related information referrals and practical assistance to victims and their families, of crime and trauma. Many instances of physical and sexual abuse go unreported; we offer a safe place to talk about relationship violence, abuse and sexual assault where the focus is not just about the criminal justice system but a holistic approach to the experience of survival. We support everyone: Women, men, non-binary, LBGTQ2+, youth and children who have experienced or witnessed any aspect of gender violence whether physical, emotional or sexual.

https://www.comoxvalleyfamilyservices.com/services-and-programs/community-based-victims-services-program

"I'm beautiful. No longer do I get messages about my inadequacies. I don't have to run to my room to be safe any longer. I even see myself sometimes as a warrior able to protect myself with help from my advocates. " The full story at: www.cvfsa.org

Our Victims Services team: Amy, Isabel and Melissa not only support survivors but are also out and about in our community wherever there is an opportunity to build awareness with the goal of reducing harm.

One example is sharing information and resources around important topics such as: What is consent ?

***Consent** means the voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question. The principles of consent that apply to assault also apply to sexual assault. The victim of sexual touching must freely consent to the act, and must understand the nature of the act being consented to. The courts have applied the definition of consent to mean that a person cannot consent to having serious bodily harm done to himself or herself. Tea consent helps to explain… follow the link!*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

This past year, statistics showed more men coming forward to report domestic abuse and also included more youth reporting violence in school. Technology has also increased in use as a tool for abuse including cyber-stalking, passive controlling behaviours and other sharing of information meant to cause significant harm.

There was an increase demand for Family Law support and as our team continues to build relationships with survivors during criminal proceedings, it ws noted that 80% of these cases have evolved into Family law proceedings over the past year. Court order breaches also continue to increase which has left the majority of survivors feeling extremely frustrated when limited or delayed action occurs in reaction to the breach. The common reaction is: 'Court orders mean nothing'.

During this reporting period, there was also an increase in survivors reporting fathers and grandfathers in regard to sexual violence cases. Another increase shown in statistics, included more female survivors looking for support and information regarding the reporting process, how it works and what it looks like when a victim decides to go forward with the reporting procedure.

Referrals continue to be steady and include approximately 75 new over the past year. Some of the more pertinent challenges affecting the survivors in our community include a lack of counselling services, housing for women fleeing abusive relationships, available youth services in regard to youth experiencing abusive relationships as well as the need for safe housing for this age category.

Amy, who oversees the gender violence cases and Isabel who oversees the sexual abuse cases both attended the RCMP watch meetings where both made presentations of our services to new members. They also gave presentations to both the Youth Media Project & The Immigrant Welcome Center;

Our CBVS team has partnered with the Canadian Armed Forces' in regard to the 'Operation Honour Program'. This program addresses sexual violence and misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces and has been developed to assist victims in the forces in coming forward with reporting in regard to sexual violence while serving in the forces.

FAMILY & YOUTH COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

The Collaborative Planning Program facilitates and supports families in the planning process regarding the welfare of minor family members. This includes the immediate and extended family members who are able to participate in a proactive decision making process that respects each family's unique needs, hopes and goals for all family members involved who are requiring any level of support. Referrals are through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

This program is essential to empowering families who may be dealing with but not limited to post traumatic stress, multi-generational trauma and/or poverty. The priority is to strengthen family bonds while ensuring all family members receive accessible support and resources available.

MEET A TEAM MEMBER: ROBYN DIAS

Robyn is the Collaborative Planning Program coordinator with our agency and her office is located with the MCFD in order to better assist and set up conferences/meetings. Robyn has lived and worked on Vancouver Island for 12 years. She started off her career doing home care for adults and then worked as a mentor with the Precious Beginnings FASD prevention program at the Kwakiutl District Council Health centre.

In 2018 Robyn began working at Comox Valley Family Services Association as a Family Development Worker and then transitioned into her current role in July 2019. Robyn works with a strength-based client-centred approach and feels honoured to work with the families of the Comox Valley. Robyn enjoys her position as a Collaborative Planning Program Coordinator as she believes families should be included in the decision making process for their children. Through the collaborative practice decision making process, child welfare plans can be developed and implemented that meet the needs of the children, youth and families.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

This past year, the MCFD Social Workers have been using all aspects of the Collaborative Planning Program in helping families within their caseloads.

More Family Development Workers are ensuring the youth receive youth transition conferences as well as helping to identify individuals for youth to have as an advocate at their meetings.

Being located in the MCFD office is beneficial. It makes it convenient to schedule conferences/meetings and for other staff to ask questions about which process would work best for a particular family.

Family Group Conferences have been lower due to only one worker in the program managing all aspects of the program which makes it difficult for planning. Over the past year, finding space to hold family and youth conferences remains a challenge. The MCFD boardroom is extremely busy.

It has also been difficult to find available administration/ practicum students to record the notes needed at the group meetings. Fortunately, for the most part, facilitating and recording meetings is possible but it is more challenging and not as effective if there is conflict that needs to be mediated within the group.

Efforts to streamline the process have worked as we continue to book review meetings at the initial meetings in the individual conference schedules. This helps both Social Workers and Development Workers by reducing the amount of phone calls/texts/emails to set up concurrent meetings in the schedule.

Many community partners from other support organizations, including the local school district, have now been more involved in the process by attending several youth and family conferences over the past year.

This has allowed teachers, counsellors and other key workers be better prepared and feeling much more comfortable with being able to prepare families for the conference experience.

Feedback shows that many community partners felt the meetings help to encourage better communications. This in turn, increased and improved the support for both the youth or family.

SEXUAL ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

We provide a range of appropriate, therapeutic and educative treatment and/or support services to children and youth ages 3 -18 (up to their 19th birthday) who have been sexually abused, and to children under the age of 12 with sexual acting out behaviours.

Treatment may include individual counselling and/or family support depending on the needs of the young person, to facilitate healing within the family system.

Intervention methods are strength-based and child-focused, using a variety of expressive therapies and counselling approaches.

Art and play therapy may be used and children may be taught safety skills as necessary. We encourage healthy parent-child attachment. We support families in understanding the impact of sexual abuse on the child/youth.

These no fee services are offered for both self-referral and referral through community partners and the program is staffed by two counsellors with specialized training and experience. Services are sensitive and responsive to cultural differences.

Also offered are sexuality clinics for any youth or adult in the community who wants to learn more about normal sexual development, responding to sexual abuse disclosures or information about sexual behavioural problems. Appointments for a confidential clinic meeting may be arranged at any time.

At times the program may do small presentations in the community covering topics related to sexual abuse such as safety, secrets, communication, boundaries and emotions.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

At the end of this last year, we hat a waitlist of 6 families enrolled for our program. Our waitlist fluctuates over the months, due to emerging crises (new disclosures) or families who stabilize and no longer require our service.

We noticed the past year, an increase of teen males seeking support, which we interpret to mean that there is less stigma for males seeking support for sexual abuse. With the onset of Covid-19, we have been challenged with service delivery because of social distancing requirements. We are in problem-solving mode, seeking new ways to connect with our clients.

Video-conferencing is a promising option if confidentiality and ethical considerations can be met. We continue to have good working relationships with MCFD social workers, school counsellors, Family Development workers and CBVS support workers. We continually strive to provide clients with therapeutic experiences that support their growth and development.

Accordingly, we add new therapy methods or techniques to our repertoire as seems fitting for the individual client. We do measure general client satisfaction; however, we may need to look at other outcome data we can gather to build understanding of client needs. Throughout the course of treatment, clients and families are encouraged to provide feedback about their experience in counselling: what works well and what does not work well for them.

We aim for a collaborative approach between counsellor and client. This feedback provides a therapy direction as well as using methods that are ideally effective with each client. We obtain this information through check-in activities (i.e. drawing, outcome rating scales), direct conversations, or quarterly counselling efficacy reviews completed by clients.

Therapist, Leslie Fletcher, will continue to be supported to use the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT). This specialized assessment has informed treatment goals and interventions and has allowed SAIP to offer some clients and their supports a deeper understanding of the specific impacts of early trauma on brain development.

Leslie also completed an 8-hour online training course through the Jack Hirose Group for working with depressed and anxious adolescents. The play therapy room has had a number of upgrades (new shelving unit, lights, and therapy tools) to enhance clients' learning and add to the comfortable welcoming space.

CREATING CALM—ANXIETY SUPPORT PROGRAM

MEET A TEAM MEMBER: LESLIE FLETCHER

Leslie is a therapeutic counsellor with our Sexual Abuse Intervention Program. She holds a Masters Degree in Counselling Psychology and has been an art therapist and counsellor for over 30 years.

Leslie helped develop the therapeutic group called 'Creating Calm' and is a key facilitator with this group that works with children 7-9, 10-13 and sometimes youth 13-15 years.

Her areas of knowledge and experience include child abuse/neglect, anxiety, life transitions, grief and loss, parent-teen relationship issues, and strengthening family relationships.

Leslie is not only an integral part of the SAIP program but also an important member of the Comox Valley Family Services Team.

She has helped to shape and guide the many aspects of our organization over many years of being involved in our community.

Creating Calm is an educational therapeutic support group for children and youth experiencing anxiety. Children and youth will learn a variety of techniques to cope and manage their anxiety, and parents will learn methods to identify anxiety symptoms and intervene to support the development of more confident, self-reliant behaviour in their children.

The goals are: To provide children and their parents with a number of concrete coping techniques to manage anxiety and fears, educate parents about the signs and symptoms of anxiety in children, provide parenting ideas to encourage more self-reliance in children and help children learn about themselves and each other in a positive light. Creating Calm presents the information in child-friendly, fun, and positive ways.

The group also provides information to parents about childhood anxiety, how to increase bravery and build confidence in children, implement new parenting strategies as needed, and support their children more effectively. Anxiety becomes a problem when children do not grow out of these stages of fear and it becomes excessive and extreme.

Problem anxiety interferes with a child's ability to engage in age-appropriate activities, socialize, learn, and develop self-confidence. Anxious feelings are usually accompanied by physical sensations such as a churning stomach, headaches, light-headedness, trembling, numbness, and/or a racing heart. Behaviours may include seeking constant reassurance, frequent crying or tantrums, avoidance such as refusing to do things or go places, and difficulties with going to sleep. Anxious thoughts present as negative thinking patterns such as perfectionism, imagining the worst possible outcomes, or believing that he or she is unable to cope with normal life challenges.

Although the experience of anxiety will vary from child to child, feeling excessively stressed, worried, overwhelmed and/or fearful is common. Fortunately, children and youth can learn methods to manage their anxiety. Family support plays a key role.

For more information: https://www.comoxvalleyfamilyservices.com/services-and-programs/creating-calm-child-and-youth-anxiety-group

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST YEAR

In our Creating Calm Program, we received a lot of favourable feedback from parents this past year who found the parent evenings to be informative and supportive. Most parents said they enjoyed being part of our weekly groups and receiving useful handouts. Reviews from the children is often very positive, with some stating that they are disappointed that group only runs for 8 weeks.

Given the positive feedback from families, many found the group experience to be educational, supportive, and helpful. Children came away from group with a better awareness about their own anxiety symptoms, a toolbox filled with ideas in how to cope more effectively with anxiety, more confidence about their own capabilities, and often a positive connection with other children.

Inquiries and general interest from the community was robust this year. Physicians and school counsellors refer children to our program more often than in past years. Parents also tell other parents about our program, when calling in to attend a group, parents note that we have an excellent reputation in the community around services for children with anxiety.

With the increase of funding last year, we were able to offer an additional group. The goal is to add and additional group for 13 to15 year olds as well as an increase to the Parenting through Anxiety groups. With each group series extending it to 10 weeks, we still have a small but manageable waitlist. We endeavor to provide support and resources to these families via anxiety support websites and books while they wait for the next group offering.

“BECAUSE, FAMILIES”

The Comox Valley Family Services Association is only made possible because of our donors.

These include federal and provincial government agencies, our municipality, local foundations and service groups. We also have small and large business donors and community members who contribute to ensure that not only the families in our community receive support today but ensure that we are able to plan for a future where no one is left behind. We would like to acknowledge the contributors listed below.

It is to them we are forever grateful for this continued support.

On behalf of our association and the many, many families and individuals we support,

Thank you

ACCREDITATION

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