



August 3, 2017

Waterloo Region

August 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the Walk In Counselling Clinic at KW Counselling Services.

When the Walk In Counselling Clinic opened quietly in August 2007 to gauge interest, the agency had more than 900 people on its waiting list for counselling. The clinic was an immediate success and was one of only a few in the world at the time. “We needed an innovative and accessible solution to allow us to see people in their time of need when they are most open to change. Because of this, clients seen at the Clinic had greater reduction in psychological distress following their visit as compared to clients visiting traditional counselling services,” says Leslie Josling, Executive Director of KW Counselling Services.

The Walk In Counselling Clinic is open each Thursday from 12-6pm with the last appointments ending by 8:30pm. Residents of Waterloo Region may come to the clinic on their own or with a partner, their family, a community support person or an interpreter. Counsellors provide support for a variety of issues including: family crisis, parenting issues, abuse and trauma, communication, separation and divorce, grief and loss, anger, depression, anxiety, sexual orientation and gender identity, addiction, etc. Upon arrival, an intake worker meets with clients and matches them with an appropriate counsellor. Referrals and suggestions for other services are also provided. The service is geared to income. A number of funding arrangements ensure that all people can be seen. No one is ever turned away because of an inability to pay. The counselling session lasts 90 minutes and clients leave with a clear, common-sense plan to address their concerns and are encouraged to work with that plan. Those who feel they’d benefit from more sessions can return to the Walk In Counselling Clinic any Thursday or call the agency to ask for ongoing counselling.

Mary Zilney, Chief Executive Officer of Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, says “This innovative initiative has benefited countless clients we serve who may not require or be prepared to engage in longer term counselling. It has been a remarkable success and has filled a need in our community that had been void prior to implementation.” Karen Spencer of Family and Children’s Services says “we have found that the parents and youth we work with have benefited a great deal from Walk In service because the response is timely...sometimes people need help right away, they are in crisis and timely help makes such a positive difference... it is so valuable to have such a welcoming and responsive service to refer our families to.”

In the last ten years, the KW Counselling Services Walk In Counselling Clinic has been the subject of two large-scale research studies conducted by Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo. The findings show that the service is effective. Often, clients who present with “complex needs” (coping with abuse, trauma, serious mental illness, or child welfare concerns) actually improved more quickly after attending a session at the Walk In Counselling Clinic than with the traditional counselling model. One unexpected benefit to the Walk In Counselling Clinic is its usefulness to men. Men are known to service and healthcare providers for their inability to seek help. Their tendency to not ask for help has a profound concerning effect on their health. It is even known to predict men’s mortality. “Imagine how thrilled we were to learn that fully half of our Walk In visitors are male. This compared to traditional counselling services where only 37% of visitors are men. This is astonishing. We are on to something and I am confident it is improving and even saving men’s lives,” says Josling.

Joanna Bedggood, Manager of Student Wellness at King’s University College at Western University and former Director of the Walk In Counselling Clinic says “having worked at the clinic for five years I had the wonderful privilege of getting to see firsthand what a difference 90 minutes of counselling could make in the life of someone who was feeling depressed, or hopeless or overwhelmed or all alone with a problem. This service makes a real important impact every week to the people who live in Waterloo Region.”

The Walk In Counselling Clinic has grown in popularity over the course of the past ten years with the number of visitors steadily climbing from an average of 30 visitors per week to a record 96 in March of 2016. In its ten-year history the clinic has seen more than 15,000 people. The clinic is funded largely by the community; United Way funding, the Region of Waterloo, fundraising events, grants, and donations supplement some annual funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services that supports clients who are women that have experienced violence or abuse. “There is wide-spread agreement that mental health supports are underfunded. People experiencing mental health issues can’t get into service when they need it. We rely on the community to help us keep our Walk In Counselling Clinic available,” says Josling. “One in five Canadians will experience mental health challenges this year. That means more than 100,000 people in Waterloo Region may need help. The demand is staggering and we need to continue to support solutions we know to be effective like the Walk In Counselling Clinic,” says Josling. “We are unaware of such a clinic anywhere that serves more clients in one day. Yet the staggering demand has surpassed our current resources.”

15,372 people benefitted from therapeutic counselling at KW Counselling Services in 2016 but many more could have been helped if the agency had funding to serve them. KW Counselling



Services is a registered charity. On average, only 36% of the agency's funding comes from government sources.

"This year, as we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Walk In Counselling Clinic we are appealing to the community for help to sustain and expand our counselling services. We need to hire additional counsellors to meet the needs of the community." Donations can be made online at <http://www.kwcounselling.com/>, or in person at 480 Charles Street East Kitchener, ON N2G 4K5. "At the end of 2016," says Josling, "we created an Endowment Fund at the Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation. In addition to immediate donations, we welcome donations to the fund as it will help to sustain our work in the long term."

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