

# **The Cornerstone Counselling Society of Edmonton**

The Cornerstone Counselling Society of Edmonton is a Christ-centered charitable agency committed to providing professional, accessible, and affordable mental health services to all Albertans regardless of race, age, gender, sexuality, background, faith, or income level. We believe that financial limitations should not prevent people from receiving the support they desperately need, and our goal is to serve the whole community without discrimination.

Founded in Edmonton in 1977, Cornerstone has grown to be one of Alberta's largest not-for-profit providers of subsidized counselling, psycho-educational workshops, and psychotherapy training. We utilize a variety of treatment modalities to assist clients who are experiencing a broad range of issues including emotional distress; addictions; trauma, violence and abuse; relationship issues; coping and behavioural issues; grief and loss; and more. Payment for our services is on a sliding scale, based upon clients' finances. We provide fee subsidies from our Way to Wellness Fund to ensure our services are affordable to all. Cornerstone is dependent upon the generosity of individuals, businesses, foundations, and grants to run our subsidy program. COVID-19 has caused a decrease in revenue streams that we normally depend on from the community which puts current and future capacity of our Affordable Counselling Program at risk and adds to our growing waitlist of people hoping to access professional psychotherapy at an affordable cost.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of our community's mental health has been negatively impacted – especially those who were already struggling with mental health issues.

Mental Health Research Canada surveyed 1,800 Canadian adults in April 2020 and another 3,005 in February of 2021 and the findings show:

- in April, 2020, 7% of respondents self-reported that they were struggling with anxiety;
- this number tripled to 25% by February, 2021;
- reports of depression also increased from 6% to 17%, and;
- along with this, Statistics Canada reports that the prevalence of mental disorders is more than four times higher among those who experienced feelings of loneliness or isolation as an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

People are continuing to experience feelings of hopelessness, stress, and emotional pain due to financial hardships and the loss of loved ones. As a result, the demand for our Affordable Counselling Program has increased at an unprecedented rate.

The regular rate for counselling as recommended by the Psychologists' Association of Alberta is \$200 per session, which is an insurmountable barrier for many. Cornerstone met the challenge of providing for the mental health needs of our province's most vulnerable populations by

creating our Affordable Counselling Program. Now, people with lower incomes and those without benefits can access professional psychotherapy services at a significantly reduced rate. Our Way to Wellness Fund subsidizes up to 90% of the cost of counselling, and our lowest income clients can pay as little as \$20 per session.

Offering our services on a sliding scale allows us to reach and support more of our community, and our large and diverse team of psychologists come from various backgrounds to ensure that our clients find the adaptive, inclusive, and compassionate support they need to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, Cornerstone experienced record-breaking years in terms of client attendance. We provided:

- 19,775 counselling hours to 4,585 clients in these years, despite an initial slow-down due to COVID-19, and;
- counselling at a reduced rate for 55% of our clients, which translates to an average of 105 subsidized counselling hours each week.

Unfortunately, due to demand, we have needed to create a waitlist and to tap into our financial reserves to meet the increased demand for our subsidized services because of the ongoing pandemic. Our client community has turned to us to provide accessible psychotherapy to combat mental health issues stemming from financial uncertainty, grief from loss, lack of social supports, and physical health concerns.

Cornerstone aspires to be a place where people from all walks of life can come to experience compassion, acceptance, and healing. Our values support the nurturing our community's wellness in order to build and rebuild a strong future for Alberta. We know that many clients in our Affordable Counselling Program will recover to their previous levels of functioning and that they will be better prepared to manage stress through the healthy coping skills that we have endowed them with.

Cornerstone has been hiring additional registered psychotherapists to meet the growing demand from our Affordable Counselling Program so that more Albertans will be able to access the mental health resources they need, when they need them, and at a rate they can afford. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has caused a decrease in revenue streams that we normally depend on from the community to support our client services. This puts current and future capacity of our Affordable Counselling Program at risk. We need to find additional funding for our Affordable Counselling Program or we will be left with no choice but to add to our growing waitlist of people hoping to access psychotherapy at an affordable cost.

**For more information about Cornerstone**

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