

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT (2016)

(This report covers the period from August 1 2015 to August 31 2016)

Preamble:

This has been a remarkable year for New Start's public image and recognition for the work that is taking place. A public presentation held jointly with the Halifax Regional Police included a panel presentation and a poster launch that stimulated immense media interest that went across the country. There has been an increased attention to our work from within the Family Violence sector and a respectful response from groups who, traditionally and politically, have always been skeptical of putting resources into men's intervention programs. More recently, New Start was awarded a grant from the Sexual Violence Strategy to provide both individual and group counselling to men who have been traumatized by sexual abuse. Again, this is a recognition of the competence of staff and their practice. However, we continue to be stretched to respond to all the needs of people who call and in September had to close the door to direct referrals from Probation Services (unless the clients were High Risk) for individual counselling. Only group counselling can be provided for probationers at this time. The majority of clients come to us with Child Welfare involvement and bring with them many complex issues that take time to support and address.

Staff Engagement:

There have been no staff changes this year and this has added to a strong, consistent presence of practitioners who are extremely dedicated to the work and who provide each other with the care and support to manage the very complex issues clients bring to New Start. Through the leadership of Jane Donovan, Clinical Supervisor, staff feel confident and competent in their practice which is evidenced on a daily basis through professional and respectful collegiality.

This has also been a year where New Start has been invited to be part of several discussions and table conversations that are leading to innovative and creative strategies to address domestic violence. The Restorative Practice table coordinated through the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women has invited New Start to be part of the understanding of the value of restorative practice and how this approach can help women heal from the abusive actions of their partners. Just at the beginning stage of the understanding of restorative practices the members of the conversation table are beginning to appreciate the value of working in this way.

Recently, New Start was asked to join a roundtable discussion with the Federal Minister on the Status of Women along with several other Atlantic voices to share innovative and creative ideas about preventing domestic violence. One of the priorities New Start put forward was the importance of working with men and boys to help them address their behaviour towards women and girls.

A very significant addition to the work staff do at New Start is the recent hiring by Halifax Regional Police of a Domestic Violence Police Officer who is specifically responsible for bringing High Risk offenders to the services of New Start. This is a community response and one that will require additional resources. We know that the sooner we can bring the alleged offender to counselling the more successful they will be in taking responsibility for their actions. Conversations have begun with HRP Victim Services to look at a pilot project that would enhance a community response for High Risk clients.

Professional Development for Staff:

Staff attended the International Restorative Practices Conference in Halifax. A one day in-house professional development day was spent with staff to share practice ideas and create expressive art work now on display in the office. Eric Ross continues his advancement in Music Psychotherapy and is in the final phase of this credential. Through weekly clinical supervision with Jane Donovan and monthly peer supervision with Tod Augusta Scott staff continue to develop their clinical skills.

Programme Development:

For the first time this year we partnered with Alice Housing to co-facilitate a parenting program for parents whose children had witnessed domestic violence in the home. A small grant was received from the Halifax Community Health Board to fund this. Although it was a pilot it is proposed that sometime in the near future we shall develop this further to reach out to more parents.

Yoga continued to be a beneficial addition to the therapeutic process and was provided throughout the year.

A women's program was held using the medium of art expression and several pieces of work are displayed in the office or in clients' homes.

We continue to enjoy and benefit from the addition of interns and this year had two students from the MEd program at Acadia University and one from the MSW program at Dalhousie University.

The Healing Narratives Program provides individual counselling to men who have been traumatized by sexual abuse and we shall soon be conducting a fall group for them. Funding is through the Sexual Violence Strategy in partnership with Robert Wright.

Community Connections:

New Start continues to be an active participant on the Metro Inter Agency Committee for Family Violence and the High Risk Protocol Committee. Through these regularly held meetings we are able to inform our partners of the work we do and share some of the issues that impact our capacity to reach out to people impacted by domestic violence. Referrals from community organizations, including Child Welfare, have increased as a result of our profile in the professional community for high standards and excellence in best practices.

Concluding Comments:

Staff are to be commended for establishing a standard of practice that is recognized across the country. We have been called upon to be the expert voice in areas of domestic violence and the recent media attention we have received bodes well for New Start to be a leader in this field. I wish to thank staff for coming to work each day and being part of this unique and effective healing environment for people. My thanks to the Board of Directors for the support they give me to support the staff.

Respectfully submitted by

Wendy Keen MSW RSW

September 7th 2016

