



Linking Lives

Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center

Overview of Programs

On-site Clinical

Individual, couples, family and group therapeutic psychosocial support of uninsured and underinsured youth and adults

The Living Room

Weekly peer-led support meeting for those struggling with daily living issues

Women's Group

Confidential bi-weekly group for women who have experienced violence such as sexual abuse, harassment, or assault

Yoga

Weekly yoga classes to promote overall wellness

To receive this bi-annual newsletter by email, please send your address to mpotter@spirituschristi.org.

Director's Update

A lot has changed here since our October 2020 newsletter. In December, Maureen Marlow retired after 15 years as Director, and she passed the mantle to me. At that time Mark Potter, a long-time member of the Spiritus team, joined the Mental Health Center as our new Associate Administrator. Mark and I are excited about continuing the mission of the Center and are looking for ways to include more people in this life-changing work -- volunteers, donors, and community partners, as well as those in need of our services. We promise to keep you posted, and we always welcome your feedback. Other changes at the Center since October include a gradual move back to in-person therapy sessions, and plans to restart our peer support meeting and women's group in the coming weeks. We will continue to offer telemental health for those who need it, but it's been great to be able to have folks back here in person!

In this issue, you'll read about one person's experience in counseling here (p.2), and learn a simple strategy you can implement in your own life to help you reach your personal mental health goals (p. 3). Before I close, I want to share an encouraging bit of news with you. Recently we received a generous donation that was accompanied by this note:

A few years ago I got help from this program, and a gift to help pay my rent during a particularly difficult time in my life. This is my humble attempt to give back. Thank you so much for this invaluable program.

Notes and gifts like these never cease to fill me with awe and gratitude. They tell me that the support and tools we provide really do make a lasting difference for people. I never get over how great it feels to be able to be a part of that! You are also a part of that. In whatever ways you invest in this work -- whether it be sharing your time, your skills, your financial resources, your prayers, or other resources -- you are helping people struggling with problems such as mental illness, grief, trauma, poverty, racism and addiction to get the support they need to get their feet under them and to work toward their goals. That's huge! We couldn't do this without you!

With Gratitude,

The Ripple Effect of Therapy

by Amy Durkee

Last February, Shealyn was struggling. She was in night school, working part-time, and her relationship with her partner was in turmoil. "I noticed that childhood trauma was coming up a lot. I was stressed out, overwhelmed, and not sleeping. I knew I needed to get some help to sort through the current stuff and then go back to what started in childhood." Often, in order to even consider getting help, a person has to overcome the barrier of distrust or lack of familiarity with mental health treatment. People often wonder if it really works. They wonder if they'll be told there's something wrong with them. And even if they're willing to take a risk, they don't know how to find the help they need. Shealyn already had positive experiences with therapy from when she was a teen, so she knew therapy could help her, but she didn't have insurance and couldn't afford to pay out of pocket. Luckily, a relative suggested she call Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center. We were able to get her an appointment with one of our counselors in early March, just before our region entered the quarantine. As a result, she has been meeting weekly with her counselor via telehealth ever since.

"I'm a lot stronger at advocating for myself and at communicating even when I feel uncomfortable"

Shealyn's account of her first session is typical. She and her counselor had what she calls "good energy" right from the start, which allowed Shealyn to relax enough to realize just how badly she was feeling. "I realized I'd been holding a lot more in than I thought." Sometimes, this experience can be so scary that the person doesn't return for a second session. They may fear that they'll fall apart, or that if they start crying they'll never stop. It often takes tremendous courage and trust to come back for a second session. A good therapist can help by giving the client time and space to go at their own pace.

Of course, Shealyn did come back, and she and her counselor built a solid relationship that allowed her to do the work she'd set out for herself. "My life has completely changed in the sense of how I handle my emotions. I'm a lot stronger at advocating for myself and at communicating even when I feel uncomfortable," she says, adding that her friends have noticed too. She says that her counselor introduces "solutions, self-soothing skills, and different ways of looking at things. I'm not just venting," she explains, "I'm changing habits."

One of the benefits of good therapy is that it has a ripple effect in the life of the client. Shealyn explains it nicely, saying, "She's not just my therapist, she's my friends' therapist as well, because when I implement the tools I learn in my own life, people gravitate toward that and they learn from it too. My healing goes beyond just me."

"My healing goes beyond just me"

Those who have experienced childhood trauma can struggle to feel their emotions and express them in healthy ways. As kids, they learned that it wasn't safe to communicate what they needed. Consequently, as adults, they may space out or withdraw when things get scary, or they may become extremely anxious, overwhelmed, or overly analytical. Some use substances like alcohol, drugs, food, or other strategies to numb their feelings. While all of these coping strategies make sense given past experience, they can also make it difficult to have meaningful relationships with others, and can lead to anxiety, depression, and/or addiction. Because of the work she's doing in counseling, Shealyn says she's more open now, and that she is learning to "really feel my feelings rather than being so analytical about them."

"This is hands down the best care I've had in my life," she says. "I am really grateful for this program and the big difference it makes in my life. I wish everyone could have this opportunity!"



*The Reel Mind Film Series and Eastman Performing Arts Medicine
present a FREE virtual screening & talkback:*

Orchestrating Change

TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 7 pm

***A film about the only classical music organization in the world
created by and for people living with mental illness***

PANEL includes Conductor Ronald Blaunstein, musicians & filmmakers

PRE-REGISTRATION required; visit: reelmindfilmfest.org



What my tennis coach taught me about change

by Keith Wilson

How can reading an article help you change?

It can't. You can't learn to play tennis by reading, either. You've got to play.

I took tennis lessons once. The coach asked me to show him my serve. I hit a few. I looked over and saw him shake his head. "We have a lot of work to do," he said.

First, he had me put my racquet down and practice tossing the ball. He showed me what I was doing wrong. I was bending my elbow, causing the ball to go behind me where I couldn't hit it well. He showed me how to toss it right. "Keep that elbow straight," he said. He watched me toss the ball until I did it correctly. "There," he said. "Now toss it that way 2,000 times, then it'll be automatic."

My tennis coach understood how to effect change. First, he had to break down the process of serving a tennis ball into parts small enough for me to focus. Just the toss. Then, he knew that to break old bad habits and create new ones, it is necessary to repeat the new habit over and over again. How many times? I don't know if 2,000 times is the precise number necessary. Suffice it to say, it's a lot.



"Change is possible. It just takes persistence"

So, if you take this process and apply it, not to serving a tennis ball, but to the way to handle all the crazy things you do, you can see changing is a lot of work. First, you must know what sanity is, and compare it to what you've been doing. You have to know how to do it right to know what you're doing wrong. Then you have to practice doing it right, over and over again, until it's automatic.

Let's say you're an alcoholic. You've gone to AA and gotten a list of phone numbers of recovering people you can call whenever you feel like drinking. They'll talk you out of it. So, what you've got to do is to call them when you have what passes for a reason to drink. It's a very simple operation, as simple as tossing a tennis ball while keeping your arm straight. If you call them once, you've achieved a small victory. If you call them 2,000 times, you've changed a bad habit into a good one. It may now be automatic.

It would take me less than half an hour to toss a tennis ball correctly 2,000 times, thus creating a good habit quite easily. It's not so easy when you train yourself to call your AA friends. You would have to have 2,000 urges to drink and 2,000 phone calls. That would take years. This is one reason why so many people relapse, so many people say change is impossible, and so many people give up. But, change is possible. It just takes persistence.

By the way, my tennis coach went on to show me other things I could use to improve my game, but what really stuck with me was how to perfect the toss. That was the only thing I learned from those tennis lessons. It turns out, that's all I needed to learn so that I could beat the people I was likely to play. If I ever turn pro, I'll have to see the tennis coach again to learn the right way to actually hit the ball. The same thing goes with learning to stop the crazy things you do. Very small changes, if they're the right changes, can make a huge difference. But you've got to practice.



Keith R Wilson is a mental health counselor who volunteers with Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center, and has a private practice in Rochester, NY.



Spiritus Christi Mental Health Center

121 N. Fitzhugh Street
Rochester, NY 14617
Phone: 585-325-1186
Fax: 585-325-1191

Hours of Operation
Tuesday - Thursday
9 am - 5 pm

Center Staff
Amy Durkee - Director
Mark Potter - Associate Administrator

Volunteer to make a difference!

Nurse Practitioners & Psychiatrists

Prescribe and manage medications for participants
2-4 hours per month

Therapists

Hours negotiable

*Special thanks to our
media partner:*



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for either pledge form, or
contact us directly for one.**

***Your support makes
all the difference!***

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Our Wish list

- **Forever postage stamps**
- **Bus passes**
- **Walmart gift cards**
- **Hand sanitizer**
- **Amazon gift cards**