

### **Special Bulletin (2): Shalem's COVID-19 Response**

Updated: March 17, 2020

Shalem is committed to the health of our participants, clients and staff, regardless of whether our services are delivered in community settings or in psychotherapy offices, including our Counselling Centre in downtown Hamilton. To that end, I want to describe the steps that Shalem has taken in response to the COVID-19 virus pandemic. The situation is very fluid—please check our website and Facebook page regularly for updates.

### **Shalem's Counselling Centre and Hamilton Office**

Because the reduction of social contact is the most effective tool we have, please be advised that **all counselling sessions will now be virtual (by phone or video counselling), effective March 18, 2020**. Effective March 18, our office will be closed to the public until further notice. This is in keeping with what our partner mental health agencies are doing around Ontario.

Please see our website or Facebook page, or call our office if you wish to book a virtual counselling appointment, to ask questions or to speak with our staff.

### **RE-create**

Shalem's RE-create drop-in art studio sessions located on James Street North in Hamilton are cancelled until at least April 6. Please stay tuned. Keep in touch with our Studio Coordinator, **Megarrah Buxton** [megarrahb@shalemnetwork.org], or call or text 289-527-1790 with any questions and for updates.

### **Congregational Assistance Plan (CAP) and Clergy Care**

We are encouraging all of our CAP and Clergy Care psychotherapists to adopt COVID-19 safe health practices, as outlined by Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health. If you need to change a CAP appointment because of concern about the virus, please call either your therapist or our Intake number (905-528-0353; 1-866-347-0041) ahead of time. We are willing to make adjustments, and we strongly encourage phone or video counselling sessions. Whether or not face-to-face sessions will continue remains the decision of each individual CAP and Clergy Care therapist.

### **WrapAround and Restorative Practice**

Any large group gatherings for WrapAround or Restorative Practice are postponed. Small meetings with small numbers of participants may still take place on a case-by-case basis, with an emphasis on caution, and with all of the self-screening and sanitizing protocols outlined by Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health.

### **Let's "Flatten the Curve"!**

We are diligently watching notifications and closely following best practices recommendations from **Health Canada**, the **Ontario Ministry of Health**, the **World Health Organization**, partner agencies with **Family Service Ontario**, the **Canadian Association of Marriage and Family**

**Therapy**, and local health authorities. Our response is being led by our Shalem Pandemic Response Committee, which consists of **myself** (Executive Director, Committee Chair), Danielle VandenAkker (Managing Director), Jennifer Bowen (Clinical Director), Marg Smit-Vandezande (CAP and Clergy Care Director), Betty Brouwer (RE-create Artistic Director), and Stephen Doucet Campbell (psychotherapist).

Like you, at Shalem we are fully committed to doing everything possible to “flatten the curve” and reduce the impact of the COVID-19 virus. That means that we are exercising every possible precaution, despite the inconveniences. Please don’t hesitate to continue to check our website and Facebook page, to call our office, or to email, with any questions or concerns.

Health authorities continue to say that the risk of infection is low. Let’s do our part to keep it that way! We deeply appreciate your patience and cooperation. And please take care of yourselves and be especially kind to one another as together we navigate this health crisis.

*Mark Vander Vennen, MA, M.Ed, R.S.W., is Executive Director of the Shalem Mental Health Network*