The Impact of Trauma & the Importance of Healing

**Trauma [noun]** – Severe emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience.

This Cambridge dictionary definition seems simple enough, but for those who work with vulnerable people, the experience is far more complex.

“Trauma is often very misinterpreted,” says Kerrie Moore, an Integrative Healing Therapist at the University of Calgary. “Very few people understand what trauma is, and that stands as one of the barriers to getting out from trauma.”

Trauma is the result of toxic stress, which is stress that occurs on an ongoing basis, such as physical or emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, experiencing economic hardship and more. Toxic stress is common among people who have little control over their environment, such as children.

When someone experiences trauma, they can stop growing emotionally, and may be at risk of experiencing depression, anger or lack of hope as they grow into adults.

“There are a lot of people who don’t realize they have trauma,” Moore says. “People don’t often see things like sleeplessness, anxiety, addictions or physical illness as the result of trauma. They think, ‘I’ve just had a bad day. It’ll get better.’”

But when things don’t get better, Moore says, it can affect people on a very deep level. Children, especially, are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues as a result of trauma, because their brains are still developing.

“If you are a child living in an environment where there is trauma around you, you’re seeing and hearing it every day,” Moore says. “That can deeply affect whether you are able to trust people, form appropriate attachments or regulate your emotions in a healthy way.”

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**Most Needed In-Kind Donations**

Closer to Home is in need of some new or gently used items to support the children, youth and families we serve.

- Bed frame, mattress and box spring (Single or Double)
- Bedding
- Towels
- Dresser
- Lamp
- Curtains
- Toiletries for boys (i.e. shampoo, body wash, soap)
- Nightstands
- Posters, pictures and other home décor items
- Grocery gift cards
- Family/youth activity passes (i.e. Calgary Zoo, Heritage Park, etc.)

Should you have any of these items, please contact Jessica at (403) 543-0550, Ext. 250 or jmelnychuk@closetohome.com.
Unless there is an intervention, she says, children who have been impacted by trauma may experience behavioural issues as young adults and be unable to control their emotions in an age-appropriate way when they experience stressful situations as adults.

When Ada* came to Closer to Home, she didn’t understand how deeply the trauma from her past and present was affecting her life. She had experienced neglect and abuse as a child, and now she was living with domestic violence. As they witnessed the abuse, her kids were also experiencing trauma, and they were at risk of being removed from the home.

Our first priority was getting Ada and her kids into a safe situation. Once that was achieved, we began working closely with Ada to help her understand how her trauma had impacted her life, and how her children’s trauma played a role in some of their challenging behaviours. She realized that her kids were reacting to triggers associated with the trauma, and we began developing plans and integrating strategies to work through the family’s experiences. With Ada’s hard work and the positive guidance and patience of our staff, she learned about coping strategies, began developing safety plans, improved her parenting skills and learned about other helpful resources in her community.

Today, Ada and her kids are safe, happy, and continuing to work through their experiences to live beyond the trauma.

Moore notes that few therapists are trained in trauma therapy, particularly from a cultural lens. At Closer to Home, we understand that working through trauma means healing in four dimensions: spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally. We are currently working alongside Moore to develop an intercultural model of practice to address the intergenerational trauma experienced by many of our clients. The model is designed to provide healing, and will be implemented later this year within our Ee-Des-Spoom-Ooh-Soop program.

“I think the most important thing for people to know is that trauma is treatable,” says Moore. “Once we understand where the trauma is coming from, we can begin to heal the spirit and emotions, move into our cognitive brains and begin to become independent thinkers.”

Arlene Oostenbrink, Associate Director at Closer to Home, says it’s important for those who are struggling with the impacts of trauma and their mental health to stay connected to caring people.

“Don’t let it isolate you,” she says. “Reach out to those around you, whether it’s a loved one or a professional, and talk to them. And if you notice a loved one struggling, offer your support and let them know they are not alone.”

For more information and to find mental health services near you, contact Health Link at 811.

* Name changed to protect privacy

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**Parenting Tips**

My child is in elementary school and has anxiety about the thought of going back to school – new teacher, new grade, new friends. How can I help ease her into the new school year?

Your daughter’s nervousness is completely understandable. You can reassure her that even if her friends are not in the same class as her this year, she will likely still see them at break time and on the playground. Remind her that she probably already knows many of the kids going into her new class, having seen them on the playground this year.

Often, when children are anxious, it helps take the pressure off if parents plan and practice with them. For example, you could plan for how her day might look and practice how to introduce herself to new friends, ask them to play with her and how to ask her teacher for help if needed. Ask her what she’s worried about and then practice how to deal with that specific situation, setting her up to feel more confident and have a positive transition to her new class.

- Jodie, CTH Family Support Worker

Do you have parenting questions for our staff? Send them to us at jmelnychuk@closetohome.com and you may be featured in our next newsletter!
Healing and Bridging Cultures

Back in June, Closer to Home’s Pekewe House opened its doors to the community to celebrate Indigenous Peoples and culture as part of Aboriginal Awareness Week. As guests feasted on ‘Bannock-Dogs’ (thank you, Tamara!), drummer, Darcy Turning Robe, performed and shared his music, stories and thoughts related to Indigenous Peoples. He told us that for him, music is for healing and bridging cultures.

Darcy’s words are meaningful here at Closer to Home as we launch the renewal of our Ee-des-spoon-ooh-soop program. The program addresses intergenerational trauma and involves Indigenous Peoples in a collective healing journey; gaining knowledge, understanding and resources so that this journey becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of healing, wellness and cultural renewal at an individual, family and community level.

“I’ve seen the yearning that Indigenous communities have to close this chapter and move forward,” says Marsha Hanson, Facilitator of the Ee-des-spoon-ooh-soop program. “As individuals and families heal from intergenerational trauma, they will find forgiveness. That forgiveness is the key to break the cycle and unlock freedom for future generations.”

We are grateful for our donors, funders, volunteers, staff, Elders and the community collaborators for guiding this program and providing the opportunity for families to find stability, wellness and cultural renewal. By working together, we will minimize the negative effects of intergenerational trauma that put Indigenous Peoples at risk of poor mental and physical health, poverty, homelessness, addictions and suicide, and we will support families, bridge cultures and strengthen Canadian identity.

For more information or to register for this program, please contact Marsha Hanson at mhanson@closertohome.
Closer to Home would like to recognize our donors and supporters for the last quarter (April 1 - June 30, 2017)


Join Our Team

TEACHING PARENTS

This is a full-time live-in position for a couple able to provide intensive treatment for six youths in a family home environment. The Teaching Parents’ primary objective is to encourage youth to develop to their maximum potential and enable them to successfully integrate back into their families and communities. As ‘parents’, you would be responsible for these youths as you would your own children with days off and vacation time provided.

BOARD MEMBER (VOLUNTEER)

Closer to Home Community Services is seeking a new Board member, preferably with Human Resources experience and the necessary skills that would provide expert guidance to the organization. Be part of a committed leadership group of board members who strategically guide the organization forward using a policy-based model of governance.

Interested applicants are asked to submit their resume and completed Board Application Form available on our website and send to: volunteer@closetohome.com

For detailed information or to check out more career and volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at www.closertohome.com.

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