

45 Year Celebration

The History of Woolwich Counselling Centre

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN...

In the mid 1970's Reverend Howard Guse, pastor at St. James Lutheran Church, along with several community members, recognized the need for a counselling centre in Elmira; he chaired a steering committee comprised of Brian Kirkham, Joyce Gladwell, Ed Conlon, Reverend Glenn Brubacher, Donna Denham, Stephanie Futher, and Dr. Michael Judd to discuss the possibility of meeting this need. On February 3, 1976 the Woolwich Interfaith Counselling Centre (WICC) opened in St. James Lutheran Church in Elmira with the director of the Kitchener Interfaith Pastoral Counselling Centre (KIPCC), Dr. Claude Guldner, directing and supporting WICC temporarily as a satellite of KIPCC.



From June 1977 until July 1978 Reverend John O'Connor served as a part-time Director of Counselling until he resigned to take a position as Chaplain at McMaster Medical Centre in Hamilton.



Verneida Prentice, Delphine Martin, Gloria Taylor, Adah Miller, John O'Connor

In 1978 Woolwich Interfaith Counselling Centre became independent with its own Board of Directors. The first director, Gloria Taylor, started in September 1978 as a part-time (two days a week) Community Program Co-ordinator with two interns. Gloria introduced an annual educational lecture series, developed a newsletter, spoke at churches and service groups, and improved the counselling room. In January 1984 Gloria left WICC to become a full-time counsellor at KIPCC.

In February 1984 Joan Leeson became the Director, counselling 18 hours a week and continuing the lecture series and community outreach. When the 10th Anniversary of the Centre was celebrated at the 1986 AGM, fifty-six people attended to hear Reverend David Watson, formerly of Trinity United Church, speak. Joan pointed out that in 1976 there were 85 counselling sessions per year and now there were 500. In August 1989 Joan resigned to take a position at the School of Social Work, Wilfred Laurier University.

From September until December 1989 Joyce Gladwell and Sandra Rohr managed the centre. Joyce had begun as an intern in 1985, then became a staff counsellor; in 1990 she became the Director of WICC. Joyce finalized the Employment Assistance Program, offered students a Stay-at-School initiative, continued the newsletter and networked with community agencies. At her farewell in 1995 she acknowledged the many dedicated supporters among them St. James Lutheran Church who had donated free office space, utilities and shared secretarial services for almost twenty years. When the new centre was renovated in 2008, it was named the Joyce Gladwell Counselling Centre to recognize the vision she, along with many others, had for a counselling centre in Elmira.



In 1995 Wendie Kirk became the next Director and continued building the Centre's network of supporters. In June 1996 Wendie left to devote more time to her private practice.

In October 1996 Gerlinde Petz was hired as the Executive Director. During her term the Christmas Grief Services and "Getting to Know you Breakfasts" were started. Gerlinde edited the newly named Newsletter, worked on grant applications and school based contracts and served on the "Fountain of Memories" (dedicated August 19, 2001) committee. At the 30th Anniversary of WCC in 2006, Ron Mathies was the guest speaker and former directors Gloria Taylor, Joan Leeson and Joyce Gladwell were present and recognized. At the 2007 AGM Gerlinde said that WCC had outgrown its space and envisioned a new centre.



After much discussion, research and support the former St. Aidan's Anglican church was purchased on November 30, 2007. Fundraising and renovations began and on November 20, 2008 WCC moved from St. James Lutheran to the newly renovated Counselling Centre at 65 Memorial Avenue. A plaque in the waiting room states: "We express our heartfelt appreciation to the countless donors whose generosity supports our goal of building healthy lives".

Mary Wilhelm became the Director from 2009 until January 2020. Mary revised and updated the by-laws, policies and procedures, wrote grant proposals, prepared a new brochure, oversaw the writing of a new Vision and Missions statement and continued the partnership with community groups and the schools. In January 2020, Mary Wilhelm retired.

Vision:

Individuals, families and communities in Woolwich and Wellesley are emotionally and mentally healthy.

Mission:

Woolwich Counselling is a community-based counselling agency facilitating emotional and mental wellness.

We create awareness, provide education and promote prevention for individuals, families.

In partnership with other community agencies, we act as a catalyst for healthy living.



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WHERE WE ARE TODAY...

Since March 2020 Amanda Wood-Atkinson has served as WCC's Executive Director. Due to Covid 19 the counselling model changed from an in person to a virtual model and Amanda focused on supporting the staff as they worked remotely. Amanda continued to connect with community organizations and services as well as meeting with other Executive Directors of the Counselling Collaborative. Under Amanda's leadership a Health and Safety Policy was created, updates to the Human Resource Policies were completed, and Board engaged in a Strategic Planning exercises for the agency. WCC has laid out ambitious goals to continue to meet the mental health needs of our community and predict an upcoming time of growth.

Throughout the years the Centre has continued to grow.

At the April 28, 2021 AGM we recognized and began our celebration of 45 years as a Counselling Centre in Elmira.



This is a brief summary of a longer version of 'The History of Woolwich Counselling Centre' which is on file at the Centre. Should you wish to have a copy of the longer version, please contact the office.

*Many thanks to **Betty Dyck** (Board Member) for her work in compiling 45 years of rich history into this document for celebrating the Centre's anniversary.*