

The Alberta Counsellor Letter

November 2015



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Editorial

... hope and inspiration ...



President's Message

... change is the constant ...

Editorial



I hope this school year has started off well and that teachers and counsellors alike are excited and inspired to do good work in their individual capacities.

Although there are always many changes and challenges for school-based counsellors, I come away from Guidance Council executive meetings with hope and inspiration to touch a life in a positive way. This September was no exception. It is these moments of inspiration that help me to continue some of the good work that happens in schools. It is also these moments that encourage me to ask others to get involved with the Guidance Council executive. Why not be a catalyst for change in the field of work you are passionate about?

Contact any executive member for information on how to volunteer – contact information is on the back page.

This edition of the *Counsellletter* includes details of our two upcoming regional conferences, both on November 21. This year, these mini conferences are replacing our larger yearly conference, in order to accommodate budget challenges. Each one, however, is designed to meet the needs of council members and nonmembers alike, especially when it comes to participation costs. Make sure to check out the conference closest to you.

The various regions in our province are doing great things in the world of professional helpers, and I always feel privileged to inform our readers about those exciting things. Please feel free to e-mail any events, initiatives or information from within your region so we can include them in future editions of *Counsellletter*. Photos are definitely encouraged!

Cheers –

Krista Bernard

Please check out our website at
www.guidancecouncil.ca
for more information on the advocacy
work of the council.

President's Message



We know that change is the constant reality. Six months ago, under the previous government, we faced dire budget cuts that led the Guidance Council executive to consider how counsellors could afford attendance at a

provincial conference. We decided to try something different, less expensive, yet highly informative and compact. Thus, this year, two concurrent conferences in Edmonton and Calgary will occur on November 21, 2015. Each conference is planned in a similar manner and the conference fees are amazing. More information about the conferences is available on page 9.

Now we have a new government that has supported education by halting the budget cutbacks. Nevertheless, the state of school counselling is in a holding pattern until the new government understands the scope of the education ministry.

The need to advocate for in-school teacher counsellors continues. Investigating the relationship between Alberta Education and Alberta Health is ongoing; we are seeking transparency, because Alberta Health contributes financial support and personnel to school boards, which in some situations is noninclusive of working with in-school teacher counsellors. Work to develop an awareness of the career

counselling component of the school counselling role is beginning.

Finally, do you realize that your comprehensive counselling program plan is your curriculum? Each school board determines how it will use its funding, and that determines how schools will use their allotments. Because there are fewer teacher-counsellors in schools, it is imperative that counsellors understand their curriculum and be ready to articulate how their curriculum is implemented in their schools. Two opportunities to share your curricular plans with your school community are Family Violence Awareness Month, which is the month of November, and Bullying Awareness Week, November 15–21, 2015. Here are two sites to help you plan awareness activities and learn more about family violence and bullying:

- <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/15677.html>
- <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/abuse-bullying/14842.html>

The first juried Guidance Council journal is being prepared and is on track for delivery before 2016. Executive members have been asked to write book reviews for publication in the journal. A new cover for the journal is being decided. Much work goes on behind the scenes to make this change, and the ATA staff have been supportive. Along with this change, we honour the work of Michael Lupart, who has been the journal editor for the past seven years.

Please check for updates on our website, www.guidancecouncil.ca. Don't forget to sign up for the RSS feed on the website, like us on Facebook and create connections with colleagues in your school district and across the province.

Mary Frances Fitzgerald

Regional Reports

Calgary

Greetings and welcome back. The Calgary regional held a session on June 1; Jacqueline Skytt, from the ATA, presented on GSAs and the new handbook that has come fresh off the press to you this September. This presentation was especially good for those of us working in faith-based environments, because it gave some solid guidelines on how to proceed when we are approached to start a GSA in our school. Many participants shared their experiences leading GSAs in their schools, and it was great to hear about the work that is being done to ensure that every student is in a safe and supportive environment.

Looking forward to this fall, we are thrilled to be hosting our first-ever regional conference. Many thanks to Kristy McConnell for providing the venue through her school division and seeking funding for the movie screening, and thanks to Jen McIntee-Leinweber for obtaining some awesome speakers. We are very excited to be meeting up with everyone at this event and hope you check out our website to watch a trailer for the movie.

I had the pleasure of attending the Summer Conference session for conference directors, in Banff, and although I am still awaiting someone to step into the role, I have started planning for conference 2016 and look forward to mentoring someone who would like to do some conference planning. Is this person you?

On a personal note, I have returned to work full time after having been home with my little ones on an extended leave. It has been a busy start for me, but I am happy to be back and in the realities of everyday school counselling. I'm looking forward to remaining active with the Guidance Council executive.

Sara Dean

Red Deer Central

Happy autumn!

The past year has been a time of change for counsellors in Red Deer Public. Our school district made the decision to go to a learning support team approach, which centralized the counsellors and learning assistance teachers (LATs), and added a new role called the community liaison worker (CLW), which replaces what used to be the family school wellness worker. This centralization of student support services resulted in the loss of many teacher-counsellor positions. The district abolished all elementary school counsellors and replaced them with CLWs, but many of the middle school counsellors have retained their positions in at least a part-time capacity. High schools have kept teacher-counsellors as part of the learning support team but most have positions.

Furthermore, the recent change in government resulted in the loss of the resiliency/empathy program in the Red Deer public school district. The new learning support teams (LSTs), which ultimately include all stakeholders interested in the well-being of students, will be different for each institution, so the counsellors of Red Deer Public are in the midst of figuring out their roles. At Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School (LTCHS), the counsellor and the LAT are the centre of the LST, and we will delegate the needs of the student to the other supports in the school and community.

LTCHS is preparing for our first Dyeversity colour relay to celebrate the diversity in our student population. The funds raised will be used to provide both a breakfast club and funding for Right to Play, to supply equipment to students to take part in sporting activities that they could not otherwise afford. Darren Lund,

from the U of C, is coming to discuss the positive aspects of diversity.

Three of my colleagues and I have started a QSA at LTCHS, which is one of many fledgling GSA/QSA groups being initiated in the RDPSD. Our district has invited Kris Wells to speak to the staff, and our QSA group is also hoping to have him come to meet directly with a group of students in our district. We applied for and received a \$600 grant to help initiate and run our QSA.

Hunting Hills High School in Red Deer also has an annual fundraising campaign supporting mental health. They undertake a 24-hour stationary bike-a-thon, which has had great success over the past few years.

Another intervention initiated at LTCHS is the Connection program. This initiative has every Grade 9 student paired with an adult in the building. Each adult will look out for three to four students. The purpose of this mentorship program is to ensure a smooth transition from middle school to high school by helping the Grade 9 students find out what is available for them to get involved in the school community, create an atmosphere of caring and help students take ownership of their learning.

Glendale School (K-8) is looking at using a storytelling café to build empathy with their students. This is their second year of a café-style program. Here is a link to the latest from our Empathy Reboot blog at Glendale Sciences and Technology School: www.empathyreboot.ca/2015/03/learning-stories-at-new-story-cafe.html#pluscomments.

Alyson King

Edmonton

This summer I completed an intensive week-long introduction to art therapy graduate course offered through St Stephen's College in Edmonton. This was a foundational course in art therapy that expanded my knowledge and practice with art therapy-based techniques. In this course we looked at art therapy ethics, art therapy processes and techniques, and theoretical approaches in art therapy. Connections between art therapy, spirituality and theological reflection were explored. Throughout the week I was engaged in studio art making, personal reflection and discussions with my peers and professor. If you are looking for some interesting and intensive professional development, I encourage you to consider enrolling in this course. And you don't have to be an artist to enjoy it!

I had the good fortune to meet with a number of enthusiastic new teachers during the Beginning Teachers Conference that took place at West Edmonton Mall. I fielded a number of questions about our council as well as questions about how to become a school counsellor. It was great hearing from teachers so new to the profession; their stories about surviving the first month of teaching are always interesting. I encouraged the beginning teachers to check out our amazing website, and I encourage you to do so as well. There is something there for teachers of all subject areas and grades.

I am looking forward to engaging in more professional development at the November 21 conference in Edmonton – see you there!

Koreen Bennett

Why Counsellors Need to Be Communication Experts



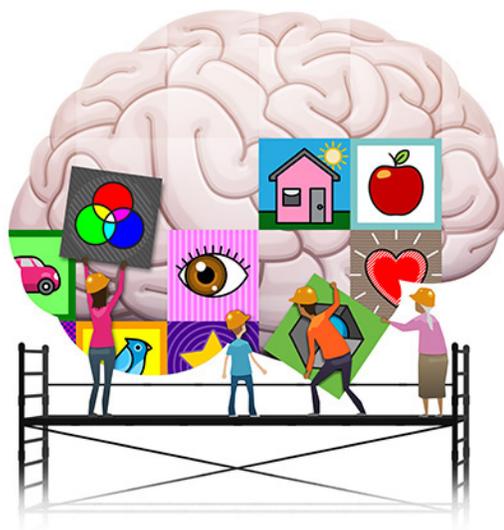
For the past two years, I have had the opportunity to be involved in the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) and have attended their “Accelerating Innovation” symposia. The goal of the symposia was to bring together professionals throughout Alberta to distill a common language around key understandings of research in early brain and biological development and children’s mental health. The key messages include the following:

1. Brain architecture: early experiences build brains.
2. Serve and return: positive experiences build strong brain architecture.
3. Executive function is the “air traffic control centre” of the brain.
4. Stress is a factor that strengthens or weakens brain architecture.

(Palix Foundation 2015)

The use of the metaphor of “serve and return,” for example, is one way that AFWI is attempting to change the cultural narrative around early brain development. The idea that interactions play out sort of like a tennis match, in which the child serves up an interaction, such as a smile, and the parent or teacher returns a positive emotional response, attempts to help

people understand that quality interactions between children and their caregivers build sturdy brain architecture.

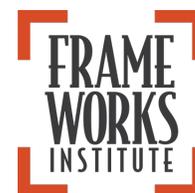


Now, knowing that we are in the business of helping students maintain good mental health, AFWI’s concepts are likely not new to you. However, how many times have you been in a conversation with someone when they have expressed a “cultural understanding” of mental health or development that is difficult to replace? Perhaps you’re suggesting to your principal that the recent hiccup that your student had would be better dealt with in school as opposed to a suspension, and you are met with the response that the student is just going to have to “pull up their bootstraps.” Or maybe you’re chatting with colleagues in a staff room about the younger of two siblings who are experiencing similar classroom behavioural challenges, and you are met with “The apple doesn’t fall from the tree in that family.” These “cultural understandings,” communicated through metaphors, seem to stick. They are difficult to change once they have become ingrained.

AFWI has leveraged its messages using the FrameWorks Institute, a group of linguists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and researchers that support nonprofit organizations in their quest to build public understanding of specific social issues. It was not until after I attended a two-day workshop with the FrameWorks Institute that I truly understood the benefits of being able to effectively frame a message. Let’s take our current understanding of the state of

school counselling in the province. Our Guidance Council executive has heard that many school divisions have cut back on school counselling. The immediate messaging that comes to my mind when I think of the absence of counsellors in schools is one of doom and gloom. For example, I see Suzie, a student with clinical depression. Maybe Suzie used to receive support from her school counsellor once a week, and was involved with a leadership group that was also facilitated by the counsellor; however, perhaps this is no longer available to her. As a result, Suzie begins to withdraw from her friends and no longer attends school regularly. As someone who sees the value of school counsellors, I want to tell these kinds of stories to administrators and other district-level decision makers in order that they understand the necessity of quality mental health programming in schools. I want them to see the necessity of counsellors in schools by telling heartbreaking stories such as these. Although

this is my immediate thought, I now have some foundational understanding of communications. Telling stories similar to Suzie’s, which reflect individual adversity, is an example of telling an episodic story as opposed to a thematic story. You see, what might happen with Suzie’s story is that administrators would revert to the fundamental attribution error: they would likely attribute Suzie’s not attending school, and perhaps even her depression, to a weakness in her personality or individual willpower. Thematic framing, on the other hand, removes the individualism that can occur with episodic framing, and allows people to consider the greater societal or systemic influences that either support or limit Suzie’s access to mental health services. Here is an example that further illustrates episodic versus thematic framing, taken from the FrameWorks Institute’s website (Benjamin 2007):



Episodic Story	Thematic Story
<p>In Chicago, one of the world’s fattest cities, doctors and child welfare officials have handled cases similar to this week’s drama around an English boy so overweight that authorities investigated his mother for possible abuse or neglect. Authorities in England threatened to take custody of 8-year-old Connor McCreddie, who at 218 pounds is three times the size of an average child his age. Connor was allowed to remain with his mother after she entered into a formal agreement with the Local Safeguarding Children Board.</p> <p>“Yes, we have had [similar reports] at some point,” said Kendall Marlowe, deputy director for communications for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. “Situations such as this one are not common, but we’re not saying it never happens. We do receive and investigate allegations of medical neglect, which can include issues of nutrition as well as other issues of providing proper medical care... (“Parental Guidance Suggested? British Boy Three Times Normal Size,” Leslie Baldacci, <i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>, March 2, 2007.)</p>	<p>Spurred by the growing crisis in child obesity, the nation’s schools have made “considerable improvements” in nutrition, fitness and health over the last six years, according to a new government survey that found that more schools require physical education and fewer sell French fries. The survey, which is conducted every six years, shows that more schools than six years ago offer salads and vegetables and that fewer permit bake sales. More states and school districts insist that elementary schools schedule recess and that physical education teachers have at least undergraduate training. More states have enacted policies to prohibit smoking at school and to require courses on pregnancy prevention.</p> <p>Perhaps most striking, 30 per cent of school districts have banned junk food from school vending machines, up from 4 per cent in 2000. Schools offering fried potatoes in their cafeterias declined, to 19 per cent from 40 per cent. (“Schools Found Improving on Nutrition and Fitness,” Kevin Sack, <i>NY Times</i>, October 19, 2007.)</p>

Do you see the difference? It would be easy to attribute Connor's obesity to a parental lack of understanding. However, the second story impresses upon the reader the need for all of us – parents, educators, government and society as a whole – to support the health of our youth.

Now, why does all of this matter to us as counsellors? We are in a time where school counselling advocacy has become an important part of what we do to support each other and our students. School counsellors are unique in that we are able to provide services at the right time and in the right place. Students do not need to wait for a referral to be accepted to see a mental health professional when they can just walk down the hall in their school. A teen who faces adversity at home does not need to obtain a signature from his or her parents in order to check in with the school counsellors. The work that each of you do every day in your schools supports and promotes the development of youth who are strong, productive, contributing members of our society. Next time you are asked what your profession is, consider stating that "I empower youth to become resourceful, valued members of our community; I am a school counsellor." Finally, if you are interested in advocating on behalf of your colleagues and students, consider becoming more involved with the Guidance Council!

References

- Benjamin, D. 2007. "A Frameworks Institute FrameByte. Episodic vs. Thematic Stories." Available at www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/framebytes/framebyte_thematic.pdf (accessed October 2, 2015).
- Palix Foundation. 2015. "Building Better Brains." Available at www.albertafamilywellness.org/building-better-brains (accessed October 2, 2015).

Kristy McConnell

Kristy McConnell, RPsych, is associate editor of the Canadian School Counselling Review and the ATA Guidance Council webmaster.

Interested in Supervising Up-and-Coming Counsellors?

The University of Calgary Is Looking for YOU.

The director of internships and practica for the Counselling Psychology program at the University of Calgary, Michael Lee Zwiers, PhD, RPsych, has expressed interest in working with the Guidance Council of Alberta in order to strengthen partnerships and build capacities within our province.

The University of Calgary's School of Education offers three different degrees in either counselling or counselling psychology: master of counselling (MC), master of science in counselling psychology (MSc) and doctor of philosophy in counselling psychology (PhD). There are an increasing number of U of C students with an interest in working with children and youth, and therefore there is also a need for more potential practicum sites for them.

The University of Calgary already has agreements signed with a number of school districts to allow for this kind of practicum placement. The University is looking for potential practicum supervisors for both the MC and the MSc program (that is, both registered psychologists and registered counsellors). Of course, the majority of students would need to be placed in Calgary or, for those who have access to transportation, very close to Calgary. Supervisors who take on the professional role of site supervisor will receive an honorarium.

If you are a counsellor interested in having your school become a practicum site, please contact Michael Lee Zwiers at mzwiers@ucalgary.ca or 403-220-5004.

Krista Bernard

Conference Information

Message from the President

Professional development is important for all ATA specialist groups. I would like to explain what Conference 2015, "Voices of Counselling: Creating Connections," will look like. On Saturday, November 21, in Edmonton and Calgary, each city will host an incredible day of professional development. Our Edmonton and Calgary schedules, including our lunch break, are the same. After lunch, we will hold a 30-minute provincial annual general meeting through video conference. At this year's meeting, we hope to

- propose that we change our name from Guidance Council of the ATA to School Counsellors of the ATA,
- formally adopt the position of associate journal editor into our constitution and
- fill the following vacant positions (there may be more as well):
 1. associate journal editor,
 2. conference director 2016 and
 3. newsletter editor.

Why did we change the format? If you recall, last spring we were facing dire cutbacks and uncertainty. Counselling positions were being identified as decreasing and no one knew if there would be funding for professional development. The Guidance Council executive made a decision to make sure that Conference 2015 would be affordable and accessible. Therefore, we are hosting a one-day conference in two cities at once, with fantastic professional development and incredibly low registration fees (with lunch included). We are already planning for Conference 2016 to take place in Canmore, Alberta.

We were, and still are, being challenged with the CASL (Canadian anti-spam legislation), which does not allow ATA specialist councils to advertise to its members any information that has a fee attached to it.

Mary Frances Fitzgerald

Edmonton Sessions

We are pleased to announce that ATA Guidance Council, North, will be hosting an extremely inexpensive one-day conference in Edmonton, Alberta at Victoria School of the Arts, 10210 108 Avenue, on November 21, 2015. Features of the conference include the following sessions:

Solution Focus Intensive

All counsellors will gain from this session with Jeff Chang, PhD. Jeff has been practising solution-focused therapy for 30 years. He is an associate professor in the Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology at Athabasca University, where he teaches in the master of counselling program. Jeff is a registered psychologist in Alberta, the Athabasca University representative to the ATA Guidance Council and the editor of the *Canadian School Counselling Review*, Canada's peer-reviewed school counselling journal.

Mindfulness for Educators

Norbert Krumins is chair of the Department of Theological Studies at St Stephen's College in Edmonton. He teaches the University of Alberta credit course "Mindfulness for Teachers." His current doctoral research is in the field of contemplative pedagogy.

Michelle Johnston is a classroom teacher and a master's candidate in educational psychology. She has been practising mindfulness meditation for over a decade and has completed professional training with Jon Kabat Zinn and the Plum Village Community. Michelle has a background in mindfulness-based stress reduction and is a certified yoga instructor. She enjoys sharing her love of contemplative practices with both teachers and students.

Contemplation and Connection for Front-Line Workers: A Watercolour Workshop—No Art Experience Necessary

Step out of day-to-day busyness and into some time for quiet contemplation and renewal. This workshop will invite you to connect with your creative self as you follow the ebb and flow

of the watercolours. You may also gain insights about the possibilities of art making for self-care and creative exploration for yourself.

Mary Norton is a professional art therapist, expressive arts facilitator and certified hakomi therapist. She was drawn to art therapy after several years of work as an adult literacy educator. As an educator, she explored how arts-based approaches support learning for all. Mary is a graduate of St Stephen's College and holds a PhD in education from the University of Alberta. She currently works with community agencies and in private practice.

PRISM: Professionals Respecting Individual Sexual and Gender Minorities

This brand-new Alberta Teachers' Association workshop is intended to stimulate a critical dialogue that examines teacher, student, school and community attitudes, dispositions and beliefs about gender and sexual minority identity and issues in Alberta schools. This workshop is

designed to support the *School Act* amendments requiring schools to be welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments.

- **Incredibly low registration fees!**
- **AMAZING door prizes!**
- **Great food!**

For more information, please contact Mary Frances Fitzgerald at maryfrances.fitzgerald@gmail.com.

For registration, please contact Koreen Bennett at koreen.bennett@epsb.ca.

Calgary

Editor's note: specific information about sessions to be held in Calgary was not available at print deadline.



Please check out our website at
www.guidancecouncil.ca
for more information on professional
development opportunities.

Guidance Council Publications

To support and inform the work of school counsellors, the Guidance Council has two publications: our professional journal, the *Canadian School Counselling Review*, and our newsletter, *The Alberta Counsellor*. Guidance Council members are encouraged to submit articles for these publications. Editorial advice and assistance will be provided.

The Alberta Counsellor

The Alberta Counsellor contains information about council activities, school counselling programs, reports of regional meetings, and announcements of and reports on professional development opportunities.

We want to hear from you!

Tell us about guidance and counselling projects or initiatives at your school. Everyone would like to read about your approaches to improving high school completion, dealing with bullying, improving your students' academic and social/emotional adjustment and achievement – in fact, anything from the wide world of school guidance counselling.

Framework for a Counsellor Article

To help you, here's an outline:

- What is your name, your school's name and your teaching/counselling assignment?
- What is your project/initiative? What are your practices?
- What was the impetus for your project?
- What did you hope to achieve?
- What did you need to do to put the project in place?
- Where did you get the time/funding for your project?
- Who else in the school/community is involved?
- What has been accomplished by your project?
- What is the future of your project?

We are also interested in publishing book, film or resource reviews; sample lessons; or reports on professional development activities you have attended.

The newsletter is published three times per year – winter, spring and fall – so please send your submission soon to Krista Bernard at kbernard@lcsd150.ab.ca. Deadlines for submissions are **September 15, January 10 and May 1**.

Canadian School Counselling Review

The *Canadian School Counselling Review* is a professional journal for guidance counsellors and related professionals. The journal publishes research and practical articles; book reviews; case studies; discussion of trends, issues and policies; and reviews of new programs and materials. The *Canadian School Counselling Review* is peer-reviewed.

Guidelines for Authors

- Manuscripts may be up to 3,000 words long.
- Follow the author-date style for citations.
- Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, in Microsoft Word format.
- For photographs and diagrams, black and white is preferred.
- Obtain permission for the use of photographs and diagrams.
- Identify people in photos.
- Include photo credit.
- Manuscripts and photographs will be returned at the author's request.

For more information, please contact Jeff Chang at jeffc@athabascau.ca or 866-901-7647.

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TBA

* Elections for 2015/16 executive positions will take place on November 21..

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