



Men's program forced to scale back

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After scratching together funding for its men's counselling program, the South Okanagan Victim Assistance Society (SOVAS) could be forced to cut its hours due to financial challenges.

For the past four years, Anne Reinders has been a counsellor for the program, which provides free counselling to men who have suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse, either as children or as adults.

She said that since the inception of the program, SOVAS staff have recognized its need and has been committed to coming up with ways to fund the counselling program.

Initially, they offered eight hours of counselling per week, but for the past two years that was expanded to 12 hours weekly. This was made possible thanks to the assistance of grants from the Gaming Commission, the United Way, the **Health Sciences Association** and its own fundraising initiatives.

Although women's abuse counselling is funded by the Ministry of Justice, men's abuse counselling is not.

Reinders said that at a recent budget-planning meeting, it was forced to scale the program back to eight hours a week again. The result is that during an average month, 12 fewer appointments will be available to men suffering from anxiety, depression, acute crisis and ongoing life trauma as a result of abuse.

"As I reflect on this reality, I am filled with dread and sadness," she said. "What do I tell clients already on a wait-list despite having major crises in their lives? What happens to the young father who is desperately trying to overcome his own history of abuse and neglect so that he can be the best parent possible?"

Reinders said many of these men have nowhere else to turn to heal their wounds.

"Beneath the armour, they have grown in order to survive; they are fragile and lost and looking for someone to understand and help," she said. "The work they do then positively impacts their partners, children and society as a whole."

Currently, the society has 22 files open. In the same year the wait-list has 10 men waiting to receive counselling on average.

"With the reduction in hours, the wait-list will be longer," she said.

Anyone able to help is asked to contact the society at 250-493-0800 and to speak with Christine or Amberlee.

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