

## Family Transition Place adding programs next month

This April, Family Transition Place (FTP) will be offering three programs to assist women and children who have come from or dealt with unhealthy family dynamics or abuse.

Registration for the programs are open, providing women with the opportunity to sign up for the closed groups, which mostly run for 10 weeks.

All of these groups are around, taking the time to build and increase a person's sense of self, so that they feel stronger and they feel more empowered, said Lynette Pole-Langdon, manager of counselling programs at FTP. They feel like they're making choices for their own lives, which they feel will lead them into the happier, more satisfying life that they want to be living.

The programs, Journey to Healing, Stepping Forward and Peaceful Families (also known as the Child Witness group), are designed to address specific needs and issues surrounding women and children who have lived with any form of abuse or have been exposed to unhealthy relationship and family dynamics.

We need to have resources available to people that are free and confidential, Pole-Langdon said. One of the big things these groups do is help to break down stigma and decrease the silence that exists around unhealthy relationships.

Journey to Healing, which begins April 4, is a group for women who have experienced unhealthy or abusive relationship dynamics with a family member, whether it was an intimate partner, parent or other relative. It helps them to focus on ideas and experiences to heal them from the past and educates them on how harmful effects of the abuse do not need to last forever.

It's a group that's part psycho-educational, but it's also therapeutic too, Pole-Langdon explained. People learn a lot of information, but there's also the processing portion where people can talk about how their experiences have impacted them, and learn coping strategies and ways to make changes in their life so they feel like it can be the better kind of life they want to be living.

Beginning April 3, Stepping Forward is designed to provide a blend of both educational and expressive activities throughout the 10-week program, addressing issues linked to trauma and addiction experiences. Along with educating women on the issues, the body's response to traumatic stress and how it can effect mental health, it also introduces women to new ideas about self-care, self-soothing and self-expression.

It looks a little bit deeper into how trauma and unhealthy relationships can impact people, Pole-Langdon said. Specifically, it talks about behaviours that are common when someone has been through trauma in their lives, or unhealthy relationships or abuse, such as turning to substances to cope. It may also impact mental health in terms of feeling anxiety, depression or trauma related symptoms.

The Peaceful Families group, which begins April 1 and runs for 11 weeks, is slightly different, in that the group is for mothers and children between the ages of five and 16 who have experienced unhealthy family dynamics (such as a difficult separation), or abuse in the home. The mothers and children are in separate groups that focus on dealing with the situations.

For mothers, the group looks at how to deal with children who are impacted by these unhealthy relationships and dynamics, how to identify when they are expressing anger or other behavioural issues as a reaction, and how to re-establish healthy relationships in the home.

The mom's group focuses around helping moms gain greater awareness around the impact that unhealthy family dynamics may have on kids in the home, Pole-Langdon explained. All the groups happen at the same time on the same night and we try to make sure that everyone is learning about the same topic, whether it's about anger, or unhealthy family dynamics impact people's emotions.

The children are split into their respective age categories and focus on the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, the changes they may have experienced in their home, as well as safety and building their self-esteem in those situations.

With each group, the message is tailored, Pole-Langdon said. Moms are learning about how to support kids that are showing signs of anger and acting out, and the children's groups are focused around identifying when they are angry and what is making them angry and increasing their awareness around the various topics.

She added that while no one is forced or expected to share their stories and their experiences, the groups provide a safe, comforting environment where they are able to share if they want to. This is part of the reason the groups are closed, as it provides familiarity and a sense of security.

A closed group means that we ask people to register for them ahead of time, as ideally we want to start the group with the same people we are going to finish the group with, she said. We don't want the disruption of seeing faces come and go during the group, we want people to be comfortable and see familiar faces throughout the duration of the program.

As far as the response goes from people who have attended the group, the only complaint they have received is that attendants

wish the groups ran for longer than 10 weeks.

‘That 10 weeks is great, but because they finally found a place where they feel safe, a place where they can talk and a place they make connections with the other people in the group, they want them to continue,’ Pole-Langdon said.

The hope is that these programs will fill up quickly with people who are really in need of the services they provide to the community. One of the biggest deterrents, Pole-Langdon explained, is that life often can get in the way.

‘I think sometimes in our lives, we all get so busy, and it’s hard to make time outside of the everyday things we need to do, like work and taking care of the kids and that kind of thing,’ she said. ‘We really hope people can take the time to participate in these groups.’

Despite the programs being designed solely for women, Pole-Langdon added it’s important that the community know they also offer individual counselling services for men who have experienced sexual abuse. If there is enough of a need in that area, it is foreseeable that they would be able to start running programs geared towards men in the future.

For more information on the programs or to register, contact Family Transition Place directly at 519-941-4357 or 905-584-4357.