



Happy 10th Birthday Gentle Path

Judy Urquhart, MSW, RSW
Executive Director

Dear Friends:

Today is a special day for Gentle Path—it is our 10th Birthday—and what an achievement that is! It is a time for celebration, a time for reflection and a time for gratitude.

The idea for Gentle Path was born in the reception area of a local funeral parlour and nurtured along by friendly gatherings and meals on the lawn of John Rodger's former home not far from the golf course at Hampton. In fact, John Rodger was the one to name the new Agency, Gentle Path, based on the book ***The Gentle Path to the Twelve Steps*** by Patrick Carnes. Thank you for that, John!

Gentle Path began 10 years ago with two counsellors—myself and Joyce Gregg—and eighteen volunteers, whose names are remembered on a plaque that hangs in a place of prominence on the wall at our counselling facility. This motley group of visionaries had a dream, a vision of creating a place where all people were welcome regardless of financial means. We identified our immediate goals and needs, the first of which was to find a home. We held our first group meetings at schools and Church basements until Wayne Erb graciously agreed to allow us to remodel warehouse space at his Rothesay Avenue location. Many thanks, Wayne, for taking a chance on a business that had no credit record and no guaranteed source of income. I have many fond memories of facilitators working together as a team learning lessons in carpentry and construction in what became a labour of love. I also remember many rolls of duct tape wrapped around metal chair legs to prevent tearing the newly laid carpet. What a sight they were! The wooden chairs were a gift from the New Brunswick Community College, thanks to the quick thinking of Howard Brayley.

Our counselling space was first located at a one-bedroom apartment on Foster Thurston Drive, a space generously provided by Fayanne Goodwin, who also played an integral role as a volunteer and staunch supporter of Gentle Path. Of the Foster Thurston location, Joyce Gregg, Laurel Goodwin and I have fond memories of the field mice that played in our stationary and winter ice storms that left the yard like a skating rink. It was quite an experience! Heartfelt thanks go to Fayanne and Laurel Goodwin for their loyalty, love and commitment to the cause. In 1999, Gentle Path Counselling offices moved to the Medical Arts Building at 115 Hazen Street, where we remained until May 2004 when we moved to our present location at 82 Germain Street. Tony Richard, landlord at 115 Hazen Street, was also a friend to Gentle Path during those early years, and I would like to publicly thank him for his kindness and support for the four years we were at the Hazen Street location.

Building a non-profit agency from the ground up with no core funding, no furniture, office supplies or money has been an incredible challenge with lots of lessons too often learned the hard way. Gentle Path could not have survived without the support and encouragement of the John Howard Society, particularly that given by Bill Basterache, our Chairman and the Executive Director of the Saint John Branch of John Howard and the Provincial Society. The local John Howard Society gave gifts of furniture, training, guidance and support as well as a long-term loan that was retired some three years later. We count the John Howard as one of our oldest and dearest friends and thank them for their unwavering support. A special thanks to our first volunteer Board of Directors, particularly Chairman, Art Gregg, Secretary, Terreena Gilliland, and Treasurer, Phyllis O'Donnell. Well done, dear friends! I began my report by describing the early founders of Gentle Path as a naïve group of idealists bound together by a dream of creating an Agency that would welcome everyone regardless of financial means. Right from the beginning, we also determined that this newly formed organization would use the Twelve Steps of Recovery as its spiritual foundation and its guiding principle.

Our group's initial goal of finding our special place was partially realized when we finished renovating and decorating that wonderful group space on Rothesay Avenue, a space we had to relinquish because it was not wheelchair accessible and the Agency could not sustain two rents. At that time, our spirits were low and the dream of having both counselling and group space together under one roof seemed like a distant dream. I think it was also at this time that I faced a harsh and difficult lesson; that is, achieving the goal of establishing a charitable organization that welcomes everyone is one thing but sustainability is quite another. In all our planning and initial meetings, the entire focus was on finding a place and setting up for business. There was no talk about what would be needed to sustain the business and help it grow. There was no discussion about what we would do if the money did not materialize when we most needed it to survive, how long individuals would stay committed to the cause or what we would do when the volunteers decided to get on with their own lives.

There were disappointments when grants did not materialize and when we could not secure core funding. Difficult decisions were made that did not please everyone, and some chose to leave. However, I believe it to be true that some people come into our lives only for a season but their mark on our lives remains forever. Such is the case with those early volunteers most of whom are no longer actively involved at Gentle Path. To you, Gentle Path owes a debt of gratitude for being the gardeners who planted the seeds that helped Gentle Path become what it is today. The Saint John community is richer for your efforts.

In the beginning, I think we all thought that just doing good work would be enough to secure the funding we needed to continue our Mission, a sort of "build it and they will come" philosophy as would the money. The Agency was very successful reaching out to those with limited financial means. Unfortunately, the demand for free service grew much faster than those that were funded, and the Agency was, at one point, at risk of closure. Thanks to strategies implemented by the Board of Directors, Gentle Path was gently steered in a direction that allowed the Agency to continue its Mission but with necessary restrictions that would insure its survival. Our survival has also been assisted with grants from United Way, The Greater Saint John Foundation, Protestant Orphanage, PLURA and MindCare. To all these great organizations, Gentle Path and its consumers extend a very large and loud thank you!

In May 2004, Gentle Path realized its founding vision—that is, we now have counselling and group services under one roof at a wonderful uptown location, which is where we always hoped and dreamed to be. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the loyalty, commitment and caring of our Staff and Volunteers, both past and present. The seeds that were

sown 10 years ago at a West Side funeral parlour blossomed with new growth, thanks to all of you. In 10 years, our business volume has grown several times more than in its first year of operation; presently, we have 18 full and part-time counsellors as well as several volunteers. We have many new business partners and many local businesses have provided financial support and items for our various fundraising ventures. As well, we have mentored many young people in their journey to become social workers, counsellors or office workers.

In 2008 another of our visions was realized when we opened a satellite office in the St. George area that is helping to meet the needs of businesses and individuals in the St. George area. In 2009, our goal is to extend our service into the Hampton-Sussex areas.

All of this was made possible because a group of people had a dream they could make a difference in their community and create a place that welcomed everyone, no matter what their station in life or financial means. Local companies and businesses have come to know that financially supporting Gentle Path through Employee Assistance Programs not only provides their employees with quality professional counselling services but also helps financially support services for others in our community who have limited financial means. As an Agency, we want a community that provides equal access and services for all its members, and we want services and programs that support and encourage peaceful, healthy and loving relationships with self and others.

In closing, there are so many people who have helped Gentle Path change and grow, a few I have mentioned in this report. The simple words “thank you” directed toward all our past and present volunteers, Board, Staff, community and business partners and supporters just seems so lame and woefully inadequate, but please know that your contributions are greatly appreciated and they continue to make a difference in the lives of so many. To any individuals or groups that I may have inadvertently omitted with this blanket “thank you”, please excuse my shortcomings. God Bless you all!

Sincerely;

Judy Urquhart, MSW, RSW
Executive Director

GENTLE PATH COUNSELLING SERVICES, LTD.

Call today for more information or a confidential appointment:
Gentle Path Counselling Services, Ltd.

82 Germain Street
Saint John, NB CANADA
E2L 2E8

Phone: 506-652-7284
Toll Free Number: 1-888-394-4022

E-Mail: path@nbnet.nb.ca web: www.gentlepathsj.com.