

## BC School Counsellor's Association Elementary Counsellor Award Winner 2010

Like many teachers Larry has always been an advocate for disadvantaged and vulnerable students. However, He soon realized that he was not prepared to be a confidant for the complex issues that students were facing. So, he decided to return to school so that he could be trained to focus primarily on the emotional needs of students. In the process he learned to listen for students' strengths, resources and talents to help them embrace all life's experiences, both negative and positive.

Larry enjoys the spirit and resilience of the children. He likes that children are hopeful and that their hopefulness is contagious. He is constantly astonished at their capacity for spontaneous warmth and intimacy. Larry is particularly amazed at their sense of humor even in the face life's challenges. Moreover he is pleasantly surprised at children's adaptability. They experience stress and tension, yet they are seldom immobilized by these feelings, or even knocked off center. It is always refreshing to work with children who are seeking to know themselves and will often risk new behavior and new sets of circumstances in order to grow and discover new truths about themselves. Larry also likes the job of counselling because he is not tied to one classroom. He has the freedom to move from classroom to classroom and school to school. Therefore he has privilege of getting to know a wide variety of school staff students, parents and agencies within his community.

Larry's biggest challenge has been finding ways to reducing the STRESS people are experiencing. We, as school staff, are trying to find the time and energy to satisfy the increasing variety and number of demands of educating our youth. More specifically, school staff has taken on more and more responsibility of providing a moral compass for our society at large. He feels that there is also an expectation to be more than a teacher/counsellor. It seems we are trying to fill the roles of facilitator, youth care worker, legal council, mentor, career advisor, surrogate parent and guru. The solution for Larry has been to enlist his community to invest in the old adage that "it truly takes a community to raise a child. Together with a variety of service agencies and volunteers, Larry has attempted to develop innovative ways to engage our students. This collaborative process has helped him to build trusting relationships and provided quality experiences amongst teachers, students, families and community members which, in turn, has reduced our daily stress.

Larry believes that is important to find Balance, balance and balance. . . Give yourself permission to draw, paint, run, play music, build, grow, create, parent, and smile, be the best person you can be and your nature will follow you to work. He would advise that new counsellors learn to listen from their hearts. When you listen from your heart you are living in your truth of the moment, no hidden agendas

about what ought to be. In the heart things are as they are, this is a place of clarity. Clarity is the foundation on which good intentions are put into practice. He would also advise people entering this field to focus on building relationships inside and outside of schools. Get to know your communities and what they have to offer. Appreciate that you cannot be all things to all children.

He would encourage people to enter the elementary counselling field because it is so hopeful. Families want to make positive changes, children are motivated and if you are willing to work collaboratively with the community, the supports are plentiful and diverse.

A program that Larry implements at his schools is the Steppingstones Program which is an 8-10 week cooperative initiative designed to provide disadvantaged and vulnerable children with an opportunity to establish meaningful peer relationships through communication and problem solving activities. The activities have been tailored to enhance children's awareness and participation in their school environment and the community at large. Lessons are custom fit to the population, timetable and learning objectives of the participants, but often include planning with the students. Students also prepare group meals to celebrate their successes. Integral to the Program is a team approach interweaving members of our community together with school personnel to provide educational opportunities to build intellectual, moral (Michelle Borba) and emotional (EQ) (Daniel Goleman) capacity.

The cornerstone of the program is developing a sense of **trust** and **belonging** amongst classmates and an attachment to the teachers and team leaders. Building relationships is the easiest and most challenging tasks of this program. In keeping with Carl Roger's philosophy of learning we have also leaned heavily on the research of Gordon Neufeld (Attachment theory), Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Broken (Reclaiming youth at risk) and David Mandt (respect and dignity) as well as the ideas/philosophy/research borrowed from outdoor wilderness therapy to create a positive, healthy, learning environment for the students.