ARBOUR COUNSELLING CENTRE

Counselling Donations / Bursaries

A working guide for donating organizations or individuals

Thank you for financially supporting counselling services for people in your care.

Many organizations, especially churches, in the Greater Victoria community maintain a benevolent fund from which they draw to help individuals or families in times of crisis or financial need. A common use of this type of gift is a bursary or donation to help defray the cost of professional counselling. Arbour Counselling Centre is grateful to you who trust us with the people you refer our way, and we thank you for your willingness to help cover some of the cost of these counselling services, when possible.

Bursary effectiveness and sustainability.

We desire to help couples, individuals, and families make the most effective use of a bursary to maximize the benefit of their counselling experience. We also wish for organizations that support our clients to be able to maintain sustainable bursary programs. It comes as no surprise that our clients gain the most help from counselling when they are engaged and invested in the process. This is reflected both in their emotional and mental engagement of the process as well as through some kind of financial investment, based on their ability.

Sometimes the dynamics around disseminating a bursary can be complex. Often, a client is motivated to receive care and merely needs some financial support. Equally often, however, a trusted advisor (such as a pastor) has encouraged someone in his or her community to utilize professional counselling in order to address a difficult issue, and a bursary is offered as a way to remove a hurdle from receiving care. Some situations are less clear from the outset as to how or when they will resolve. Thus, it can be helpful to have some basic guidelines to help manage these more ambiguous situations in a way that is both charitable and respectful of a person's autonomy.

Understanding how Arbour sets the case rate.

With the exception of cases that we bill to third party payers for a benefit, claim, or grant, Arbour Counselling Centre sets the case rate for each and every client by utilizing a sliding scale based on household income. We ask our clients, using an honours system, to identify their case rate on a sliding scale based on their gross combined household income. For the details of our sliding scale, see www.arbourcounselling.ca/case-types-and-fees. Given that the case rate is variable from case to case, when a bursary is offered to a client, various ramifications exist to the way a bursary is established and distributed. For example, if a bursary is offered to "cover the cost of the first three sessions", the bursary may be billed for as low as $80+GST X 3 = $252 or as high as $140+GST X 3 = $441. Given these variables, we have some recommendations for disseminating a bursary in order to both maximize its benefit to the client and to help sustain the bursary programs of donating parties.

Our experience and some recommendations for defining a bursary.

It is difficult to predict how many sessions might be of benefit to a client in any given situation, but in general, we recommend that our clients anticipate somewhere between 6 to 12 sessions. Usually, the first two or three sessions are used to establish rapport, develop an understanding of the context, and assess how to best utilize counselling with an individual, couple, or family. Of course, many exceptions exist, but we find that most people find some clear benefit if they plan for a block of appointments, beginning with a base of 6. If clients will be receiving a bursary, it is always helpful for them to have advance awareness of what the counselling will cost them and for how many sessions they will have assistance. This takes the element of negotiation away from

the client/counsellor relationship and allows them to focus on building the necessary rapport for their work together.

As such, if it is possible, we recommend to donating organizations as a general rule that they define **a finite dollar amount per session for a block of up to 6 sessions**, where the bursary pays for the defined portion and the client pays the balance of the case rate at each session. Depending on the situation, the bursary manager can propose additional support at the completion of those sessions. Offering a way to support the client for up to 6 sessions from the outset in no way obligates him or her to utilize all 6 sessions, but it does reflect a message that encourages people to engage counselling as a process of a series of conversations that moves toward depth rather than manage a crisis with a quick fix.

Setting a base number of sessions allows for a bursary manager to identify in advance how much a bursary will cost his or her organization, and it helps the client establish what his or her cost will be as well. If, for example, an organization can budget for a $300+GST total bursary, a client can be told that a bursary will cover $50+GST per session for up to 6 sessions. The client's case rate will be set based upon the sliding scale rate. Let's say the case rate is set at $80+GST; then the client will pay $30+GST per session for 6 sessions, and we will bill the bursary for $50+GST per session.

We observe various benefits to a bursary that is defined at the outset by a finite dollar amount per session for a given number of sessions:

- Predictability and sustainability
  The donating entity can know that the bursary will not exceed the set amount, irrespective of whether it is utilized in full. Also, if a finite amount per session is provided from the bursary, each new client's contribution may vary based on the client's household income, but the bursary's portion will remain the same.
- Client investment
  The client has some financial investment in each session, which typically increases his or her motivation to fully utilize the time. The bursary manager can gauge with the client whether the financial investment is too difficult and can make some adjustments in advance, as needed.
- The onus for a potential check-in is placed upon the client, respecting his or her confidentiality and autonomy
  If a bursary manager is concerned about cutting off assistance before the full benefit of counselling is reached, clients can be encouraged at the outset to request additional sessions in blocks of 3 or 6. With a finite bursary, the onus is placed on the client to check in with the bursary manager once the bursary is fully used. This offers a context for a supportive conversation – whether to inquire about the client's experience of the counselling, to merely approve additional support, or to request the client's permission to speak to the counsellor. Remember, however, since Arbour Counselling Centre is bound by confidentiality laws, we must receive a signed *release of information* from a client to speak to a third party about anything regarding the counselling. The client's emotional safety is paramount and always takes first priority. We will never pressure a client for permission to speak with a bursary manager.

Thank you, again, for your support!