



Connections
COUNSELING
a trusted referral resource

Annual Report
2017



Message from Laura Wall

It has been a long time since I've sent an update on the Connections Counseling ministry that began three years ago at Aldersgate United Methodist Church. This has been a season of personal change for me, of shifting directions and seeking God's call in new places. The counseling ministry remains a mainstay of my service, and so as we celebrate Easter and a time of rebirth and renewal, I wanted to share our latest news with you, as well as simply restate our mission and ask that you pray for our work.

Please know that we pray for our congregational communities every day. You are in our hearts and in our thoughts—we would not be here without you!

With the Peace of Christ,
Laura

A Client's Journey...

Jackie ... (not her real name) is a 28-year-old college graduate who works as a minimum-wage barista. She recently fled an abusive relationship and is living with friends while she "gets it together." She knows that her background—growing up in a home with an alcoholic father where she regularly witnessed domestic violence—makes it hard for her to maintain supportive relationships. She also experienced sexual violence as a teenager. She used to identify as Christian but says that "my parents failed me, Jesus failed me, I figured out early that I was on my own."

Jackie knew that she needed help but her insurance required a \$45 copay for therapy, and she couldn't afford that. She heard about **Connections Counseling** from a friend and worked up the courage to call. The therapist was reassuring and let Jackie know about the **scholarship fund**. She and the therapist agreed on a fee of \$15 per session.

At her first appointment Jackie felt a bit nervous, but the therapist was warm and empathetic, and Jackie slowly began to open up. Afterwards, Jackie felt "lighter," and she left the session feeling hopeful for the first time in months.

Jackie is smart, funny, courageous—and broken. She is strong enough to seek help, and resilient enough to stick with it. **Counseling is not easy!** It means opening up old wounds—in order to heal them. It means being willing to look at our own participation in our story—in order to change it.

Part of Jackie's story was not understanding how a loving God could let these things happen to her. All Connections Counseling counselors are **spiritually trained**; this is a foundation of our ministry.

So when a client has felt hurt in the context of religion—whether feeling let down by God, or having experienced a more personal betrayal—we can meet them in that place, and offer Grace. This is a deep part of our calling.



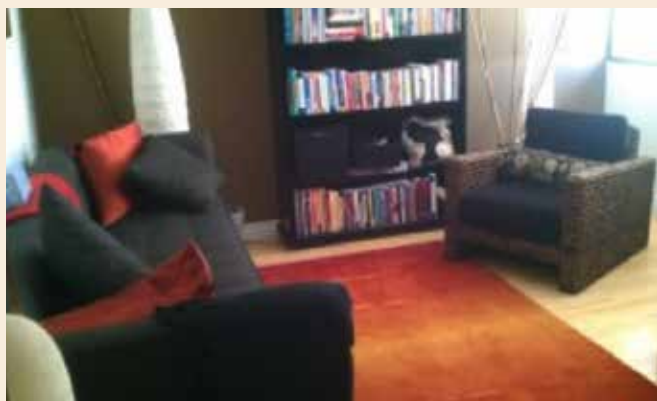
NEWS: Extension Ministry Appointment

Reverend Katie Stickney is a Deacon and Pastoral Counselor who is endorsed for service in an extension setting. “Endorsement is the process established by the church to ensure that people providing ministry in settings (outside the church) are capable and appropriate representatives of the denomination. Endorsement provides an additional means of relationship between those people in extension ministry and the whole ministry of the church.” Katie is in the process of applying to be appointed to Connections Counseling! Hold a prayer for her—and us!



Meeting Space: A Ministry of Welcome

Over the past two years we have had many UMC churches generously offer us the use of a room for meeting with clients. The space where we meet clients is an embodiment of the welcome and grace we intend to offer. We are so grateful to our “home” church, Aldersgate UMC, as well as Redmond UMC, for providing dedicated office space for this purpose. Both churches also offer rooms suitable for family or couples therapy.



Ronald UMC houses our newest dedicated space and we will be furnishing it over the next couple of months to create a space of safety, privacy, and peace. We are excited to be on-site at Ronald after their Grand Opening of the **Ronald Commons!** We hope to partner with Ronald UMC in creating outreach opportunities to serve the community living at the Commons.

Subsidy Fund

Also foundational to our ministry is the ability to offer low-fee counseling for those with limited means. One of our challenges has been in not knowing how many clients, for how many sessions, the fund will sustain. Our counselors worry about offering subsidized counseling to a client and then having the funds run out. This also presents ethical issues, as we are bound by our ethical code not to abandon clients. So this has been the source of some discussion over the past year.

At our February Board Meeting we created a model that we feel is both sustainable and fair. We will offer 12 weeks of subsidized counseling for those in need, with the understanding that after 12 weeks the client will need to re-apply for the subsidized rates. The counselors can decide to renew the low-fee structure for another 12 weeks, or offer it to a different client, if the subsidy fund can support it. This offers a brief, intervention-based model that supports those in need—who are often in crisis—within a structure that encourages growth toward independence, and also provides the ability to reach more clients.

Pastors: *We particularly invite you to refer low-fee clients to us. This is one way we can both honor those who donate to the fund, and continue to serve our congregational communities.*



Support Our Ministry

Our counselors are currently seeing more clients at subsidized rates than what the subsidy fund can support. These subsidy clients are mostly women, many with a background of sexual abuse or domestic violence. By coming in to seek counseling, they are taking a significant step toward their own growth and healing. We have several more clients who would like to apply for this funding. **Your donations make a difference!**

Choose from several ways to donate:

1. **Click the Donate button** from our website at <http://www.connectionsounselingwa.org/>.
2. **Give through your workplace:** We are a registered charity with Benevity, an organization that manages corporate giving and matching funds for clients such as Microsoft. If your company has a corporate giving campaign, you can select Connections Counseling as your designated charity. Corporate matching funds double your giving!
3. **Donate through PayPal:** You can donate directly to Connections Counseling from your PayPal account. When sending money, simply enter Therapy@ConnectionsCounseling.org as your recipient.
4. **Mail in a donation** to Connections Counseling at Aldersgate UMC—or, if you are at the church, just drop it in the mail slot for our Treasurer, Marie Veith!
5. **Shop on AmazonSmile** and select **Connections Counseling** as your charity.



Other ways to help!

- Consider having your church collect a dedicated offering in exchange for a sermon, workshop or other presentation by one of our counselors. This may be particularly relevant for your congregation as **Mental Health Awareness Month approaches in May!**
- **Spread the Word!** Tell people about Connections Counseling. Spirit may be working through you to Connect someone with the resources they need for healing and growth
- **Become a Board Member!** We welcome new voices on our Board and are currently seeking to engage with passionate visionaries able to guide the future growth and development of Connections Counseling. If you feel called to this, please contact Laura Wall.

Looking Forward ... Reflecting on Where We've Been

As we continue to fulfill our mission to offer accessible, affordable, spiritually-grounded counseling to our faith communities and the people they love, we can reflect in gratitude on our growth over the past three years:

- Thanks to regular donations, we now have a healthy subsidy fund of over **\$6,000!** Our current level of donations can support about **6 subsidy clients per month** (depending on what the client can afford to pay)!
- We plan to bring on a new counselor this year—you will hear more about that in a special newsletter!
- We have hopes of an official appointment by the Conference to our extension ministry!

It is with a sense of humility in being able to serve the risen Christ through our work that we thank you for your love and prayers. Please pray that Holy Spirit continues to connect us with those who can best be served by our gifts.

In the Spirit of Peace,

**The Counselors and Board of
Connections Counseling**