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Cornerstone Counseling Center of Chicago

Fall 2010

Building Foundations



Our Vision

to reach our diverse community with the highest quality counseling services

Our Values

- a commitment to social justice
- multicultural competence
- the integration of faith and practice

Director's Dialogue

Susy Francis-Thornton, PsyD, MBA



This September marked Cornerstone Counseling Center of Chicago's (CCCOC's) 39th birthday! What a rich, exciting, and blessed history we've had. To

take advantage of this milestone, it is important to remember where we came from; honor the people who brought us to where we are; and re-commit ourselves to the consistent vision of service to the underserved. Thousands of people have come through our doors since we opened as the Near North Side Counseling Center in 1971. Clients, counselors, students, and donors have experienced the impact that compassion, service, and love have had on our community. We will be celebrating that impact this year in our newsletters, at our Open House, and during our annual Benefit Dinner this spring.

Cornerstone is marked by an incredible consistency in our mission through the years. Through uncertainty and relying on faith, Cornerstone has always undertaken the task to provide high quality care to those who didn't have insurance or the ability to pay out of

pocket. This has required acts of selflessness, commitment, and generosity from people who believe in our healing work. Their investment has paid off. Cornerstone remains a healing force in the community and continues to grow as an organization. We are a place for people to grapple with psychological and spiritual issues together. We have developed the competency to work with a diverse clientele. And we now have the capability to offer a unique environment of Christian faith and professional excellence to the next generation of therapists through our training program.

Even in this time of economic hardship, we are healing clients like Todd*. Todd had been a client of the Center working on anxiety and stress management as he had had several panic attacks at his job. Although Todd's work performance was at its peak six months into therapy, his company merged and he was "downsized" and found himself unemployed and without insurance. Todd's anxiety symptoms increased, yet he could no longer afford therapy.

** Client name and personal information has been changed to preserve confidentiality*

A generous donor provided the opportunity for Todd to continue to work with his therapist. Nine months later, Todd is gainfully employed, and his anxiety is, as he puts it, is "very manageable", He commented, "I can enjoy my work!"

CCCOC continues to be an organization dedicated to social justice through providing individual, group, family, and couples counseling along with educational seminars and workshops for children, adolescents, and adults in our community both on site and in many of the neediest neighborhoods in the city.

Please join us on October 5th, 7th and 8th for our open houses and to help us celebrate! Please send in your story, volunteer with us, utilize our services, and join the Celebration! It will be a great opportunity to meet our new students, as well as our new Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Mr. Brendan Dry.

Dr. Francis-Thornton is in her sixth year as Executive Director at CCCOC. She offers bilingual (Spanish) services and has a passion for empowering others to be effective leaders, servants, and citizens.



Our Partners

Cornerstone will provide Title I Academic Counseling services for eight Chicago Public Schools this semester. We are very excited to begin new partnerships with Tabernacle Christian Academy in Chicago's Morgan Park neighborhood and St. Paul Lutheran School in Norwood Park.



We continue our relationship with organizations like By the Hand Club for Kids and Family Bridges. Serving alongside our partner organizations allows Cornerstone to more effectively accomplish our mission of serving *all* who need hope and healing.



Dara Johnson
Senior Director of Operations
By The Hand Club for Kids

Through Cornerstone, I have seen lives changed. One child in particular who struggled with anger is now always smiling. The joy on that child's face is a true testimony of Cornerstone's work.



Laura Truax
Senior Pastor
La Salle Street Church

There are many pastoral care situations where you quickly realize this person needs a brother or sister who can offer them some professional care--quickly. It's such a grace to know that I can refer folks to CCCOC with confidence. The staff is distinctly competent with individuals whose practices range from eating disorders to grief counseling to identity issues. I'm very grateful to have them so close.



Jim Wilkes
Principal
Cornerstone Academy

We had a couple here at the Cornerstone Academy who we sent across the hall for couples counseling. Cornerstone Counseling met with this couple every week for years. Through college, through marriage, through their first child: this couple relied on Cornerstone Counseling and I know that those counselors had a huge impact on their relationship.

Healing the wounds of loss

Jennifer Simmons, Practicum Student



In my first month at Cornerstone, I have already experienced the life-changing impact we have on our community. In response to the death of a teacher in the Children's Learning Center, a team of Cornerstone counselors laid a path to healing for her co-workers. It was a terrible and sudden tragedy, and those who work closely with her were the most affected.

We offered members of the staff the chance to process this terrible incident in crisis counseling groups. Four counselors were immediately on hand to talk, support, and listen to those affected. As the teachers began to share their grief with us, I saw just how important our services truly are. We not only welcome clients who are seeking help, but also reach out hurting people in their time of greatest need. Life is unpredictable, so our willingness to support and to serve must be spontaneous and compassionate.

When coping with the grief that follows a tragedy in your life, make sure you are taking care of yourself by following these five simple rules:

Understanding the five stages of grief

Denial Our loss is confusing and painful and we cannot accept that our loved one is really gone.

Anger We look for people or circumstances to indict for the way we feel. Often, we resort to blaming ourselves.

Bargaining We attempt to sacrifice something in our lives in exchange for relief from our pain or life returning to the way it was.

Depression We become numb and crippled to the point of immobility. We feel hopeless, weak, tired, and alone.

Acceptance We take the first step down the path to healing. Though our pain remains, we accept our loss and re-connect with loved ones. We feel hopeful for the future.

1. Maintain a normal routine. This allows you to ease your way back into the pattern of your life.
2. Do not use drugs or alcohol in excess. Grieving is a natural process and you cannot escape confronting your pain.
3. Exercise consistently. Physical activity provides a healthy distraction for your mind, increases endorphins, and will help you return to a normal sleep pattern.
4. Eat, even if you do not feel hungry.
5. Find a supportive ear. Talking about your pain is an important part of coming to





Paul Harris, PsyD



I remember one particularly painful band practice, when our guitar player suggested I begin drumming along with a metronome. My tempo was off, he asserted.

Confident that my rhythm was not the problem, I nevertheless decided to give it a try. It was a disaster: the metronome was erratic and couldn't keep the beat. I brought the metronome to our next practice intent on proving how ineffective the device was. Much to my surprise, as I drummed in-time to the metronome, my band mates grew more and more delighted. Our songs sounded better than ever. As you have no doubt guessed, the metronome was keeping perfect time, and when I aligned myself to its tempo, it changed me, my playing, and our music for the better.

I think of God's reality of love and his desire for redemption as the ultimate metronome. In his book *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell explains how important it is that we adapt ourselves to that reality: When we do, we are empowered to be effective expressions of that love

to others. When I came to Cornerstone in 1998, the small but devoted staff was on its last legs. They had come through trying times and, as I would soon discover, there were more trials ahead. But I believe that the work we do at Cornerstone is faithful to God's reality, and I have witnessed how God has worked through our staff, even in difficulty, to impact our Christian faith community at-large and a multitude of clients. Through our work, I have been shaped by the love and faithfulness of the Almighty.

I have seen God begin to overcome a history of distrust and suspicion between those in the mental health community and the church. Partnering with churches in our area and seeking to build relationships with those in Christian leadership has built an increasing level of trust. The clinic is more and more seen as a place that values the transformative truth of the gospel and of quality therapeutic intervention. Many clergy members have contributed mightily to the Center by providing overt support, thoughtful feedback, and referrals, sometimes at risk of displeasing some in their respective congregations.

I have witnessed true healing power in our center. The amount of time we spend with clients is relatively small: only fifty minutes per session. And yet, the remarkable life transformations our

clients experience testifies to a supernatural effectiveness. Our counselors are willing to love, to show compassion, and to listen, and the source of their energy is God's movement. I can recall even specific instances when I so deeply understood my client that I knew the Holy Spirit was at work in our session. The impact of these small, but sacred, moments of healing is why the Center exists. Even as God heals one life, he uses that person as an agent of healing among family, friends, and the larger community.

When I was director I often found myself at the end of my strength, overwhelmed by circumstance. In my weakness, I was witness to the work of the Almighty who quietly accomplished His purposes here with complete precision. From the brink of extinction, God raised Cornerstone to the place where it is today. Being a part of that transformation continually renews my faith that we are aligned with the Almighty's revolutionary reality. And for that I am humbled and very grateful.

Paul Harris was the Executive Director of CCCOC for just under five years. Paul remains involved at Cornerstone, though he has since opened his own practice in Chicago. He currently serves as a clinical supervisor for students in our training program.

OurCalendar

Open House 2010

Oct. 5	10:30-1:30, 3:00-7:00
Oct. 7	7:30-10:30, 1:00-3:30
Oct. 8	1:30-4:00

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MARRIAGE LINKS

Sept 24-25 9:00am-4:00pm, Sat 9:00am-4:00pm
 1111 N Wells Street, Chicago, IL

A team of our counselors will be leading a free marriage seminar this weekend at our building. The seminar will focus on the dynamic links of knowledge, trust, reliance, commitment, and touch.

Come celebrate forty years of impact in our community at our 2010 Open House. There will be opportunity to meet our current staff, network with professionals in your area of business, and experience a play therapy exercise. We look forward to seeing you there!

Be aware of two new relationship seminars made possible through our Family Bridges partnership coming up soon!

P.I.C.K a Partner	Pre-Marital Seminar
An eight week group for singles on Wednesday nights beginning Oct. 20th.	A weekend long intensive for engaged or seriously committed couples. Date TBD.

“I’ll Do it.”



Brendan Dry

Jennifer Merck has a character flaw. Well maybe.

“I’m just not a quitter,” she says. “I’ve never actually left a job. I guess it says something about me.”

So my interview with Jennifer Merck begins: fourteen years of dedicated service to CCCOC attributed with a laugh to character defect. When Jennifer came to the board fourteen years ago, there was no APA certified training program. The executive director worked part-time. Board members did not have an active role in governing the center.

“Our first benefit dinner,” she remembers, “was held in January. Our first speaker was Becky Pippert and I remember being on the phone with this woman in December trying to confirm that we were actually going to have a speaker! Now, we start planning a year in advance for hundreds of guests.”

It is completely accurate to say that Cornerstone grew up under Jennifer’s watch. And perhaps just as amazing as the development of our center is Jennifer’s own coming-of-age story as a young leader with Cornerstone. She was passionate about hands-on service, a social worker in the city when she came to Cornerstone, and had virtually no administrative experience. Still relatively new to the board, Jennifer

Celebrating Jennifer Merck

found herself on the brink of massive plunge of faith: stepping into the role of board president.

“When the previous president unexpectedly resigned, the rest of us looked at each other and the question in the room was, ‘Which one of us will it be?’ To be honest, my first thought was no way, I don’t have time for this, much less the qualifications.’ I had a toddler at home, was working part-time. So I waited for somebody else to speak up. No one did. So I started thinking, ‘Life is flexible and I have a heart for service.’ So I said I’ll do it.”

I almost lost the gravity of her decision in her nonchalance. A life in the suburbs, family, career opportunities could have pulled Jennifer away from CCCOC. This was a sign of maturity, of true service, of unwavering commitment. She does not dwell on the drama, as many people would, and now I understand that for Jennifer, there really wasn’t an alternative. The wind was at her back, she had one foot over the edge, and the only thing left to do was jump. Then learn to swim.

“I became President because the organization needed me. But I stayed because I was committed to our people. Early on, there were certainly some hard times. Paul (Harris) had to deal with a very difficult staff issue that really affected

the center. On top of that, he was seeing fifteen clients a week. He really turned to the board for support.”

“Paul (Harris) and Susy (Francis-Thornton) were incredibly instrumental to developing the vision and the character of the center. It was exciting to be around them. We began really reaching out to the Evangelical world under Paul. Susy developed our vision tremendously.”

I feel refreshed listening to Jennifer’s humility—I see the encourager, the supporter, and the friend that she was to staff on display. Relationship is paramount to Jennifer, which is completely fitting for an organization whose service necessitates relationship building.

“I always think of what we do here as just people helping people. That impulse is at the heart of Christian faith. That is how healing happens.” I shake my head when the interview is over. In the midst of our conversation, Jennifer casually pointed out that the chance to serve God is a no-brainer. Life is flexible. We just need to say “I’ll do it.” Thank you Jennifer for your commitment. Glory be to God for your service.

Jennifer Merck served on the Board of Directors for twelve years; eight of which were as President. She lives in Wheaton and remains actively involved in promoting and supporting CCCOC.



Our Board

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