



North Van church pilots program to provide free counselling



[Jane Seyd](#)

Sep 3, 2023 12:00 PM



Mount Seymour United Church Rev. Nancy Talbot says there's an unmet need for counselling services on the North Shore. | Paul McGrath / North Shore News

[Listen to this article](#)

00:02:13

A North Vancouver church is starting an innovative pilot program that will pay for free counselling sessions for people who can't afford the service.

Recommended reads for you:

- [New outreach centre for youth aims to save lives in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside](#)
- [New outreach centre for youth aims to save lives in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside](#)

Reverend Nancy Talbot of the Mount Seymour United Church said the idea grew out of a mental health ministry at the church that recognized counselling as an important need that often isn't being met.

"We have a sense that often people can't afford to access the kinds of services that might be helpful for them," she said. "People are struggling with their mental health, and they have fewer and fewer funds."

If you don't have the ability to pay for counselling, and don't have access to employee assistance programs, getting help can be harder, she said – especially if people either don't qualify for public assistance or face long waits to see a publicly-funded counsellor.

The pilot program has been made possible by a bequest received by the church a few years ago, said Talbot. The church has earmarked \$35,000 towards the program and will "do as much as we can for as many people as we can" with that money, before assessing how it went.

You don't have to be a church member to apply for help and there's no expectation that anyone will become a church goer, Talbot adds. She said there's also no particular profile of who the counselling sessions are targeting, but preference will go to North Shore residents with limited funds who have urgent mental health needs.

Those whose applications are accepted will get a voucher for up to eight free counselling sessions, with either the counsellor of their choice or a counsellor from a list approved by the church. It's possible those approved can apply for further support if needed.

Along with the free counselling program, the church is also planning to offer a lecture series on mental health issues, starting with a talk on Oct. 17 by counsellor Mary Sparks on mental health resources for children and youth on the North Shore. Another lecture on Nov. 7 by registered psychologist Rami Nader will focus on helping a loved one with mental health challenges.

To find out more about [the free counselling program or apply for help](#), contact the Mount Seymour United Church at MtSeymourUnited.com

Leave a comment

Have a story idea?

Letter to the editor

Report a mistake