

## Career Profile

### William Corrigan, Family Therapist

[Watch William talk about his career as a Family Therapist](#)



For William Corrigan, a Master of Theology Graduate from Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, it was an elective course in Family Therapy during his undergraduate degree in Psychology that derailed his interest in becoming a Clinical Psychologist, and instead, ignited a passion to pursue further knowledge and training in the field of Family Therapy. For the past 16 years, William has provided individual, family and group counselling in a variety of settings, most recently serving as a therapist in an eating disorders program with Homewood Health Centre, as well as operating a private clinical practice, Anam Cara Counselling Centre. In addition, William diversifies his work week by teaching family therapy and human development courses at the University of Guelph.

Becoming a therapist is not a singular prescribed education path, instead, people enter the profession through a variety of educational paths ranging from Master's work in psychology, education or family therapy to name a few. William completed Master's work in theology, where he spent half his time taking pastoral counselling and family therapy courses. He then went on to complete the accreditation process with the American Association of Marriage & Family Therapists, where he now also possesses the credentials to act as a supervisor to therapists also training to become certified.

A typical day for William working in the eating disorder program involves attending interdisciplinary team meetings to discuss patient care and progress, planning interventions for patients, researching and preparing to deliver group and family therapy sessions, as well as eating meals with the patients to coach them through their experience around food. A typical day in private practice would involve 5 hours of counselling per day, but the majority of that work takes place in the evening given client work schedules. William receives clients through Employee Assistance programs, which typically involves 4-8 sessions with the same client, whereas other clients may participate in counselling for longer periods of time.

It is no surprise to hear that work as a therapist can be challenging. William indicated that most counselling programs do not equip you to deal with the business aspect of owning your own practice. You really need to learn skills in marketing, advertising and basic finance to name a few. What counselling programs do equip you for is how to manage what is known as 'compassion fatigue' or 'vicarious trauma'. William found in the beginning of his career, he was impacted much more by listening to difficult life stories, however, over time he has learned how to effectively avoid burnout, and how to maintain positive, healthy boundaries. "One thing about private practice is I've recognized it can be lonely...at the hospital I always have someone I can go to and talk to about what I'm doing. In private practice I have to make time for that. I have to keep contacts with people I went through school with, friends, colleagues that I've met...to talk about cases that are difficult." William indicates it is precisely the emotionally-charged nature of this work that is why adequate supervision as a therapist is so critical.

"Knowing that I'm helping people – that's a big motivator" says William. "Working in a structured program (like a hospital eating disorders program) affords great opportunities to witness tangible and measurable change in someone's eating behaviour". William also finds that being able to participate in teaching is a great complement to his work week, and knowing that he is helping to grow the profession of family therapy is a significant reward.

William identified the following skills and personal qualities as essential to engage in therapeutic work effectively:

- Have an outgoing personality and be very interested in people's lives
- Be an effective listener – “you need to know how something a client said a half hour ago may fit with what they are saying in the present”
- Have a good sense of your own strengths and weaknesses – keen self awareness.
- Ability to recognize your limits - knowing when to say “no” and recognize what is beyond the boundaries of your competency. Being assertive with clients is important to facilitate change.
- Be remarkably patient – “counselling is something that cannot be rushed”. People do not simply change overnight.
- Be flexible – “you may go into a therapy session with an agenda or a belief that you have figured out a client's issue, but then it becomes apparent that you need to come up with new theories and be willing to let the client take the lead.”

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