



Photo taken by A. Gardner, June 21, 2013.

“My BVC is a community where people take care of each other”

Calgary’s downtown core is slowly returning to a new “normal.” Here and there, puddles of silty water still remain, sludge-filled reminders of the flood that surged through the city only weeks ago. The Central Library remains closed, the unmistakable smell of mud and wet books wafting from within.

One block away at Bow Valley College, campus life is resuming in a tentative, shell-shocked way. The downtown college was evacuated and all four buildings closed from June 21 to July 4. Our rural satellite locations were also hard hit. Outside of the city, the High River campus hopes to reopen soon.

On Thursday, July 4, Bow Valley College president Sharon Carry welcomed staff back to the downtown campus and announced that learners would return to classes on Monday, July 8. She began by thanking Bow Valley College staff who have been working 24/7 to get the college up and running again- the IT department, maintenance, security, management and faculty.

"This has been an unprecedented time for the College and our great City. The floods have certainly tested our limits, but have also revealed a resourcefulness, humanity, and commitment to service that really exemplify Bow Valley College. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to our learners, faculty, and staff who

have been incredibly supportive and patient while we have worked to get the College back on track." (Press Release, Bow Valley College, July 5, 2013)

The College community came together in countless ways to help each other during the crisis. Not only did people work endlessly on fixing our campus, but we also extended our support in each other's homes and communities by providing food and shelter, wading in on the clean-up, caring for pets and even washing much needed laundry.

It's been almost a month since the most severe flood in over one hundred years swept through Calgary and large parts of southern Alberta. Whole towns and neighborhoods have been busy cleaning up, negotiating with insurance agents, and starting the hard work of rebuilding.

But it's not over yet.

The long process of healing has just begun. A natural disaster such as a flood has a huge impact on the emotional and mental health of individuals that were directly and indirectly affected. During the first week that students were back in classes, Liz O'Shea, Coordinator, Counselling and Specialized Support, held several information sessions on the emotional and social impact of a natural disaster.

Faculty and learners alike may be experiencing stress. Right now, it might be normal to have heightened feelings of anxiety. When it rains, we might worry about flooding. Irritability, confusion, indecisiveness, shortened attention span and trouble concentrating- all are common following a disaster. These symptoms gradually decrease over time and most people recover.

However, O'Shea noted that some people may experience more severe reactions such as nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing, panic attacks, rage and intense agitation. These may be warning signs that a person needs professional help.

What can you do?

During the information session with learners, students suggested several ways of coping:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat nutritious meals
- Get enough sleep
- Do yoga and meditation
- Spend time in nature
- Talk to friends and loved ones
- Look out for one another

O'Shea also recommended avoiding alcohol and drugs (they increase depression), spending time with positive people and reaching out to others for support. It is this final sentiment that Liz O'Shea spoke about when she said "My BVC is a community where people take care of each other."

During the past few weeks, we've experienced many things: the sheer power of nature; coping in the face of hardship; and the enormous generosity of strangers. The flood brought informal, unplanned learning into our lives requiring patience, care and working alongside one another. These will help us as we move carefully into the formal learning stream once again.

If you, or someone you know is experiencing severe stress reactions in the aftermath of the flood, there is help available:

Students - Bow Valley College Learner Success Services: Room N231, Phone 403-410-1440, css@bowvalleycollege.ca

Staff – Employee Assistance Program, Forbes Psychological Services: (24/7) 1-800-420-2204

Distress Centre 24 hour Crisis Line: 403-266-4357

Online Resources

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/Advisories/ne-pha-ahs-support.pdf>

<http://bowvalleycollege.ca/campus-services/learner-success-services/community-resources.html>

www.learningandviolence.net/takecare.htm

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/handouts-pdf/Reactions.pdf>