

Narrative Walks Manitoba: therapeutic group walks in a forest

The first walk of the season is planned for Saturday, June 6th, 2020 at Bird's Hill Park!

More dates will be announced as they are planned.

Groups are 6-12 people. Registration is first come, first served!

Do you have a problem or concern that needs to be taken for a walk?

Do you have a problem or concern in your life keeping you up at night and/or infiltrating your moments of peace?

Do you enjoy quiet time to reflect in nature?

Are you able to walk on a trail in the forest – with stops and rest breaks – for a day on your own?

Are you willing to engage in a process of reflection?

Then taking a Narrative Walk could be for you.

What does a Narrative Walk look like?

Narrative Walks are therapeutic group walks that take place in a forest. We will journey through and with nature, on foot, and each with a problem unique to us. There are narrative therapy questions posed along the trail that will invite us to consider different perspectives of a problem story in our lives - and the questions also ask us to reflect on preferred stories and paths we want to take up in life. Walking and journeying are powerful metaphors that we connect with and experience in this group, and we invite people to engage with the questions in their own way. The facilitators support the group with guidance and encouragement through the walk, and they also take up a 'de-centered' role which allows for folks to lead their own journeys. Brief group circles will be also held at certain rest stops where people will be invited to share short parts of stories with others, as they choose to. The circles will be a place where people will be invited to listen to, and witness, the stories and the preferred paths of others.

Attending a Narrative Walk involves meeting at a specific trailhead into a forested area at Bird's Hill Park at 9am. After brief introductions, hearing about the land and our guiding metaphors, we will begin our journey together. Spending time with the questions that are posed at certain stops along the way simply involve reflecting while walking for some sections of the walk, writing down some the reflections and engaging in a couple of writing exercises at rest stops, and joining together in the group circles. Other small activities include for example picking up an object that represents our problem and carrying it with us for a time. We will end with an appreciation ceremony. The walk will end up back where it started at mid to late afternoon (about 5pm). Food will be provided to nourish us along the way.

What kinds of problems can come for a walk?

The problem could be basically anything. It could be a recent problem or concern, or one that a person has a history with. It could be related to stress, illness, change, grief, and/or identity. It could be related to anxiety, depression, or trauma. It could be related to creativity, inspiration, or spirituality. It could be connected to a family or relationship concern.

Also, a person does not need to have the name of a problem entirely pinned down before joining in a walk, although it is okay too, if someone has a name of a problem that is clear to them. We ask that each person bring one problem, as compared to many at once, but it is okay to bring a problem that feels like an unnamed blob, for example. There is room during the walk to sort out our own descriptions of things as we go along – and this is part of the intention of the walk. The important part is that the language we use is our own and that it is used on our own terms.

Who can attend the walk?

- Anyone who is willing to engage in a process of reflecting on questions.
- Anyone who can walk through a 14km forested trail for a morning and afternoon. The walk is paced, includes stops and food breaks, and is intended to be accessible for a range of abilities and bodies – but it does require the physical ability to take a long walk.
- Anyone who is willing to engage in a small amount of group reflection, as decided by each person. We ask that people be willing to be genuinely supportive of others - if even by your presence, without many words.
- Anyone who enjoys quiet reflective time in nature.
- The group on June 6th, 2020, is open to people who are 18 years old and up to all genders and backgrounds. Youth focused Narrative Walks are being planned for the future. We have found, over and over, that groups that are diverse in the ages, genders, and backgrounds of the people attending, allow for a rich experience for all.

About Your Guides:

Lise Brown is an outdoor educator, guide, and therapist, and is a facilitator and owner of Momenta Inc. Since 2002, she has facilitated groups in urban and wilderness environments all over Manitoba that focus on meaningful activities, physical and emotional safety, successful participation, and fun.

Candace Neufeld is a narrative therapist in independent practice who is committed to social justice in her work. Since 2003, she has been developing and hosting therapeutic groups for youth and adults and she believes that groups can be deeply transformative and can be offered in a way as to honor the process and wisdom of each person attending.

Registration and Fee:

Registration involves completing the online registration which can be found here: <https://momenta.campbrainregistration.com>. Once you complete your registration, you will receive a confirmation email with additional information about where we are meeting, advice about what to wear, etc.

The cost is \$200 + GST per person (but there are some low-income spots also being held for people. Please let us know). This includes the snacks and lunch. If you have insurance to cover therapy services, part of the cost of the walk might be covered for you. Candace and Lise are both registered as social workers in Manitoba.

Other FAQ's

How hard is the trail to walk?

The trail is mostly flat, and our walk will be paced and include breaks, but it is a full day walk. By the end of the walk people feel good, but tired. It is intentionally a full day walk as people who have attended in the past say that they found the walk and reflection to be more useful, when it was a full day.

How much group discussion is there? I'm not sure I'm good in groups.

The group reflections are minimal (much of the day involves independent reflection) and decided by each person, but we ask that people participate as best they can in the group parts, in good spirits. People who attend find the group reflections to be an important and meaningful part of the day. The group reflections are facilitated and structured, so that what is asked of people to share is clear and often relatively brief. The questions posed in the group reflections intentionally allow for choice and unanimity in what is shared.

Where did this idea come from and why this approach?

Narrative Walks was created by a therapist in Australia, Chris Darmody, who wanted to develop a program to engage with people who may not be interested in conventional methods of therapy. The activity was developed to be in nature, story-based, participant led, hopeful, and non-pathologizing. It offers walking and journeying as powerful metaphors for life and change.