

From and for the North: The Crisis Centre for Northern BC on why local services matter

By: *Lina Moskaleva*

Our environment, culture, and context all inform how we live, work, and care for one another. For those working in caring professions, knowing the social and physical landscape of the communities they serve makes it possible to provide appropriate and effective services. Without this knowledge, the services may be ineffective at best, and sometimes even altogether harmful.

“The first thing I think many people don’t realize is the scale of Northern British Columbia,” points out Riley Skinner, executive director of the Crisis Centre for Northern BC. “It occupies a space larger than the country of France, with only a fraction of the population.”

The Crisis Centre for Northern BC has served Northern B.C. since its inception in 1970. Their service area stretches from the Alberta border in the east to Haida Gwaii in the west, from Quesnel in the south to the Yukon border to the north, and the Centre is based in the North’s biggest city of Prince George. The team of staff and volunteers provide crisis intervention, suicide prevention, resource information, education, and confidential peer support both from the Centre’s main office and remotely, from the communities they live in.



Source: [Crisis Prevention, Intervention and Information Centre for Northern BC](#)

“We do things differently here,” says Skinner with a smile. Northern BC is home to about 200,000 people, including 55 First Nations living across 62 communities, spread out over a vast and challenging landscape, so excelling at adapting services and building relationships and collaborations are essential.

One of the ways the Centre had to innovate during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond was by opening the ability for trained volunteers to answer calls remotely. This move allowed the Centre to offer their services to those in need, regardless of how far they may be from the head office, delivered by people who are based in those communities.

Exact knowledge of the support available to people in crisis is critical in rural and remote communities as the typical options available in large cities may not be feasible - for some folks, their nearest hospital is a 10-hour drive away. “What works in one place may not work for another,” emphasizes Skinner when speaking about the challenges of delivering effective support services. “We need responders, educators, and peers who understand their communities' specific strengths, challenges, and systems.”

Making sure that the accredited and evidence-based services the Crisis Centre for Northern BC provides meet the specific strengths and challenges of the communities they serve takes collaboration, local knowledge, and dedication. This is why the Centre continues to be a trusted source of support for the people of Northern BC.

—

To learn more about the Crisis Centre for Northern BC's services and programs, please visit crisis-centre.ca.

—

The Crisis Centre for Northern BC is committed to supporting people during times of crisis. If you or someone you know is in crisis, please reach out, help is available 24/7:

- Northern B.C. Crisis Line: 250-563-1214, 1-888-562-1214, 24/7
- Northern B.C. Youth Line: 250-564-8336, 24/7
- BC Suicide Line: 1-800-784-2433, BC-wide, 24/7
- 310-MENTALHEALTH: 310-6789, BC-wide, 24/7
- 9-8-8: 988 (phone and text service), National, 24/7