

THERAPIST NETWORK MEMBER INTERVIEW

SHELBY LOOMIS

WHY DID YOU WANT TO JOIN THE THERAPIST NETWORK AT AGKNOW?

When I first heard about AgKnow I was so excited about it because I hadn't heard of anything like it before. I really wanted to be a part of a service that not only understands farm culture, but is also focused on increasing awareness and access to mental health services in rural areas. Farming is unlike any other job, so I think it is great that it's unique culture is being recognized.

WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO FARMING?

I grew up on a third generation farm, which my brother and my dad are now running together. Growing up, I would help on the farm and I was in 4-H Beef. I moved to Edmonton for a little while to get my bachelor's and my master's degrees. Then, just a few years ago, my husband and I moved back out to the country and are starting up a cattle and grain farm of our own.

(Wow. So different from the family farm, your own thing, huh?)

Yes, yeah. He grew up on a farm too, so it's something we always wanted to get back to. It's still small, but growing.

WHY DOES HAVING GOOD MENTAL HEALTH ON THE FARM MATTER?

Good mental health is just as important as any strong foundation. We don't always think about it because we don't see it. But mental health really dictates how we communicate, how we feel emotionally, how we feel physically, how we interact with others and the world around us, so having that base is really important.

It's usually not just one person, that is feeling the effects of poor mental health because it kind of goes into so many other areas, especially on farms when you're usually farming with your family or it could be employees as well.

If one person is feeling stressed, tired and overwhelmed, chances are the family's feeling it, the people working on the farm are feeling it and the farm itself is feeling it.

When this happens there is a lack of communication, you're more likely to make mistakes, all because you're tired and overwhelmed. There may be some more risks taken because your mind is just focused on so many other things, or we take out that frustration on the people that we love the most.

FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAJOR ISSUES FACING FARMERS TODAY?

Well, as always there's weather changes, machinery breaking down, worrying about unexpected costs and



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all of that. And then obviously, there's the larger ones like livestock depopulation, succession planning, those kinds of things.

But I think especially in the most recent years, something that farmers are really feeling is the fluctuating market prices and input costs, because input costs, like seed and fertilizer, are so high right now. Money stress is putting a strain on a lot of people, whether their farms are large or small.

HOW CAN GOING TO THERAPY HELP A FARMER WHO IS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH? SO A FARMER, OR SOMEONE FROM THEIR FAMILY?

When we're struggling, we don't always know how to talk to other people. We don't always know where to talk, how to bring it up with somebody. We may worry about what they'll say, if they'll change their opinion of us, or maybe we just don't want to add our worries to their plate.

We don't want to stress out other people with our own stress. Therapy offers a place for you to talk without receiving any judgment and without adding any worry to your loved ones. It's a place where you can get professional feedback, insight or suggestions and resources that are specific to your individual life.

OKAY, AND HOW DO YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP A FARMER WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS IN YOU KNOW, WHY SHOULD THEY CHOOSE YOU LIKE, WHAT CAN YOU OFFER THEM?

Growing up on a farm, I know farmers are some of the toughest people out there, but they're also some of the most stubborn. So it can be nice to have a counselor who not just knows what farming is, but who has been there, seen how stress can build up, seen how quickly things can change depending on the weather, finances, or what have you -

I also know how important it is to build trust. I don't expect people to come in and completely open up to a stranger, the first time we meet. But I do hope that I can help farmers feel more comfortable in the sense that I have a base understanding of what you might be going through.

It's also important to remember that farmers' time is valuable, so they may not want to spend time explaining farm culture and how farming is different from other jobs. Because I grew up on a farm, and still farm, we can get right to working on your concerns.

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED STYLE OF THERAPY? DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIALIZATIONS?

Yes, when I saw this question I laughed because I didn't know how to answer it in a way that would be helpful for potential clients.

(Are you someone who likes to do more talk therapy, or is it you might engage in more cognitive behavioral type approaches, or take a spiritual approach or an art therapy approach or anything like that? It could be that you don't have any, and this is maybe just like a moot question? Anything that you want to share, especially those specialties or just if there's sort of a niche area that might separate you from other therapists you're welcome to share.)

In general, my therapy approach is, and this is why my dad called it "psycho horseradish", because it's psychodynamic, which is talk therapy.

(What did he call it? Psycho horseradish?)

Well yeah, because I explained it to him, and not in a bad way, he was just like “what was the name of the psycho-ha-wa-?” Yeah, and that’s why.

So basically, I help identify patterns that may be negatively impacting a person’s life. I also add in some basic CBT strategies and I’m trained in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). For the most part I offer that supportive space and I kind of adapt to each individual’s needs. I have a few different backgrounds that I work with, and I go based on what the individual needs as far as specialty goes.

Anger. I love working with anger - I used to facilitate Cornerstone Counselling’s anger management course, and I really enjoyed it. Other areas that I work with are; self esteem, daily stressors, depression, anxiety, suicide, trauma, and relationships.

WHAT CAN A FARMER EXPECT IN THEIR SESSION WITH YOU?

So the first session is usually spent getting to know each other. If the person wants to go into full history in general they can, or they can just share a little bit of what’s going on for them right now.

I usually like to start with just basic questions, but people can choose what they do or do not share. It’s 100% their call in terms of: what we talk about, if they want to answer my questions, or want to talk about things that I bring up.

In the first session we also talk about what’s bringing them to counseling and so that we can start to get an idea on where we can go next, what kinds of resources might be helpful, and starting with a little bit of a plan of how we’re going to move forward together.

WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO DESCRIBE YOU?

Caring and hardworking. I think those would be the main ones.

AND FINALLY, WHAT’S THE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE THAT YOU WOULD RECOMMEND TO SOMEONE WHO’S STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH?

Talk to somebody. Talk to anyone, it doesn’t matter who. Therapists are great to talk to, but if you’re not ready for that, just talk to anyone you feel you can trust. It can be a friend or family member or a co-worker. A lot of the times when we’re struggling we leave that in and the longer it stays in the bigger it feels. When this happens we can get in our own head and convince ourselves that we’re the only one feeling this way, which builds more sadness, shame, and guilt. That’s why talking about it, even a little piece of it, with anybody is helpful.



Interview by Dr. Rebecca Purc-Stephenson
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