



SILA
SKILLS IN LIFE FOR ALL

The SILA Skills Group is a new Canadian federally incorporated, not-for-profit corporation that believes in building mental health resilience by fostering supportive, validating, and respectful environments. We do this by providing emotional skills-building workshops targeted at educators, social service providers and first responders.

Building Mental Health Resilience

A Message from the President

The SILA Skills Group has just completed its first year of operation and I am excited to share what we've accomplished and what we've learned.

The idea for The SILA Skills Group emerged two years ago when I got together with a group of women to talk about the power of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) skills in building mental health resilience and transforming lives. We wondered why these skills aren't taught more widely in our communities. Each of us has experienced our own challenges and has stories of how these skills transformed our families.

We decided to create a not-for-profit that would provide these life-transforming skills to others as inexpensively as possible, charging only enough to cover our costs. In August of 2020 we incorporated as The SILA (Skills In Life for All) Skills Group.

Our SILA workshops teach people how to use the core skills of DBT --- mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness --- in their everyday lives. Our goal is that after participating in one of our workshops, participants can de-escalate tense, emotional situations and skilfully manage their professional environments and relationships.

We decided to pilot our workshops last fall with teachers, calling our workshop **Transforming Classrooms**. We knew that teachers were under tremendous stress in classrooms and COVID has only made things worse.

I also remembered that previously in my volunteer career, when I led DBT skills-based program for families, I noticed that the teachers in my groups would report that when they practised these skills at school, they were able to de-escalate tense situations, better connect with students and transform their classrooms.

Continued p.4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Transforming Classrooms – Workshops for everyone working in an education environment – teachers, education assistants, administrative/support staff, guidance counselors, student teachers, & pre-service teachers. Our goal is truly to transform the entire school environment!

Transforming Connections – Workshops for social service workers, youth workers and first responders.



Quotes from Educators

“[The skills] have been SO helpful. They’ve changed how I regulate myself and care/support my students Life changing.”

“With the skills of validation, I have found huge success in connecting with others and helping them regulate their emotions.”

“... the delivery is so important and [the Facilitator] was just perfect.”

“I can see the real change these skills bring. This can make a difference in my life no matter what else continues to happen throughout my life...”

“...This workshop is the reason why I will survive this pandemic.”

“This course has a way of getting to the root of the problem.”

“... I began to put into practice what I learned from the very first session...”

“I will be sure to spread the word that this is a fantastic program that is well worth the time and effort to attend.”

“This course has changed the way I support my students.”



The SILA Skills Group’s Transforming Classrooms workshops have been designed with input from educators and adapted to meet the challenging schedules of teachers.

Transforming Classrooms workshops consist of 12 hours of participative experience where educators share their real-life experiences and learn how to skilfully manage to achieve best outcomes.

In 2021, The SILA Skills Group delivered **5 Transforming Classrooms** Workshops to the Alberta Teachers Association Local 8 and another workshop for educators at 2 Alberta schools.

All workshops were delivered virtually.

Survey results showed teachers reporting a decrease in stress levels, a calmer classroom environment as well as feeling they were coping better and had an increased level of optimism for the remainder of the school year.

All survey responders rated our facilitators as excellent, saying they would recommend the workshop to others.

Several participants said they intend to bring the workshop to the attention of their school boards.

LEARN, DISCOVER,
ACQUIRE NEW SKILLS

Our goal is that educators learn how to:

- Build trust, reduce the intensity of emotions and open the door for problem-solving
- Interpret a student's behavior by approaching with curiosity, removing judgment, and being in the moment to respond constructively to the current situation.
- Bridge communication between teacher and student, student and student, teacher and teacher
- Create an overall collaborative and validating classroom environment
- Use emotion regulation and distress tolerance skills that help with self-care and mental wellness
- Recognize their own emotional vulnerability and reactivity in any given situation to position yourself to interact effectively.



Quotes from Social Service Workers

"I love how transferable this info is. It's been the most useful training I have taken... These skills are so simple, yet so effective."

"...wish I learned many of these new skills early on in my career!"

"Excellent workshop great for me personally and professionally."

"Excellent series, highly recommend anyone and everyone take this training to improve workplace outcomes, personal relationship and self control."

"Really enjoying all of these new ideas for my 'tool box' personally and professionally!"

"Everything, facilitator was excellent, well spoken in explaining details and giving examples that I could relate to and connect with my every day work stressors and scenarios with clients."

Your **STRENGTH** +
new **SKILLS** =
positive **CHANGE**



TRANSFORMING CONNECTIONS
Building Emotional Resilience

SILA
SKILLS IN LIFE FOR ALL

The SILA Skills Group piloted a **Transforming Connections** Workshop with a group of Ontario social service workers. The input from this group was very valuable as we continue to adapt our workshops to meet the needs of social service workers, youth workers and first responders.

Most survey responders rated our facilitators as excellent and all responders said they would recommend the workshop to others. This pilot helped us to hone in on what skills work best for this group of social service workers and we were able to add an extra session that focused on an additional skill that we felt would benefit this group. We were also able to learn about typical scenarios faced by this group of participants in their workday and we will be incorporating these scenarios in future workshops.

As my fellow SILA board member Kelly Maxwell, a teacher with 30 years’ experience, says, “We are constantly told to make connections with our students and that if we make those connections we’ll be effective. But nobody ever showed me how to do it until I took a DBT-skills based program. And now I am using these skills in my classroom every day. And I am such a different teacher.”

Learning DBT skills involves embracing a dialectic (synthesis of opposites) --- learning to accept difficult thoughts, feelings and behaviours while at the same time learning to change them. DBT was developed by Marsha Linehan in the 1980s and has since been found to be effective not only for a broad range of mental illnesses but also for building emotional resilience in anyone willing to learn the skills. As Blaise Aguirre and Gillian Galen, doctors who specialize in DBT at the Harvard-affiliated McLean Hospital, write in their new book, *DBT for Dummies*, DBT “is not just for {people seeking therapy} but is also a life enhancer for everyone.”

I am pleased to say that our **Transforming Classrooms** workshops have been so successful that we have developed a **Transforming Connections** workshop for social service workers and hope to pilot this workshop with first responders in 2021/2022.

And lastly I want to say that I am very excited to be working with a group of board members who are passionate and committed to sharing these life-changing skills.....*Rosanna Ruppert, President*



- Directors**
- Karen Black*
 - Kelly Maxwell*
 - Catherine Needham*
 - Heather Rider*
 - Rosanna Ruppert*
 - Dr. Lynn Swanson*