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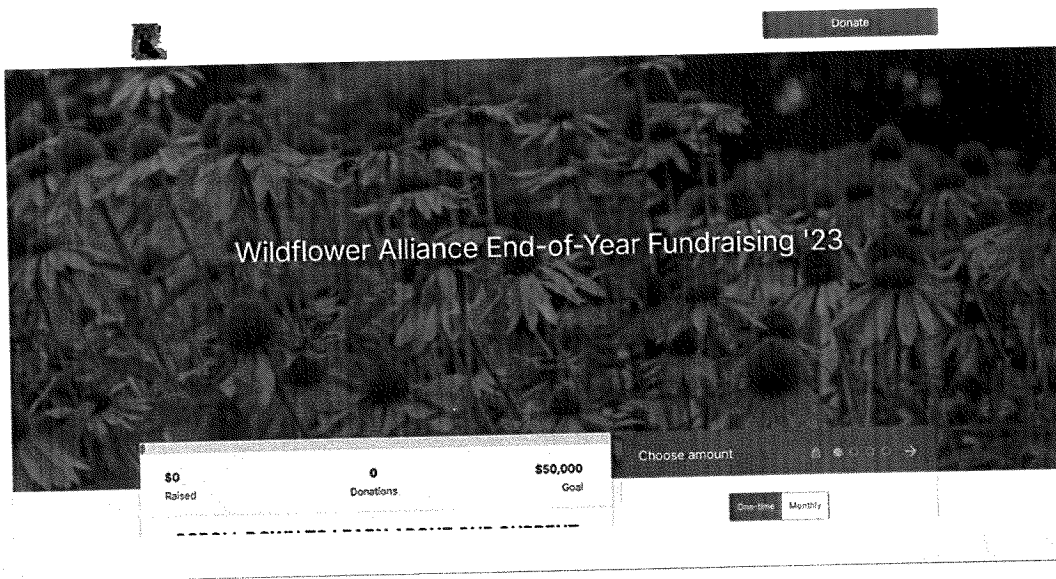
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View a web version of this newsletter by clicking [HERE!](#)

End of year Donations...

There's still time to help us raise end-of-year funds and get a tax deduction for 2023! [CLICK HERE NOW!](#)



Voices, Visions & Unusual Beliefs: Innovative Support Strategies

March 18 to March 20, 2024, 9am to 5pm

@ Holyoke Community College, Holyoke, MA

Click [HERE](#) to register

In current Western medical paradigms, hearing voices is often a deeply marginalized experience. Those who hear voices and/or see visions are typically given a poor prognosis. Suggested coping strategies tend to be limited to distraction techniques or heavy neuroleptics. Clinicians, voice-hearers, and family members have often felt frustrated by the limitations of this model.

Another world is possible. This training is for anyone who is interested in learning the current research, strategies and supports that are being developed by people with lived experience of voice-hearing world-wide. We will explore:

- ◆ How trauma, culture and social factors influence voice-hearing
- ◆ Common myths about voices & visions and how to shift these paradigms
- ◆ A new dialogue framework to discuss non-consensus reality states in a supportive way
- ◆ Dozens of real-life strategies that are used by voice-hearers to cope with a distressing experience

This event will be co-facilitated by Cindy Marty Hadge and Caroline Mazel-Carlton, both of whom have extensive personal experience with voices, visions, and navigating the psychiatric system. Both have well over a decade of professional experience supporting other voice-hearers in community settings,

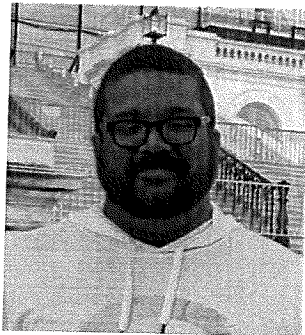
clinical environments and online. Caroline and Cindy have had the privilege of both learning from and supporting system change in the international community, from the Netherlands to Brazil to Israel to Australia. Their work has been featured in mainstream media outlets, academic articles, and books, including the most recent work from NYT best-selling author Daniel Bergner, "The Mind and the Moon".

Continuing Education information: This program has been approved for 18.5 Social Work Continuing Education hours for relicensure, in accordance with 258 CMR. NASW-MA Chapter CE Approving Program, Authorization Number D 91991. This program has been approved by MaMHCA/MCEAP for 18.5 CEs for LMHC.

Please contact us at info@wildfloweralliance.org for questions regarding CE accreditation.

Wildflower Hires Two Returning Team Members Into Senior Leadership Roles

In November, 2023, longtime Assistant Director, Erin Levesque—Alaskan Native herself—moved to Alaska to do similar work to what she has been doing with Wildflower with Alaskan Native communities. That, and some other shifts on the team left us hiring for two senior leadership positions: Not only Assistant Director but also Director of Community Supports.



Director of Community Supports:

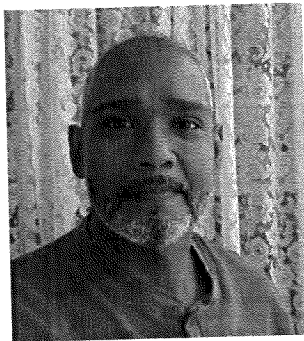
Earl Miller has now taken on the newly created role of Director of Community Supports, overseeing centers and other essential work particular in the Hampden County area.

Earl has spent many years living in Hampden County, including Springfield and Holyoke. In fact, it was in Springfield that he experienced being unhoused, often sharing about how he called Forest Park home for a while. In this work, he also draws on his experience spending many of his formative years in psychiatric facilities in

neighboring Connecticut. Earl is a dad of two, and roommate of one dog and one cat. He loves a game of chess, a hot coffee and a boring history podcast.

Earl first began working (after some time as a volunteer) for Wildflower in 2013. His many roles include having served as Community Coordinator for both the Bowen and La Brega centers. He also was responsible for initiating Wildflower's work with tenancy preservation and the Rainville, a 46-unit Single Room Occupancy building for people with a history of homelessness.

Since his time at Wildflower, Earl has served in a number of other roles including as Director of Recovery for the Department of Mental Health Western Massachusetts Area, and as the first Black Director of an Alternatives to Policing Program. In recognition of some of this work, he is featured in the Black Movement Leader's Project (www.blackmovementleaders.info). In the fall, he began offering some consultation support to Wildflower, and as of mid-December, he has returned as Director of Community Supports. We are happy to have his energy and wisdom back in the community full-time!



Assistant Director:

In the New Year, Rafael Rodriguez will join Natan Cohen as one of Wildflower Alliance's Assistant Directors. He will focus particularly on supporting our work in Franklin and Berkshire counties, along with other administrative tasks to support the whole team.

Rafael comes from a place of having learned through living. He himself has been homeless, struggled with substances, and suicidal thoughts, among other life experiences that he has not only survived but learned from. He is a father, a chef, and loves football. Rafael was born and raised in Holyoke, Massachusetts.


Rafael first began working with Wildflower in 2016 as a Bilingual (Spanish/English) Advocate eight hours per week at the Bowen Center. He quickly grew into many other roles, including as the initial Director for the Wild Ivy Social Justice Network (now led by Ebony Flint), and as a longstanding member of Wildflower's training team.

In 2020, Rafael took a position outside of Wildflower as a Coordinator for the HEALing Communities Study, focused on reducing opioid-related deaths. Although he maintained his connection to our community as a trainer and helping out in other ways when he was able, taking on the role of an Assistant Director represents his full return to the community after a few years mostly away, and we are excited to have him back!

Webinar - #988: Is it Helping More Than Hurting?

Monday, January 22nd, 2pm-4pm EST

988 has been prompted as our nations answer to access issues for crisis support. But, is 988 hurting more than helping? Is geolocation being used and if yes, how and when? How has 988 impacted use of force? Are 988 operators trained properly to talk about issues like self-injury? What information is and isn't being shared transparently? Join us to learn more about these points and more!






#988

Is It Helping More Than Hurting?

Monday, January 22, 2pm-4pm Eastern

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TO REGISTER: tinyurl.com/988124

 <p>Jess Stohlmann-Rainey is a mad, fat, queer activist. She previously worked as Director of Development for Rocky Mountain Crisis Services, and now consults across the nation to states revisioning their crisis response systems and more.</p>	 <p>Emily Wu Truong is a 2nd generation Taiwanese American mental health advocate, community organizer, award-winning storyteller, and visual and performance artist. She also has first-hand experience with how #988 can harm.</p>	 <p>Rob Wipond is a journalist and author of 'Your Consent is Not Required' looking at hard data on use of force across the US and Canada. Rob is the only journalist to date consistently digging into the #988 data with a critical eye.</p>
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To Register **CLICK HERE!!**

Featuring:

Jess Stohlmann-Rainey: Jess is a mad, fat, queer activist. She previously worked as Director of Development for Rocky Mountain Crisis Services, and now consults across the nation to states revisioning their crisis response systems and more.

Emily Wu Truong: Emily is a 2nd generation Taiwanese American mental health advocate, community organizer, award-winning storyteller, and visual and performance artist. She also has first-hand experience with how #988 can harm.

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Black Movement Leaders Project:

New Addition for the New Year

Elizabeth “Mya” Haley was officially added to the Black Movement Leaders Project toward the end of December, 2023, just in time to help us bring in the New Year!



Mya is driven by her own experiences in the foster and mental health care systems, and has spent her career working with, for and alongside people who have received mental health services. In her work, she has raised consciousness about the role of lived experience in the context of Peer Specialist jobs, but also as it relates to the expertise of individuals who are being supported. Mya consistently highlights the importance of providers partnering with—and amplifying—the voice of people with lived experience. Her efforts span the Peer Specialist field including direct support, advocacy, activism, and training. Mya’s philosophy is simple: in order to be person-centered and recovery-oriented, we must commit to the belief that people are not their diagnoses and that recovery is not only possible but individualized, non-linear, and influenced by larger socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. While these are the cornerstones of Peer support, Mya is known for emphasizing how all providers can benefit from using this lens.

Mya currently works as a Peer Specialist, Recovery Trainer and Implementation Specialist at the ACT Institute for Recovery-Based Practice at the Center for Practice Innovations at Columbia University. She’s offered numerous presentations, including on peer support and ‘role drift’ at the New York Association for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS) this past fall.

You can hear Mya speak at a 2023 Round Table discussion on the issue of ‘stigma’ [HERE](#)

**View the Black Movement Leaders Project
at www.BlackMovementLeaders.info**

Blackout Poetry Night Greenfield

January 5th, 4:30p-7p

Join us to create blackout poetry.


Blackout Poetry Night
 January 5th, 4:30-7p

What is blackout poetry?
 Blackout poetry is a form of poetry where portions of the original text are kept, while other parts are drawn over or crossed out. Blackout poetry can give new meanings to old texts. Supplies provided.

Join us to create blackout poetry.

What is blackout poetry? Blackout poetry, also known as erasure or redacted poetry, has a goal of using pre-existing or "found" text to create something new. Portions of the original text are kept, while other parts are drawn over or crossed out. Blackout poetry can give new meanings to old texts. Supplies provided.

For more information contact Eryx,
eryx@wildfloweralliance.org



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For more information, contact Eryx.
eryx@wildfloweralliance.org

Older Adults: New Writing Group

Writing Our Stories

Adults aged 50+

This will be a five week writing group using prompts to share thoughts and stories from our lives

Thursdays on Zoom

January 18th, 25th, & February 1st, 8th, & 15th

6pm to 7:30pm EST

To Register E-mail:

zoe@wildfloweralliance.org

OLDER ADULTS 50+

Writing Our Stories

This will be a five week writing group using prompts to share thoughts & stories from our lives

Thursdays on Zoom
 January 18, 25 & February 1, 8, 15
 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. EST

To Register Email:
zoe@wildfloweralliance.org

WILD FLY SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Community Resource: Shaping Soles

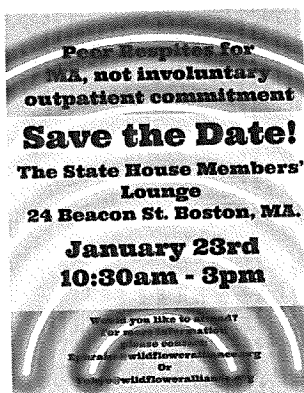


Shaping Soles was founded in December 2022 by Chris Goossens. It all began after Chris saw a heartwarming story on the news about a boy in Buffalo, New York, who was gifted shoes by his classmates, who knew his family couldn't afford new sneakers. After that, Chris went to work, posting on Facebook, reaching out to local businesses, and collaborating with the 413 and 860 community to gather footwear and distribute it to those in need. By August of 2023, Shaping Soles had donated over 1,000 pairs of footwear. Just several months later, by early December, that figure had risen to 1,900 pairs—all within less than a year since launching.

Learn more @ shapingsoles.org

Thank you to Shaping Soles for donating over 50 shoes and boots to our Pittsfield Center!!!

Advocacy Day is January 23rd!



S.1238/H.3602 An act to establish peer run respites throughout the Commonwealth

What are Peer respites? Peer respites are a safe space where people can stay in homelike setting for up to 2 weeks while they navigate through a mental health crisis. People undergoing a crisis are able to explore an alternative to the medical model of

support; offered by highly trained and skilled peer supporters. These peer

supporters have lived experience surviving trauma, crisis, and a variety of life-altering challenges.

The Issue: People are stuck cycling in and out of the mentalhealth system with a lack of real choices and alternatives. The results range from inadequate care at a high cost, to sometimes even death. People undergoing a mental health crisis are frequently traumatized by this inadequate care. The risk of harm is substantially higher in LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities.

The solution: Set up a peer run respite in each county in Massachusetts in order to provide support for people, with two specific LGBTQIA+ focused peer respites and one BIPOC respite. One of the two LGBTQIA+ peer run respites would be established in Western Mass.

Advantages of Peer-Run Respites:

- Life changing and life saving.
- Helps people break cycles.
- High potential for cost-saving both in the short term and (particularly) the long-term.
- Can play a key role in diverting people from ED boarding.
- Are proven to work- Afiya house has gained international recognition by WHO as the highest standard in non-coercive response to emotional and mental health crisis.
- Are also supported by: the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA a federal agency).

**For more information, or accessibility concerns please contact
Tokyo@wildfloweralliance.org or Ephraim@wildfloweralliance.org**

FOR MORE INFO:
tinyurl.com/PRinfo23

S.1413/H.1612, 'An Act establishing peer-run respite centers throughout the Commonwealth' is sponsored by Senator Jo Comerford and Representatives Lindsay Sabadosa and Smitty Pignatelli. It would establish at least one peer respite per each of 13 counties in Massachusetts. It would also establish the first LGBTIQIA+ peer respites in the world, with one of the two to be based in Western Massachusetts.

TESTIMONIALS

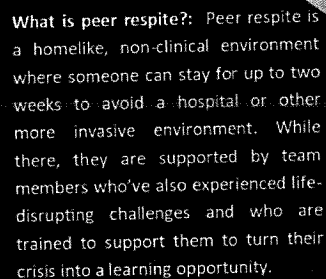
"This stay made such a difference. I'm hoping to be able to come back and work here when I'm ready, and give back to others some of what I was able to get."

"It's a huge difference from the hospital. There's no way to really fully put that to words."

"I had trouble trusting this place because I knew it was still funded by the same sources, but not by the end. I knew I could trust them by the end and trust changes everything."

Support Peer Respites in Massachusetts

Many people are stuck cycling in and out of the mental health system with a lack of real choices and alternatives. The result is ineffective care at high costs. People going through crisis are frequently traumatized by this care and the loss of power that goes with it. Consequently, they often experience worse outcomes including increased suicide risk and shortened lifespans. The risk of harm is even greater for people who identify as LGBTIQIA+. Peer respites are an opportunity to offer support guided by the wisdom gained from people who've 'been there', and to develop respites that limit harmful power imbalances, and focus on health, healing, and personal growth.



What is peer respite?: Peer respite is a homelike, non-clinical environment where someone can stay for up to two weeks to avoid a hospital or other more invasive environment. While there, they are supported by team members who've also experienced life-disrupting challenges and who are trained to support them to turn their crisis into a learning opportunity.

ADVANTAGES OF PEER RESPITE:

- Life changing and life saving
- Helps people break cycles
- High potential for cost-saving both in the short and (particularly) the long-term
- Shown to reduce use of psychiatric hospitals and emergency rooms, and increase community connection
- Can play a key role in diverting people from ED boarding
- A growing body of evidence proves they work (Afiya House has gained international recognition by WHO as an exemplary model of non-coercive, alternative crisis)
- Are already supported by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Compassionate Accountable Conversations

Online Webinar:

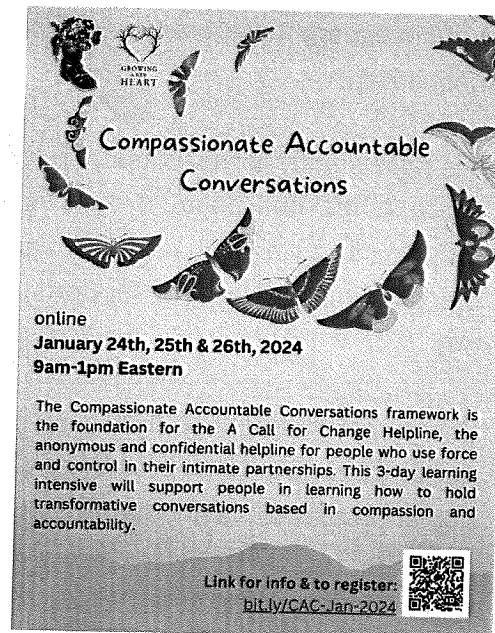
January 24th-26th, 2024

9a-1p EST

The compassionate Accountable conversations framework is the foundation for the A Call for Change Helpline, the anonymous and confidential helpline for people who use force and control in their intimate partnerships. This 3-day

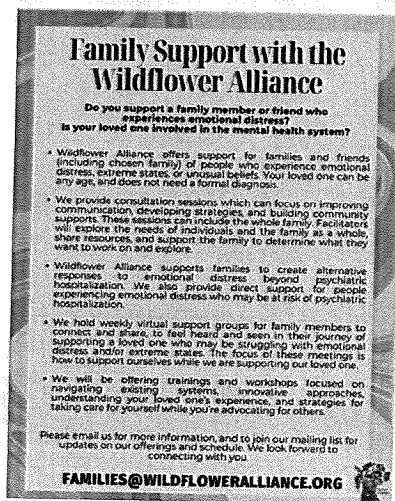
learning intensive will support people in learning how to hold transformative conversations based in compassion and accountability.

Link to Register



The poster features a central title "Compassionate Accountable Conversations" surrounded by various butterfly illustrations. At the top left, there is a logo for "GROWING HEART" with a heart symbol. Below the title, the text reads "online January 24th, 25th & 26th, 2024 9am-1pm Eastern". A paragraph of text describes the program as the foundation for the A Call for Change Helpline, an anonymous and confidential helpline for people who use force and control in their intimate partnerships. The text states that the 3-day learning intensive will support people in learning how to hold transformative conversations based in compassion and accountability. At the bottom right, there is a QR code and a link: "Link for info & to register: bit.ly/CAC-Jan-2024".

Family Support with the Wildflower Alliance



Family Support with the Wildflower Alliance

Do you support a family member or friend who experiences emotional distress?
Is your loved one involved in the mental health system?

- Wildflower Alliance offers support for families and friends (including chosen family) of people who experience emotional distress, extreme states, or unusual beliefs. Your loved one can be any age, and does not need a formal diagnosis.
- We provide consultation sessions which can focus on improving communication, developing strategies, and building community supports. These sessions can include the whole family. Facilitators will explore the needs of individuals and the family as a whole, share resources, and support the family to determine what they want to work on and explore.
- Wildflower Alliance supports families to create alternative responses to emotional distress beyond psychiatric hospitalization. We also provide direct support for people experiencing emotional distress who may be at risk of psychiatric hospitalization.
- We hold weekly virtual support groups for family members to connect and share, to feel heard and seen in their journey of supporting a loved one who may be struggling with emotional distress and/or extreme states. The focus of these meetings is how to support ourselves while we are supporting our loved one.
- We will be offering trainings and workshops focused on navigating existing systems, innovative approaches, understanding your loved one's experience, and strategies for taking care for yourself while you're advocating for others.

Please email us for more information, and to join our mailing list for updates on our offerings and schedule. We look forward to connecting with you.

FAMILIES@WILDFLOWERALLIANCE.ORG

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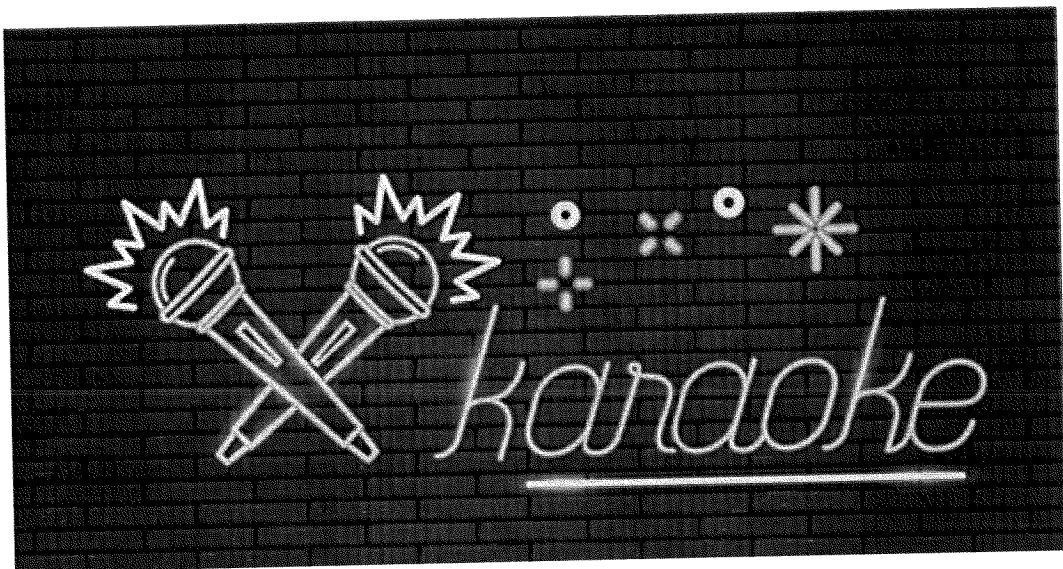
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Please e-mail us for information, and to join our mailing list for updates on our offerings and schedule. We look forward to connecting with you.

FAMILIES@WILDFLOWERALLIANCE.ORG



Karaoke in Pittsfield

January 19, 2024, 5:30—7pm

@ Wildflower's Pittsfield Center, 361 North Street

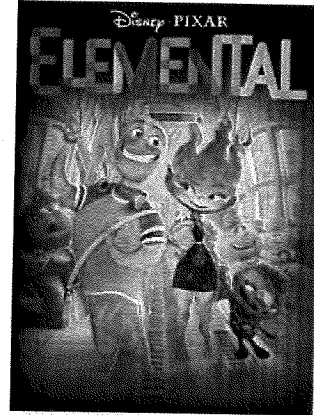
Pittsfield has a karaoke night on January 19 from 5:30p-7p

Dinner & a Movie Greenfield

Friday January 26th, 2024

4:30p-7p

Join us for a Potluck style dinner. Feel free to bring a dish to share! Arrive at 4:30pm to make a plate and settle in to watch Elemental, starting promptly at 5pm. Enjoy your food and good company until the event ends at 7pm.



For more information contact AJ:

aj@wildfloweralliance.org

Benefits Training: SSI & SSDI for 18+


**Benefits Training:
SSI & SSDI for 18+**
With Social Security Advocate
Caitlin Thomas, BSN, RN

What you'll learn:

- What SSI and SSDI benefits are
- SSA acronyms and lingo you need to know
- Eligibility guidelines and how to apply for SSI and SSDI
- Best practices for maintaining benefits once approved
- How to prepare for Continuing Disability Reviews

Virtual Webinar Presentation
Saturday, January 20th, 2024
10:00 am - 12:30 pm EST

Register at:
bit.ly/Benefits-Training-Jan24



Send us with your questions: alliance@wildfloweralliance.org

Virtual Webinar Presentation

Saturday, January 20th, 2024

10am-12:30pm EST

What you will learn:

- ◆ What SSI and SSDI benefits are
- ◆ SSA acronyms and lingo you need to know
- ◆ Eligibility guidelines and how to apply for SSI and SSDI
- ◆ Best practices for maintaining benefits once approved
- ◆ How to prepare for Continuing Disability Reviews

Register [HERE](#)

With Social Security Advocate Caitlin Thomas, BSN, RN

When Conversation Turns to Suicide: On-Line!

Wednesday, Jan 10, Friday, Jan 12,

Wednesday, Jan 17 & Friday, Jan 19

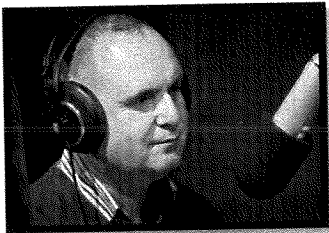
12pm to 4pm Eastern

This training is for anyone (family, friends, providers, peer supporters, etc.) who is interested in learning about the Alternatives to Suicide approach and how to better support people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts.



Click [HERE](#) for more information and to register

Working with Hearing Voices & Unusual Beliefs: A 6 Session Course



With Peter Bullimore & Co.

Participants in this 6-session training will learn how to better understand and support people to make meaning of their experiences with voice hearing and/or unusual beliefs or what gets called “paranoia.” Attendance at all sessions is required to fully complete the training. All sessions will be held on-line, and all times listed are in Eastern USA time. Registration is required. Space is limited. All sessions will be led by Peter Bullimore & company.

Monday, February 5, 10-2pm: Three Stages of Hearing Voices

Tuesday, February 6, 10-2pm: Three Stages of Unusual Beliefs/“Paranoia”

Wednesday, February 7, 10-11:30am: Maastricht Interview Overview

Monday, February 12, 9-4pm: Using Maastricht for Voices

Tuesday, February 13, 9-4pm: Using Maastricht for Unusual Beliefs/“Paranoia”

Wednesday, February 14, 10-2pm: How to Use What’s Learned from Maastricht

PLEASE NOTE: All times are listed in Eastern USA time. We are unable to offer recordings of these sessions at this time. People seeking to attend must be able to do so live.

For more information, or to register, click [HERE](#)

Anti-Oppression Training February

Join Sera Davidow, Rafael Rodriguez, and Ebony Flint as they offer a three-day anti-oppression training. This training aims to examine what being a “good” person really means, how to understand privilege and use it for good, effectively owning and apologizing for your missteps, and strategies for interrupting situations where people are saying or doing things rooted in oppressive ways of being and thinking.

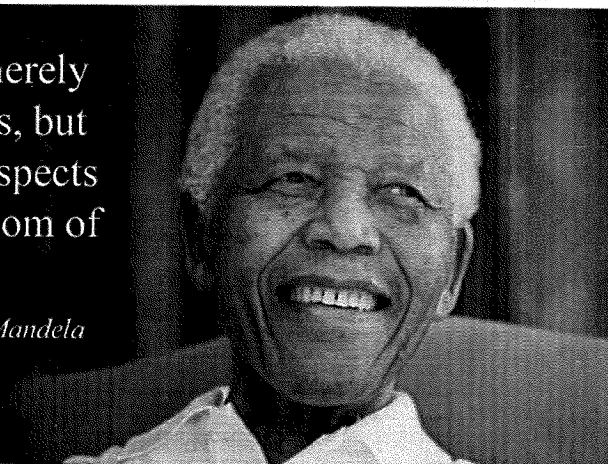
The training aims to be highly interactive, and requires a willingness to self-reflect, sit in discomfort, and work together toward building a better world.

- Monday, February 26, 9am to 5pm
- Tuesday, February 27, 9am to 5pm
- Wednesday, February 28, 9am to 5pm

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER!!](#)

For to be free is not merely
to cast off one's chains, but
to live in a way that respects
and enhances the freedom of
others.

Nelson Mandela



In the News...

Withdrawal effects are experienced by around half of patients, with up to half of those describing their symptoms as severe, and a substantial proportion experiencing withdrawal for many weeks, months, or longer.

Read More [HERE](#)

Ask Afiya...

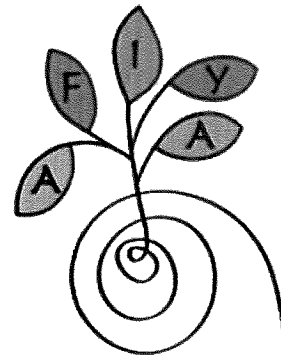
Does Afiya ever close in bad weather?

What do they do about the snow?

Afiya never closes due to bad weather. Sometimes, we may have to find coverage from someone nearby in place of a team member coming from further away. On occasion, we've had to ask someone already there to stay put through the bad weather, or had the supervisor on-call come in. But we will always remain open, unless something impacts the house directly. We do have a back-up plan should we ever need it to move people to a hotel if (for example) the heat were to go out, but that has never happened to date!

Otherwise, things remain pretty much the same as any other day with perhaps just a little more for team members to do in terms of shoveling walkways and putting down salt, or moving cars around for the snow plows. If you are staying at Afiya during a snowstorm and you have a vehicle, we may need to ask you to move, too. Otherwise, things should be good!

www.afiyahouse.org



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