



Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars”. Kahlil Gibran

The Surviving Spirit Newsletter February 2020

Newsletter Contents:

- 1] This coat design isn't just saving lives. It's launching new careers for homeless people – CNN
- 1a] This coat isn't just saving lives. It's creating careers the homeless – YouTube 3:45 minutes
- 2] Bipolar MD: My Life as a Physician with Bipolar Disorder: Paul Golden MD: Amazon.com: Books
- 3] Sarah Knutson – Author, Advocate
- 4] ‘Heart Berries’ author Terese Marie Mailhot answers your questions - PBS NewsHour - Video & transcript
- 4a] Heart Berries: A Memoir: Terese Marie Mailhot: Goodreads
- 5] Kindness improves our nervous systems - Big Think by Jaimee Bell
- 6] You Are Alive For A Reason - You Tube 5:15 minutes
- 7] Rising Sun Expression - An artistic organization to help empower people with mental health and/or substance abuse issues to heal and gain purpose through art in all forms.
- 8] Study supports long-term benefits of non-drug therapies for pain - By Mike Richman
VA Research Communications
- 9] Unity Radio WUTY 97.9FM Worcester, MA ALL NEW Talking Wellness with Mike MacInnis.
Today's special guest is Michael Skinner
- 10] African American History Month
- 10a] Who Killed Malcolm X? - Documentary
- 11] Ten Tips for Aging with Depression By Jan McDaniel @ Psych Central
- 12] 7 Podcasts That Can Help You Feel Just a Little Less Anxious by Emily Forney

“What happens when people open their hearts? They get better.” Haruki Murakami

1] [This coat design isn't just saving lives. It's launching new careers for homeless people](#) – CNN - Story by [Holly Yan](#), CNN Photos by [Brittany Greeson](#) for CNN

[*Hey folks, please note, lots of great pictures posted at the website for this article. MS*]

Detroit (CNN) In the shadows of Detroit's tallest skyscrapers, dozens of homeless people shiver in the 17-degree cold.

Ferocious wind gusts of 15 mph feel like cold knives stabbing the face.

Such conditions claim the lives of countless homeless people every winter -- especially those without warm coats.

Now, a nonprofit aimed at solving that problem has accidentally led to one of the most successful homeless employment programs as the country's [homeless crisis keeps growing](#).

"This is so much bigger than anything I could have imagined," said Veronika Scott, the 30-year-old CEO and founder of the Empowerment Plan.

The plan hires homeless people and teaches them how to make coats for the destitute suffering on the streets.

These are not your typical coats. They transform into storage totes and full-length sleeping bags to protect against frostbite or death.

But the most impressive transformation happens behind the scenes, where the coat-making program has helped 100% of its homeless workers afford their own homes within months.

She was sick and living in a car with her kids

With laser-sharp focus and dizzying coordination, Pam Warren uses all four limbs to stitch a coat.

"I'm doing pockets on panels," she explains, running a piece of rugged black fabric under a sewing machine.

She powers the machine with a pedal under her left foot while steering the direction of the stitches with a lever next to her right knee.

At age 48, Warren has discovered a hidden talent.

"I'm a seamstress, that's my title. And I'm also a pocket expert," she says with a broad grin. "I'm so good with those pockets and so quick with them."

Four years ago, Warren was homeless, living in her car with her two youngest children.

She was laid off from her car parts manufacturing job after suffering a severe blood clot, which rendered her unable to work for months.

Almost immediately, Warren knew she and her children would also lose their beautiful brick house. "I had no help," she said.

That's because a few years earlier, Warren had decided to leave her husband and raise her children alone. Like many colleagues at the [Empowerment Plan](#), she was a victim of domestic violence.

Warren married young, in her 20s, and soon became a housewife and stay-at-home mom.

The physical abuse started early and persisted for years, she said, until "I just left one day -- for my kids."

"I stayed so long because I didn't think that I could make it without him -- financially, mainly ... especially with the kids," Warren said.

After her job loss in 2015, she and her two youngest children -- then a toddler and a fifth-grader -- lived in her Chrysler Sebring for months, "calling shelters every day" to see if any space had opened up.

"For a long time, we went two days where we didn't (shower). We couldn't afford to bathe," she said.

"My daughter was going to school, so she missed a lot of schooling because it was embarrassing, sending her to school without clean clothes and taking care of her hygiene."

Her daughter was so traumatized by bullying over her lack of hygiene that she missed half the school year. She ended up failing the fifth grade and had to repeat it.

Finally, after four months [living in a car](#), the family moved into a homeless shelter. That's where she learned about the Empowerment Plan, which occasionally hosts job fairs with the shelter.

"I wanted a job, (but) it was a sewing job," Warren said, chuckling. "I know nothing about sewing!"

Yet after a series of interviews, she got the job. "My jaws was hurting from smiling so much," she said.

Now Warren has her own home, and her children are doing well in school.

"I'm also back in school to get my GED," Warren said.

She takes great joy in stitching the coats and even more joy "just seeing them on the streets."

"Everywhere you go, you'll see people, and you'll tell them, 'Hey! I made that coat!'"

'I don't need a coat! I need a job!'

Scott never planned to be a CEO. The 30-year-old founder of the Empowerment Plan was homeless off and on throughout her childhood as her family struggled with job loss, mental health issues and addiction.

"There was a point in my upbringing where everything I personally owned could fit in a backpack," Scott said.

"In that backpack, I had my sketchpad. And that is why I got into art. That was the thing that I could do with nothing."

That love for art -- along with scholarships and financial aid -- got her into the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, where she majored in product design.

Maybe she'd work for a big firm in New York City, she thought. But more than anything else, "I wanted to take care of my family."

Her plans took a sharp detour when she was 20 and got an unusual class assignment: Design a project that fulfills a need in the community.

"We were just Googling 'needs in Detroit,'" Scott recalled.

She learned hundreds of freezing homeless people couldn't get into shelters that were already full. So, with no experience in clothing design, she decided to design a coat that turned into a sleeping bag.

"It took 80-plus hours to make the first one," Scott said.

"We were just Googling 'needs in Detroit,'" Scott recalled.

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"It took 80-plus hours to make the first one," Scott said.

She took her early prototypes to a local shelter to get feedback from homeless people. But her biggest epiphany came when a woman at the shelter started "full-on yelling at me."

"You! You with the coat! Coat lady!" Scott recalled the woman shouting. "This is pointless! I don't need a coat! I need a job!"

That's when Scott transformed her class project into a mission to employ homeless people.

She graduated college in December 2011. On January 1, 2012, she started the Empowerment Plan. Almost everyone thought the business model would fail, Scott said.

"We were completely funded by the PayPal button on my blog," she said. "That raised the money to help us get going."

Scott's college dean connected her with the CEO of [Carhartt](#), a rugged clothing manufacturer that soon

became a supporter of her nonprofit.

"They donated the first sewing machines. They donated the fabric. They flew me out to spend time in their factory, so I could see how these products are really made," Scott said. "I learned really everything I know now."

Soon, Scott could hire her first few employees from a homeless shelter. She'll never forget the eagerness of the job candidates, including one who showed up to the interview two hours early.

"They were just so dedicated," Scott said. "I remember they were like, 'Oh, I have kids, but that's not going to get in the way!'"

But hiring wasn't the only challenge. Scott knew she lacked the skills to teach her new hires how to make the coats efficiently.

So, she posted a plea on Facebook: "I need help. Does anybody know how to sew? I need somebody to come in and teach us."

One woman responded. She later became a full-time employee.

Fast forward eight years, and the Empowerment Plan has employed more than 80 homeless people. Many have graduated and started their own business ventures. Not a single worker has reverted back to homelessness.

And the 35,000 sleeping bag coats they've created have been shipped around the world.

A global phenomenon

As word of the "empower coats" grew, so did global demand.

"We've been able to hand them out across the entire US and now 20 other countries ... because of partnerships with other nonprofit organizations," Scott said.

The program is funded through private gifts. Each \$125 donation pays for the materials and labor for one coat, and donors can request coats go to specific communities or wherever the greatest need is.

Last year, "a corporation sponsored 2,000 coats, and it went out to 20 different cities," Scott said. "So, members of our team went to all these communities."

But like any urban area, it's difficult to know where the most dire needs are. That's where the experts come in.

Trying to find those who need help the most

Detroit's Hart Plaza doesn't look like a home for the destitute.

In the summer, the sprawling complex is bustling with music festivals. But by winter, the 14-acre plaza

is virtually abandoned.

While indoor spaces sit empty, homeless residents shiver in the open-air stairwells or in outdoor corners.

Transient men and women are so well hidden in the plaza's crevices, most passersby don't even notice them.

But medical students Ellie Small and Mari Gener know exactly where they are.

"I come here a couple times a week," said Small, a student in Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine.

"It's interesting because there's a whole different crowd in the morning, in the middle of the day, and at night."

Small is the president of MSU's [Detroit Street Care](#), a volunteer-based outreach program that provides medical support and supplies to the homeless.

The group -- along with similar organizations at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan -- work with Scott and the Empowerment Plan to help figure out where the coats should go.

Scott said even though she's a Detroit native, "I wouldn't know to go into Hart Plaza."

"There's so many great outreach organizations and soup kitchens, and those are the people that we partner with," Scott said. "And that's how we do it around the world, too."

Police officers also help with the mission, stashing coats in the back of their cruisers for homeless people they encounter, Scott said.

All this started with a CEO who had zero formal executive training.

"The lack of business knowledge that I had served me well in a weird way," Scott said. Had she gone to business school, "I don't know if I would have taken the risks that I did."

Employees don't just work. They're paid to learn

While employees get paid for a full work week, they only spend 60% of that time actually making coats.

The other 40% is spent in classes designed to ensure they stay self-sufficient after they graduate from the Empowerment Plan.

These classes, taught by volunteers and other organizations, include financial literacy, driver's education, GED test preparation and domestic violence recovery.

If not for her financial literacy class, Morgan Ealy said she'd probably face a lifetime of bad credit and

poor financial decisions.

"I didn't know that if you get a credit card, you don't just max out your credit card and pay it off -- that you're only supposed to spend half, or less than half," the 25-year-old said.

Ealy became homeless several years ago after losing her mother and losing her retail job due to lack of transportation.

Now at the Empowerment Plan, she's learning life skills that she might have never learned -- like how to budget her income.

She took the financial health class and had \$30 in savings a full week after payday.

"That was the first time I realized I was saving money," Ealy said.

"It made me feel amazing. I was like, 'I got \$30!' Even though it wasn't a lot ... It made me feel capable of actually saving more. And I'm ready to do that."

'Why can't I do something like that?'

Colin Michael Lindsey's life has taken tumultuous turns in his 52 years.

It's "almost impossible" for him to get a job because of a felony conviction, he said. Lindsey said he's applied for 30 jobs, including in the fast-food industry, but has been rejected from them all.

Now living in a tent under a bridge, Lindsey wakes up before dawn to walk to the [Pope Francis Center](#), where he can get a hot meal, a warm shower, and today, an unexpected new coat.

His jaw drops when he learns his new coat was made by other homeless people.

"I didn't know that!" he exclaimed. "Why can't I do something like that? I'd be willing to do something like that!"

But getting a job at the Empowerment Plan is competitive. Applicants go through several rounds of interviews, and the few dozen employees working at any time represent just a tiny fraction of the [2,200 chronically homeless people in Detroit](#).

Still, Lindsey said he's inspired by the Empowerment Plan and hopes to work there one day.

"That's what I want to do," he said. "And it's something you can be proud of. You can look at (the coat) and say, 'Hey, I made that.'"

She started her own business after the Empowerment Plan

Kenyetta Caldwell broke down in tears the day she walked into the Empowerment Plan.

The mother of eight had been riding a bus two hours each way to manufacturing job that paid \$8.50 an

hour. Unable to make ends meet, she found herself homeless and about to go to a shelter.

That's when her sister told her about the Empowerment Plan. Caldwell showed up and came face-to-face with the CEO.

"I begged and begged. ... I broke down in front of her," Caldwell recalled. "I said, 'I don't know what I'm going to do if I don't get this job.'"

Scott, who normally hires employees from homeless shelters, decided to take a chance on Caldwell.

It was a good hire. Caldwell shot up the ranks and became a production manager, making \$16 an hour in 2016.

But after just 1 1/2 years, she left the Empowerment Plan.

"I got bit by the entrepreneur bug, and I wanted to do something different," Caldwell said.

She used her love of sewing to launch her own clothing line -- [Creo by Keca](#).

"Creo" means "create" in Latin. "Keca" comes from the first two letters of Caldwell's first and last names.

Just a few years into her new business, Caldwell's work has been featured in local celebrity fashion shoots. She also makes custom designs and sells her clothing online.

Last year, when a low-budget movie featured her designs and listed her in the credits, Caldwell said she felt "on top of the world."

"The story gets better as you keep writing it," she said.

But her level of success wouldn't have been possible without the Empowerment Plan, she said.

Now, instead of begging the CEO for a job, some Empowerment Plan employees are begging Caldwell to hire them.

"I get occasional calls about 'Are you hiring? We want to go!'" Caldwell said.

She doesn't have enough funds yet for employees of her own. But Caldwell wants to hire other graduates of the Empowerment Plan.

"My goal is to get my ladies," she said. "I've seen some very brilliant minds come through."

1a] [This coat isn't just saving lives. It's creating careers the homeless](#) – YouTube 3:45 minutes

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us." Albert Schweitzer

“Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love.” Lao Tzu

2] [Bipolar MD: My Life as a Physician with Bipolar Disorder: Paul Golden MD](#): Amazon.com: Books

Bipolar Disorder Doesn't Have to Hold You Back An authentic journey into darkness and light, *Bipolar MD: My Life As a Physician with Bipolar Disease* by Paul Golden, M.D. delves into what it's like to live with bipolar disorder every day but still carry on a full and satisfying life. Speaking from personal experience and professional practice, Golden reveals all the struggles and triumphs of living with mental illness as a medical professional. With remarkable honesty, he reveals the details of his manic episodes, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, losing his first wife, shooting himself multiple times and having his medical license taken away upon retirement, but also the many lives he touched and the patients he saved. "Love, family, education, a career and a purpose are all within reach," says Dr. Golden. "Those who suffer from bipolar disorder can find both personal AND professional success!" *Bipolar MD: My Life As a Physician with Bipolar Disorder* is the story of a bipolar man who didn't let his illness hold him back.

Paul Golden, M.D. is a retired physician, an advocate for those with mental illness, a husband, a father to two children and the author of the books "[An Insider's View Of Bipolar Disease](#)" and "*Bipolar MD: A Doctor's Memoir of Life with Bipolar Disorder.*"

“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“There is no better than adversity. Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance next time.” Malcolm X

3] [Sarah Knutson – Author, Advocate](#)

Sarah Knutson is an ex-lawyer, ex-therapist, survivor-activist. She is a blogger for Mad in America (<https://www.madinamerica.com/author/sarah-knutson/>) and a founder/ organizer of Peerly Human, a social justice and trauma-informed community for self-help and mutual aid. Peerly Human offers free, peer-run, peer-funded self-help and mutual aid opportunities. Outside of the reach of mainstream mental health and the oppressive "mandatory reporting," we empower each other to offer, receive, share and experience the radically transformative power of unconditional personhood and our own authentic, vulnerable humanity. You can learn about our growing community here:

<https://peerlyhuman.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>

I wrote the articles below to explain to a general audience how the ordinary stress response and ordinary life stressors potentially play a huge role in what mainstream society calls "mental illness." When you consider the chronic impacts and do a careful analysis, the overlap between the symptoms of stress (both physically and mentally) and the DSM symptoms of "mental illness" is so pervasive that it's hard to tell whether anything is left that the stress response could not potentially explain. The have been well received on MIA (ranging from 10,000 to 32,000 hits per piece and counting).

- Anatomy of a Suicide: Stress and the Human Condition, <https://www.madinamerica.com/2019/12/anatomy-of-a-suicide-stress-and-the-human-condition/> (32,000+ hits)

- Traumatic Immobility: Depression as a Stress Response, <https://www.madinamerica.com/2019/01/traumatic-immobility-depression-stress-response/> (30,000+ hits)
- How the Human Stress Response Explains Away “Bipolar Disorder”, <https://www.madinamerica.com/2018/04/how-the-human-stress-response-explains-away-bipolar-disorder/> (almost 10,000 hits)

The hope in doing so is to resource peers and peer organizations to argue to funders that the lay public, and especially those with lived experience, play a crucial role in reversing the "mental illness" epidemic. Moreover, this is true even with heavy hitter diagnoses like suicide, bipolar and major depression. All too often, providers claim that such diagnoses are far too dangerous for peers or the lay public to be involved with. As the argument goes, it takes years of college and professional training to understand the issues and treatment needs. But to the extent that "mental illness" is about stress and the garden variety challenges that all of us have to face as part of the human condition, then everyone potentially has relevant experiences that can be helpful. And this is especially true for those of us with lived experience who have met such challenges and come through on the other side.

Factoring in the impact of stress, a logical division of labor between peers and professionals could thus be conceptualized as this:

1. To the extent that chemical or genetic issues are the sole cause of difficulties, providers are the experts on the DSM/ ICD, treatment plans and all the protocols that go along with that.
2. To the extent that stress is driving distress, peers are the experts on the life conditions that stress people out and how to navigate those practically in the community.
3. Peers are also ideally positioned, as people who have undergone similar struggles, to help others seek personally meaningful reasons for attempting to change based on self-determined values of their choosing.
4. Equally important, since the symptoms of stress and psychiatric disorders often overlap, peer involvement in clinical settings is crucial in helping to eliminate potential sources of stress that may result simply from a person being away from home and placed in an unfamiliar environment, e.g., an emergency room or psychiatric ward. Someone who has lived experience (especially of being hospitalized and having come through on the other side) is uniquely positioned to provide a calming influence and therefore can help reduce this kind of "noise" in the clinical evaluation and treatment process.
5. Finally, peer workers thus serve an important function in breaking down barriers and mitigating the iatrogenic, socially isolating impacts of psychiatric diagnosis. Due to rampant discrimination, the stress likely becomes much worse when someone is siloed into treatment and no one in their past life will talk to them anymore because of stigma, including the popular myth that "mental illness" is too complicated for lay people to understand.

Thank you for your consideration!

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/skknut/> <https://www.madinamerica.com/author/sarah-knutson/>

“Most of us spend our lives protecting ourselves from losses that have already happened.” Geneen Roth

"If I am overwhelmed, I may be trying to do too much. Today I will try to 'Keep it simple.'" Courage to Change, Al-Anon

4] [‘Heart Berries’ author Terese Marie Mailhot](#) answers your questions - PBS NewsHour - Video & transcript

Terese Marie Mailhot, author of our January pick for the NewsHour-New York Times book club, Now Read This, joins Jeffrey Brown to answer reader questions on “Heart Berries,” and Jeff announces the February book selection.

The conversation is part of Canvas, our ongoing series on arts and culture.

Our book club pick for January is a memoir by a young woman writing her way out of pain.

It's titled "Heart Berries," tells of growing up on the Seabird Island Indian Reservation in British Columbia, of traumas and trials, of a breakdown, and perhaps a breakthrough through the very act of writing.

Author Terese Marie Mailhot joins us now from Lafayette, Indiana.

[Video only](#) 6:43 minutes

4a] [Heart Berries: A Memoir: Terese Marie Mailhot](#): Goodreads

"A sledgehammer. . . . Her experiments with structure and language . . . are in the service of trying to find new ways to think about the past, trauma, repetition and reconciliation, which might be a way of saying a new model for the memoir." —Parul Sehgal, *The New York Times*

Heart Berries is a powerful, poetic memoir of a woman's coming of age on the Seabird Island Band in the Pacific Northwest. Having survived a profoundly dysfunctional upbringing only to find herself hospitalized and facing a dual diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder and bipolar II disorder; Terese Marie Mailhot is given a notebook and begins to write her way out of trauma. The triumphant result is *Heart Berries*, a memorial for Mailhot's mother, a social worker and activist who had a thing for prisoners; a story of reconciliation with her father - an abusive drunk and a brilliant artist - who was murdered under mysterious circumstances; and an elegy on how difficult it is to love someone while dragging the long shadows of shame.

Mailhot trusts the reader to understand that memory isn't exact, but melded to imagination, pain, and what we can bring ourselves to accept. Her unique and at times unsettling voice graphically illustrates her mental state. As she writes, she discovers her own true voice, seizes control of her story, and, in so doing, reestablishes her connection to her family, to her people, and to her place in the world.

"Children learn from what they see. We need to set an example of truth and action." Howard Rainer, *Taos Pueblo-Creek*

"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave." Dakota

5] [Kindness improves our nervous systems](#) - Big Think by [Jaimee Bell](#)

[Please note, you can also listen to the article at the website. MS]

Our bodies are chronically in "threat mode"- but being kind recalibrates our nervous system

Being kind to others positively impacts your physical and mental health, according to this groundbreaking research by Stanford professor Dr. James Doty.

- The default "rest mode" of our brains is often taken over by a "threat mode" setting because of our stressful, "on-the-go" lifestyles. When we are chronically in threat mode, this leaves us with less capacity for compassion.
- Showing compassion or acting kind to others can actually change your physiology, taking you out of threat mode and putting you back into your natural "rest and digest" mode.
- Research by a well-known Stanford professor Dr. James Doty has shown that acts of kindness or compassion that put us back into our "rest mode" can have lasting positive impacts on our physical and mental health.

Kindness is a virtue that is admired and applauded, in most cases. But did you know that being kind can also be good for your health? In fact, being compassionate to others can actually reset our consistently stressed systems back into our default "rest mode", causing all kinds of positive effects to our overall health.

Our nervous system was never meant to be in "threat mode" all the time

According to [Dr. James Doty](#), Stanford professor and author of [*Into the Magic Shop: A Neurosurgeon's Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain and Secrets of the Heart*](#), the nervous system doesn't function optimally if it's in threat mode all the time. And yet, our adrenaline-fueled, "on-the-go" lifestyles have us operating mainly in threat mode, which can be one of the reasons we contract a variety of different illnesses.

Our bodies release inflammatory proteins in response to stress. Because of this release, our nervous system shows a decrease in the capabilities of our immune system, which is what responds to threats such as germs or bacteria that cause illnesses.

The constant over-stimulation of our nervous systems caused by our fast-paced way of living also makes us much more inclined to jump to (often judgmental) conclusions about other people. This kind of quick judgment dulls our own ability to act out of compassion for others. That, in turn, leaves us operating in a constant threat mode, which has negative long-term effects on our health.

Kindness and compassion reset us into "rest mode", starting in the nervous system

The ability to feel and act out of compassion for others can have a huge effect on your overall health. Dr. Doty explains it best in [this Uplift article](#):

"When someone acts with compassionate intentions, this has a huge, huge positive effect on their physiology. It takes them out of threat mode and puts them into the rest and digest mode. What happens

when that occurs is it changes how they respond to events."

According to Dr. Doty, instead of a quick response that is often based on fear, anxiety or stress, our response time is slower and more deliberate, which tends to result in more effective, more creative and more compassionate actions. We are able to change the responses we have to events because we are allowing the executive control area of our brain to function at the highest level.

Several studies at [Emory University](#) have demonstrated this and given results that support the idea that regular compassionate acts or compassion-based meditation practices can reduce negative neuroendocrine interactions in our brains (which are the interactions between our nervous system and the endocrine system).

The sympathetic nervous system vs the parasympathetic nervous system

When we switch to our parasympathetic nervous system (which we instinctively do when we act out of compassion), we flip out of the sympathetic nervous system that most of us live in due to our busy lifestyles.

When this switch happens, our heart rate variability increases, which causes a boost in our immune system. This immune system boost can help us fight off infections or illnesses.

Now, let's talk about telomeres. To visualize them, you can imagine small caps that protect the ends of chromosomes during cell division. Telomeres get shorter each time a chromosome copies itself during cell division, which happens constantly. Eventually, telomeres get too short to do their job of protecting the genetic information stored in the chromosomes, which causes the cells to eventually stop replicating—a process known as cell death. This is how telomeres act as an aging clock in every cell we have; the faster your telomeres shorten, the more advanced the aging process becomes.

[Research by Dr. Doty](#) has shown that one of the long-term positive effects of living in our parasympathetic nervous system (referred to as our "resting" mode) is that our telomeres actually increase in length.

In theory, over time, being kind and compassionate can actually slow down the aging process in some of the cells of our body.

Just as showing compassion can recalibrate our nervous systems out of threat mode and back into resting mode, experiencing compassion or kindness from others also has a positive impact on our systems. Research by Stony Brook University professor [Stephanie Brown](#) has proven that experiencing compassion can lead to [tremendous improvements](#) in our mental and physical well-being, as well.

Be kind. It's good for your health.

This ground-breaking research allow us to [understand the benefits](#) that kind human interactions can have on the health of our minds and bodies.

The positive ripple effect that comes from being kind doesn't just impact our health, but it can also impact our interactions with others and set off a positive chain reaction with far-reaching benefits

across entire communities. Resetting our own systems into resting mode by taking ourselves out of threat mode can allow us to process things more clearly and make better choices.

In a world where you can be pretty much anything, be kind. It's good for your health.

"We need more light about each other. Light creates understanding, understanding creates love, love creates patience, and patience creates unity." Malcolm X

"It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is." Desiderius Erasmus

6] [You Are Alive For A Reason](#) - You Tube 5:15 minutes

Contrary to what you may have heard, you are needed in this world.

[Sustainable Human](#) - Sustainable Human is a 501c3 non-profit started by a husband and wife team (Chris and Dawn Agnos) whose mission is to examine the underlying stories that give rise to the environmental, social, and economic crises of our time and offer new stories that help humanity to live in harmony with each other and the biosphere. Learn more: <https://sustainablehuman.org/>

"When you know who you are; when your mission is clear and you burn with the inner fire of unbreakable will; no cold can touch your heart; no deluge can dampen your purpose. You know that you are alive." Chief Seattle, Duwamish

"If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it." Toni Morrison

7] [Rising Sun Expression](#) - An artistic organization to help empower people with mental health and/or substance abuse issues to heal and gain purpose through art in all forms. Family and friends are welcome.

Our Story - Having experienced mental health issues and substance abuse difficulties we found healing and peace in the arts. We have utilized many other sources of recovery to put our lives back together. Everyone has an individual path and different struggles. None of us is immune. Rising Sun Expression has been founded to offer people of the community another "Avenue" for personal growth and transformation. It is not meant to replace what is already working in our lives, but to enhance what we in the recovery community or those seeking a way out already have in place. We welcome all including family, friends, or anyone else who has been touched by psychiatric disorders and/or addiction to join us to heal. We also advocate to end the stigma associated with these significant difficulties and offer hope to all who are willing to listen.

Parable - The addict, who suffered from a psychiatric disorder, was stuck in a deep well. He cried out for help. Two people walked by, they were unable to help. Finally, an artist, who was in recovery, strolled past. The person in the well cried out again. The artist jumped into the well. The afflicted person asked, "Why did you do that? Now we're both stuck here." The artist replied, "I have been here before and I know the way out." - In loving memory Story adapted from Sam Madia. (09/12/1952-01/29/2020)

Joel's Story (Founder)

My name is Joel and I am an artist, who has bipolar disorder. I have been depressed all my life. I felt the weight of the world's problems upon my shoulders. During my adolescence I suffered from the affliction known as obsessive compulsive disorder. Over time the obsessions and compulsions began to subside. Eventually, even the depression gave as I matured.

However, a dramatic turn of events occurred when I returned to university to complete my bachelor's degree at age 27. I had my first manic episode and went into a three month psychosis where I traversed alternate realities, traveled through time, and felt invincible. During this period I was hospitalized several times because I believed in the reality that was my waking nightmare, so I would quit taking my medication. Eventually, I admitted defeat and gave into the doctor's orders.

I began to heal and completed my BA in Business Communications from DePaul University. The last eighteen years since my initiation into the world that is bipolar have not always been easy. There have been many highs and lows. Some quite significant, others not so much. I used drugs and alcohol to numb the pain that the medication often didn't relieve. About eight years ago I got clean and sober. Amazingly enough my medication began to do what it was intended, keep me stable. However, that was not always the case. I was able to put together years of recovery from addiction, yet still suffered psychologically.

I have been a creative my entire life, I lived in my head. The only safe place I had to dwell. I have my own space now and I am able to create like never before. The arts are helping me to heal. I used to just survive and now I thrive.

[Events](#) [Contact us](#)

“Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.” Helen Keller

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” Hans Hoffman

8] [Study supports long-term benefits of non-drug therapies for pain](#) - By Mike Richman
VA Research Communications

"It made sense that if non-drug treatments are good at managing pain, their effect would go beyond only pain relief."

A new study finds that non-drug therapies given to service members with chronic pain may reduce the risk of long-term adverse outcomes, such as alcohol and drug disorder and self-induced injuries, including suicide attempts.

The [findings](#) appeared online Oct. 28, 2019, in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.

The researchers concluded that service members with chronic pain who received non-drug therapies while in the military, such as massage or acupuncture, had a “significantly lower” risk in VA of new

onset alcohol or drug disorder; poisoning with opioids and related narcotics, barbiturates, or sedatives; and suicidal thoughts and attempts. The research team did not study death by suicide.

Dr. Esther Meerwijk, a statistician and suicide researcher at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System in California, was the lead author. Her team reviewed the VA health records of more than 140,000 Army soldiers who reported chronic pain following their deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan from 2008 to 2014. The most common types of chronic pain were joint discomfort, back and neck issues, and other problems involving muscles or bones.

“Chronic pain is associated with adverse outcomes, such as substance use and suicidal thoughts and behavior,” Meerwijk says. “It made sense that if non-drug treatments are good at managing pain, their effect would go beyond only pain relief. However, I was surprised that the results of our analyses held, despite our attempts to prove them wrong. Often enough in research, significant results disappear once you start controlling for variables that can possibly affect the outcome of the study.”

The researchers controlled for length of a service member’s care in VA, whether the Veteran had been exposed to non-drug therapies in VA, and the number of days a VA patient received opioids. They also tested to see if service members who received non-drug treatments were healthier to begin with and if more Veterans who received non-drug therapies died before any of the adverse outcomes occurred.

Research part of large observational study

It’s possible, Meerwijk explains, that soldiers who received non-drug therapies didn’t have to rely on opioids as much for their chronic pain and are therefore at lower risk for adverse outcomes. “We may also be seeing a genuine effect of non-drug therapies that occurs regardless of whether soldiers use opioids or not,” she says. “If non-drug treatments make chronic pain more bearable, people may be more likely to have positive experiences in life. That makes them less likely to have thoughts of suicide or to turn to drugs.”

Meerwijk’s research is part of the [Substance Use and Psychological Injury Combat Study \(SUPIC\)](#), the largest and longest observational study to date of pain management and behavioral health conditions in Army service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. VA has participated in the study, which is led by [Dr. Mary Jo Larson of Brandeis University](#) in Massachusetts. Meerwijk became part of the study in 2016.

“When I joined the team, one of the goals was to study long-term effects of non-drug treatments for chronic pain received in the military,” Meerwijk says. “Given my research interests in suicide and suicide prevention, it was suggested we look at suicidal thoughts and attempts as outcomes. Given SUPIC’s interest in substance use, specifically opioids, we broadened the analysis to serious adverse events related to opioid use and chronic pain.”

Chronic pain is often managed with prescription opioids. Especially at higher doses and longer length of use, opioids have been linked to a greater risk of substance use disorder and self-inflicted injuries, such as opioid overdose and suicide attempts.

While in the service, the soldiers included in the study had received non-drug therapies that included

acupuncture, dry needling, biofeedback, chiropractic care, massage, exercise therapy, cold laser therapy, osteopathic spinal manipulation, electrical nerve stimulation, ultrasonography, superficial heat treatment, traction, and lumbar supports. Ultrasonography is a technique that uses echoes of ultrasound pulses to pinpoint objects or areas of different density in the body.

In the study, the researchers compared service members with chronic pain who did or didn't receive non-drug therapies and described the links between such treatments in the military and long-term adverse outcomes. They determined that soldiers who received non-drug therapies were at lower risk of being diagnosed with drug use disorders and self-inflicted injuries, such as accidental poisoning and suicidal ideation—which is the thought of taking one's own life.

The largest difference was seen with regard to accidental poisoning with opioids or other pain drugs: Those who received non-drug therapies were 35% less likely to injure themselves than those who didn't receive such therapies while in the service. Service members who received non-drug treatments were also at lower risk down the road for these adverse outcomes:

- Self-inflicted injuries, including suicide attempts: 17% less likely.
- Suicidal ideation: 12% less likely.
- Alcohol or drug use disorders: 8% less likely.

The results supported the researchers' hypothesis that use of non-drug therapies in the military would be linked to fewer negative outcomes for patients in the VA system.

Study doesn't prove cause and effect

The median age of the cohort was 26, and the median length of deployment was a little more than a year. The researchers focused on outcomes that are tied to chronic pain and opioid use. Alcohol or drug use disorders were the most frequent adverse outcomes, followed by suicidal ideation and self-inflicted injuries including suicide attempts. Poisoning with opioids, related narcotics, barbiturates, or sedatives was least frequent.

Because the study was only observational, based on past treatment data, and didn't include a randomized clinical trial, it doesn't show cause and effect—only an association. The researchers did use a method called propensity matching, which allowed them to carefully analyze differences and similarities between those soldiers who received non-drug therapies for pain and those who did not, to try and tease out the effects of that variable.

“We aimed statistically to create groups that, with the exception of receiving non-drug therapies, were as similar as possible,” Meerwijk says. “But we were limited to the observational data we had. That means that the groups may have been different in ways that we didn't measure and, as a consequence, we don't know about. We cannot rule out that one of those ways explains why we found what we found.”

Another limitation of the study is that the researchers didn't look at specific non-drug therapies to gauge the extent to which they may have contributed—or not—to the overall finding.

“Another thing to keep in mind is we didn't look at effects of individual non-drug therapies. We treated

them as one,” says Meerwijk. “Most likely, only some of the therapies that we included are responsible for the effect that we reported, whereas others may have had no effect at all, assuming there’s no other variable that explains our findings.”

[Other researchers](#) have found that service members who use non-drug therapies may be healthier to start with than those who do not and, as such, may be at lower risk for poor outcomes. Meerwijk’s team did not find that to be the case. They documented that service members who received non-drug treatments in the military were more often hospitalized and had longer inpatient stays, for example, than their peers who had not received such therapies. They were also more likely to be diagnosed with mental disorders, except alcohol use disorder.

Meerwijk is confident her study will raise awareness about the potential long-term benefits of non-drug therapies. She notes that representatives from [VA’s Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#) have shown interest in attending conference calls with her team on the findings of the study. VA’s Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation, which supports the agency’s [Whole Health](#) initiative, has also reviewed the study, she adds.

The study was funded by VA, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.

“You have to look deeper, way below the anger, the hurt, the hate, the jealousy, the self-pity, way down deeper where the dreams lie, son. Find your dream. It’s the pursuit of the dream that heals you.” Billy Mills

“Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined.” Toni Morrison

9] [Unity Radio WUTY 97.9FM Worcester, MA](#) ALL NEW Talking Wellness with Mike MacInnis.

Today's special guest is Michael Skinner, author of Surviving Spirit Network who is also an advocate, trainer, consultant and presenter on the issues of trauma, abuse and mental health concerns.

<https://www.facebook.com/unityradioma/videos/529736251288799/> - Radio show interview

[Talking Wellness Mondays](#) 1pm-2pm

Hear from the movers and shakers in Central MA and elsewhere who are on the front lines of providing services, as well as fighting back against the stigma of mental health diagnosis. Always with a focus on the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, Mike uses his connections as Program Manager for Worcester’s own Kiva Center to bring the spotlight on the agencies and the people in the forefront of changing the illness model into a wellness model. Insightful, thoughtful and meaningful conversations about a topic long overdue for a place in mainstream conversation.

[THE KIVA CENTER](#) A Trauma Informed and Recovery Based Outcome Model

Unity Radio is designed to raise the awareness of community needs and act as a media resource within the neighborhoods we live, by encouraging public dialogue and promoting equal access to community

resources

“There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.” John Holmes

“Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.” Booker T. Washington

10] [African American History Month](#)

The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled with adversity to achieve full citizenship in American society.

As a Harvard-trained historian, Carter G. Woodson, like W. E. B. Du Bois before him, believed that truth could not be denied and that reason would prevail over prejudice. His hopes to raise awareness of African American’s contributions to civilization was realized when he and the organization he founded, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), conceived and announced Negro History Week in 1925. The event was first celebrated during a week in February 1926 that encompassed the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The response was overwhelming: Black history clubs sprang up; teachers demanded materials to instruct their pupils; and progressive whites, not simply white scholars and philanthropists, stepped forward to endorse the effort.

By the time of Woodson’s death in 1950, Negro History Week had become a central part of African American life and substantial progress had been made in bringing more Americans to appreciate the celebration. At mid-century, mayors of cities nationwide issued proclamations noting Negro History Week. The Black Awakening of the 1960s dramatically expanded the consciousness of African Americans about the importance of black history, and the Civil Rights movement focused Americans of all color on the subject of the contributions of African Americans to our history and culture.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” That year, fifty years after the first celebration, the association held the first African American History Month. By this time, the entire nation had come to recognize the importance of Black history in the drama of the American story. Since then each American president has issued African American History Month proclamations. And the association—now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)—continues to promote the study of Black history all year.

(Excerpt from an essay by Daryl Michael Scott, Howard University, for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History)

10a] [Who Killed Malcolm X?](#) - Wikipedia [a compelling film and worth watching. MS]

Who Killed Malcolm X? is 2020 documentary miniseries directed by Rachel Dretzin and Phil Bertelsen. Produced by Fusion, the series began streaming on [Netflix](#) on February 7, 2020.[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)

The documentary follows the work of Abdur-Rahman Muhammad, a historian and tour guide in Washington, D.C., who for years has been investigating the assassination of [Malcolm X \[1\]\[4\]](#)

& ['Who Killed Malcolm X' explores mystery of his murder](#) – PBS News – YouTube 5:54 minutes

It's been 55 years since human-rights activist Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem in front of hundreds of witnesses. But new evidence suggests two of the three men convicted of the crime are actually innocent. A new Netflix documentary, "Who Killed Malcolm X," explores the mysteries surrounding the murder. Ivette Feliciano sat down with a historian and one of the film's directors and has more.

"I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catchers mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back." Maya Angelou

"A man who stands for nothing will fall for anything." Malcolm X

11] [Ten Tips for Aging with Depression](#) By Jan McDaniel @ Psych Central

Major [Depression](#) - the clinical type - is not a normal part of aging. Though it can appear at any age, older adults are at an increased risk. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) distinguishes this condition from having "the blues" and likens it to other medical illnesses that are treatable, like diabetes or hypertension. Overwhelming sadness and [anxiety](#) can last for weeks at a time or much longer, with a wide range of other discouraging symptoms. Yet, there are things that can help.

Statistics tell us that later in life, at least one chronic disease will affect 80 percent of us. It naturally follows that having other illnesses, like heart disease or cancer or dealing with slow-downs in social, cognitive, or mobility functions make it likely that depression might be more common. Retirement is often a huge change in lifestyle and, while it may seem attractive to dream of the freedom to do whatever one chooses, the reality may be quite different as finances, structure, and productivity limit the desire of some to do anything at all. [Read the entire article](#)

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Theodore Roosevelt

12] [7 Podcasts That Can Help You Feel Just a Little Less Anxious](#) by [Emily Forney](#)

If you [struggle with anxiety](#), you know there's no quick fix. (It doesn't matter how many times [someone tells you to relax](#).) But finding things that work for you — outside of therapy and anything else your doctor recommends, of course — doesn't have to be so challenging. With the surge of podcasts, gaining access to professionals and creative thinkers is easier than ever. We've compiled a list of short, soothing podcasts you can listen to before bed, while in the shower, or during a particularly stressful moment that will [help you unwind](#) and find new ways to cope.

[Podcast links](#)

Also posted online - [The Best Books and Journals to Help Ease Your Anxiety in 2020](#)

“You may think that you are insignificant in this world. But someone drinks coffee from the favorite cup that you gave them. Someone heard a song on the radio that reminded them of you. Someone read the book that you recommended, and plunged headfirst into it. Someone smiled after a hard day's work, because they remembered the joke that you told them today. Someone loves them-self a little bit more, because you gave them a compliment. Never think that you have no influence whatsoever. Your trace, which you leave behind with every good deed, cannot be erased.” Unknown

Thank you & Take care, Michael

PS. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know – mikeskinner@comcast.net

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A diagnosis is not a destiny

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy - Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

[The Surviving Spirit Facebook Page](#)

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[@SurvivinSpirit](#) Twitter

[Michael Skinner Music](#) - Hope, Healing, & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health - Music, Resources, & Advocacy

Live performance of "Joy", "Brush Away Your Tears" & more @ [Michael Skinner – You Tube](#)

"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi