Re-thinking Mental Health Crisis Together

Staying Connected and Peer to Peer Crisis Response
On Mental Distress

*Distress* is the word used in other countries, rather than the terminology Mental Illness.

{Distress in Cambridge Dictionary: A state of extreme worry, sadness, or pain}

**PAIN!**

There is a relationship between expressions of mental distress and PAIN.
Pain results from:

Trauma--emotional or physical.

Sensitivity that causes people to feel things deeply, extremely

Fear: Fear from sensing one is experiencing things differently than people around them. What does this mean, and who can I trust with this?

Exclusion: Real or imagined, people experience being “othered” even within their own families--and even before they have a diagnostic label.
Understanding Mental Distress Means . . .

Coming to terms with the factors that impact mental well-being (and what we think mental well-being is.)

Question: Is mental well-being simply the absence of phenomena we now call “symptoms?”  NO!
FACTORS in OUR MENTAL WELL BEING:

- **BIOLOGICAL**
  Genetics; physiological related to trauma, even emotional trauma, nutritional intake!

- **SPIRITUAL**
  Perspective on the inner self especially in relationship to God or other fundamental framework for world view.

- **SOCIOLOGICAL**
  Our relationships with others, relatedness to social activity around us. Family relationships are important here!

- **PSYCHOLOGICAL**
  Mental processing of experiences. Can be inherent or learned from others or as survival/coping.

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“Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual”
Therefore, as distress arises . . .

It can look like many things and should not be dismissed simply clinical symptoms. These are experiences arising from pain and dissonance.

It is an expression of internal pain and turmoil and can cause a person to “pull away” from others because he/she/they do not feel safe with their internal experiences and may not know how to entrust these even to those who love them.

As the turmoil builds, it can express itself through extreme mental experiences such as delusions, hallucinations, etc.

Yet this is the most important time to try to connect with a loved one, help him or her feel safe. (“HOLD SPACE”). If you demonstrate fear, they know this, and this can amplify the problem. (Emotional CPR and Open Dialogue)
FINDING CONNECTION

A key priority during distress or crisis is simply connecting socially. When we connect with another through a crisis, we empower that person because he feels related to another even in midst of an extreme challenge.

There is safety and hope in this.
Crisis as an Opportunity

“The concept of crisis in mental health is an interesting one. In spite of the fact that many traditional theorists have viewed crisis as an opportunity for growth and as an essential experience in the context of one’s development (Erikson, 1976), we in mental health want to medicate it, lock it up, and restrain it. We have forgotten that perhaps there is something we can learn from this experience, something that will enable us to “do” it differently and understand ourselves in new ways.”

Shery Meade, pioneer and researcher in peer support
Peer to Peer Support

The Healing Function of the Mutuality of Experience

And GreenTree’s Peer Crisis Support
Who, then, can so softly bind up the wound of another as he who has felt the same wound himself?

Thomas Jefferson
Peer Crisis Support

The **mutuality of experiences** is critical to supporting a person through extreme experiences:

1) It helps another person feel safe from judgement or dismissal
2) It helps someone trust the support of another, and
3) It offers great and necessary hope because the supporting peer is a survivor who may have had very similar experiences!

“*I’ve been through something very similar to what YOU are going through. Let me come alongside and offer you hope.*”
GreenTree’s Crisis Support

Three components:

- **Greet individuals at the Emergency Department** upon referral from WFU Baptist ED. Engage and invite.
- **Host them as a guest at The Refuge** where people can find rest, nourishment, have hygiene needs met—just be re-humanized, becoming more emotionally grounded.
- **Assist with peer to peer support and advocacy that can help people toward solutions.** This includes connecting them with services, other community assets (housing, recovery programming) as well as peer developed social offerings and programming at GreenTree Peer Center.
The Longer View . . .

Our aim is to offer . . .

**Individual solutions:** Crisis support that re-directs people toward solutions, resilience, reclamation of a healthy life/recovery. *A crisis can be a doorway to growth and progress!*

**Community solutions:** Alternatives that prevent the use of coercion, that don’t focus only on pathology, but focus on responsiveness and role as citizens. We want to remove barriers that cause us to default to law enforcement or other kinds of enforcement. *THIS validates humanity instead of dismissing it.*
What this looks like- (Can you envision this with us?)

- A strengthened local peer social setting and network where people can find validation through each other and then feel empowered to participate in other communities.
- A peer crisis support setting where police officers and mental health EMS workers can bring folks whom they have engaged to a safe and supporting environment by peers who can empower them to become more emotionally grounded and relationally connected.
- A peer respite house where people can seek crisis support early and stay a few days as may be helpful.
- A family and youth space where youths can be supported while family members are met with support that helps them to stay connected to their loved ones instead of further straining these important relationships.
“Peer support is a culture of healing. As people practice new ways of “being” through even the most difficult times, possibilities for breaking old patterns and creating new opportunities are endless.

Crisis then just becomes another word for redefining our experience and ourselves so that instead of needing to be locked up, we can begin to break free.”

- Shery Meade
GreenTree Peer Support Program

Peer Center and Peer Crisis Support at The Refuge

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