

December 2021

Upcoming events

NH Mental Health Peer Alliance, Tue, Dec 21, 10 AM. Come, let your voice be heard. The Alliance is made up of adults with lived experience who want to improve mental health services in NH, organizing to advocate, educate, and inform. Please contact tina@connectionspeersupport.org for an invitation.

Board of Directors, Wed, Dec 15, 5 PM. Members and staff welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact tina@connectionspeersupport.org for an invitation.

Community Meeting, Thur, Dec 9, 1:15 PM Whether offering ideas for new groups or getting updates on Step Up/Step Down, this a chance for our entire community to gather and be involved in making Connections even better. We need your voice!



Connections Welcomes New Executive Director, Community Excursions, Seasonal Reflections, and More



Around Connections, we are getting a lot of practice in the Intentional Peer Support task of Moving Towards. This month we welcome a new Executive Director, continue to readjust to a “normal” schedule as a pandemic continues, and still welcome the holiday season by reaching out to each other. There is a lot happening here. Check it out!

OUR VOICES

Connections Welcomes New Executive Director



We are thrilled to introduce our new Executive Director, Mike Skinner. He is a multifaceted individual, a professional musician and composer, whose own lived experience in the mental health system has led him to a life of advocacy and passionate activism for peer support for more than thirty years.

In the 1980s Mike was a working musician, married, with three children. He had a good life but something felt off. Following a friend's suggestion, he began attending meetings of Adult Children of Alcoholics. "We didn't call it peer support back then but that's what it was. Later, when my PTSD and major depression hit and I was hospitalized (all of my hospitalizations were voluntary), my peer support was meeting fellow folks in those facilities - I still have connections to some of these folks."

The first few years were a struggle. "The depression and PTSD made the music sound and feel like a bunch of noise. I couldn't even drum. I had no sense of rhythm. My mental health providers told me in a low voice that I was mentally ill; I'd never play, never work again. That really fueled my anger. It's a soul-crushing trauma to be told you would never have a life again - that this is as good as it gets. It was peers who told me to pick up a guitar. That was my path back to music."

In the 1990s I started attending National Alliance on Mental Illness gatherings. Then I heard about peer support for mental health. There were several groups I joined. I was immersed in just trying to connect with other people and at first, I didn't say a word, just listened. I realized healing didn't have to be a cookie-cutter approach; my mantra was "Learn to listen, listen to learn" - the folks I met were a fountain of knowledge - EMDR, "This book has helped me," healthy food. I was learning anything and everything I could to help me heal- I tried everything.

In my life, I discovered the power of connection and healing, created community, created family that I know as peers. I am excited to be a part of growing that power at Connections and look forward to what we can learn from each other.

Eventually, I started bringing my guitar, singing a little, sharing my story, but hearing others' stories as well and realizing the trauma in people's lives. I've always been outspoken, I always stood up for people being picked on. Visiting, I saw friends being mistreated at the state hospital. I spoke out and the head of psychiatric nurses contacted me and asked me to speak to staff. I started getting invitations to speak and began giving workshops. I started The Surviving Spirit newsletter. Eventually, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) hired me as a consultant. We'd go to Washington, and we sat around the table with psychiatrists, medical professionals asking us, "What do we need to do?" I don't just go in to share my story. I go in to share all that I have heard, these collective stories that I've learned."

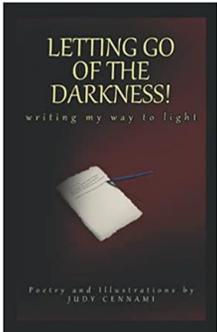
Now I'm here at Connections and am going back to my old mantra: "Learn to listen and listen to learn." What do we need to do? How do we make Connections better? How do we reach more people? There's a whole group of people who don't have a clue that we exist. How do we offer support so folks aren't just surviving, but thriving? How can we learn about how to help facilitate that?

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OUR VOICES

Authors Share their Journeys of Healing

From Darkness to Light



On Nov 18, local author Judy Cennami visited Connections to discuss her new book of poetry, *Letting Go of the Darkness*, made up of poems she wrote in her own path to healing. Thank you to Judy for graciously allowing us to include a piece of her work in this newsletter.

Finding my way

I cannot envision
My future path
For the road is hidden
Behind the fog

My mind will not venture
To what could be
Or what I can achieve
For I do not know

My spirit lost
Amongst my thoughts
I search for myself
Within the chaos

To set future goals
I find impossible
For each day that I get through
Is a goal accomplished



If You Ever Lose Hope

Our December guest speaker will be Jordana Chana Mayim. Her latest book, *If you Ever Lose Hope*, is also a tale of rising from darkness.

Jordan will be joining us remotely 10 AM, Thursday, Dec 2.



E EXCURSIONS

This past month we had a blast visiting the Portsmouth art scene's newest addition, The Museum of New Art, and its inaugural exhibit, *HEREARESPACESTHATBREATHE*, by Markus Linnenbrink. The artist explores color and emotion in a way that can be mind-bending. The exhibit inspired some great conversation and perhaps a future art project here at Connections; stay tuned!



SEASONAL VIBES



Holiday Outreach

In keeping with the spirit of both Connections and the season, we will be making additional outreach efforts this month. We will be creating and mailing holiday cards, visiting homebound members, and generally trying to connect with our community. If you would like to join in sharing some camaraderie and cheer, email nina@coonectionspeersupport.org for details.

The Gift of Life

I am grateful for getting the gift of my daughter. She is a true miracle. Her name is Danielle. I had wanted a baby for many years. I have polycystic ovaries. It made it hard to conceive. So when I got pregnant, I was excited for this gift of life.

The greatest gift I loved to give is my daughter Danielle to my parents. They were excited to know they were going to get the gift to be grandparents again. She has been a treasure to them ever since.

I love knowing that these gift exchanges of giving and receiving were a reality that I achieved in my life

Beth



CPSC SCHEDULE

- If you have any questions, please call 603 427 6966 or email info@connectionspeersupport.org
 - All groups are available in person or online. The link for all online groups is: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/709997085>. If you're new to GoToMeeting, you will be prompted to download the app. You can also click the link on our website calendar: connectionspeersupport.org
 - The center is available for drop-in peer support as well.
 - For group descriptions, please see our calendar at connectionspeersupport.org
 - All services are free and no referral is needed.
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- All groups are held at our center at 544 Islington St, Portsmouth, as well as online. The center is available for drop-ins as well.
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- Call us at 603-427-6966 by 4 PM the day before to arrange transportation to the center the following morning, and by 11 AM same day to come in the afternoon.
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- ***Please help us keep everyone safe!*** Masking is required in the center if you have not been vaccinated. All participants must wear a mask while in the van;
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- Our building may close for bad weather; we'll still be available by phone and online groups will run

MONDAY	TUESDAY
9:15 am Check-in 10:15 Habitudes 11:00 Hearing Voices 11:30 BYO Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 Insights and Self-Reflection 2:15 Dual Recovery	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Anxiety and Depression 11:30 BYO Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 Holiday Crafts
6	7
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27	28

DECEMBER 2021

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Living Thankfully 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 WRAP/IPS Topics	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Guest Author: Jordona Mayim, <i>If You Ever Lose Hope</i> 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 A.R.T./Board Games	Closed for staff Co-reflection
9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Living Thankfully 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 WRAP/IPS Topics	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Portsmouth Gingerbread House Exhibit 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 Community Meeting	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Holiday Card Workshop 11:30 BYO Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 Wellness for the Weekend
9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Living Thankfully 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 WRAP/IPS Topics 4:00 Board of Directors' Mtng	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Low Stress Holidays 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 A.R.T./Board Games	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Jewelry Making Workshop 11:30 BYO Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 Wellness for the Weekend
9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Living Thankfully 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 WRAP/IPS Topics	Closed for Christmas 	Closed for Christmas 
9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Living Thankfully 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 WRAP/IPS Topics	9:15 AM Check-in 10:15 Planning for the New Year 11:30 Community Lunch/Check-in/Neighborhood Walk 1:15 A.R.T./Board Games	 Closed for New Years

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Please send any additions or corrections to

info@connectionspeersupport.org

Crisis Text: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor
www.crisistextline.org

To connect with local resources in the Seacoast area, go to www.211nh.org OR call 211.

Service Link:

Your link to information and support services within your community.

<https://www.servicelink.nh.gov/>

Toll Free Number: 1-866-634-9412

Peer Respite:

Peer Respite is a 24-hour, peer-driven, short-term, non-medical alternative to hospitalization. To begin your pre-qualifying application and interview, call the following respite centers: **PEER RESPITE PROGRAMS ARE SUSPENDED DUE TO COVID-19. PLEASE CALL OR CHECK PSA WEBSITES FOR UPDATES**

Stepping Stones, Claremont, NH. Respite 603-543-1388, Stepping Stone Peer Center: 603-543-1388,

Toll Free: 1-888-582-0920,
www.steppingstonenextstep.org

H.E.A.R.T.S. Peer Support of Greater Nashua, Nashua, NH. Crisis Respite: 603-864-8769, Peer Support Center: 603-882-8400,
www.heartspsa.org.

Monadnock Area Peer Support Agency, Keene NH 03431, Respite 603-352-5093 or 866-352-5093,
www.monadnockpsa.org

Legal Help:

NH Legal Assistance 603 431-7411
NH Pro Bono 1 800-639-5290
Legal Advice & Referral Center 1800-639-5290
Disability Rights Center: 1-800-834-1721

Meals:

Salvation Army Food Truck parked on State St near South Church, **Portsmouth:** Dinner Daily 5:00 PM, Breakfast Mon-Fri 7:00-8:00 AM, Takeout only

Middle St Baptist Church, 18 Court St, Portsmouth Community Lunch, Wednesday 12 PM-1 PM. Takeout only

St. John's Church, Chapel St Portsmouth Community Lunch: Thursday 12 PM-1 PM. Takeout only

Community Health Services:

Families First: Providing health and dental care, as well as parent and family support.

Portsmouth location: 100 Campus Drive, Suite 12, Portsmouth 603-422-8208

Food Banks:

Operation Blessing: 600A Lafayette Rd, Portsmouth: Call for an

Gather: 210 West Rd, Suite 3, Portsmouth. Monday-Thursday 10 AM – 3 PM by appointment, Friday 9 AM-1 PM. info@gathernh.org or 603-436 9641

Mental Health/Substance Misuse Resources:

Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A. World Services, Inc., 24-Hour Hotline 1-800-593-3330; www.aa.org/

NAMI NH, www.naminh.org

National Suicide Prevention 1 800-273-TALK (8255),
www.suicidepreventionlife.org/

NH Specialized Information and Referral Center is available 24/7, 365 days a year. Simply dial 211

Granite Pathways Rehabilitation Services 10 Ferry St, Suite 319, Concord NH granitepathways.org

Safe Harbor, 603-225-9540,
<https://granitepathwaysnh.org/safe-harbor-recovery-center/>

Seacoast Mental Health Center, Inc. 603-431-6703, <http://www.smhc-nh.org/>

Seacoast Pathways, 603-812-9031,
<https://www.seacoastpathways.org>

Transportation:

ACT (Alliance for Community Transportation) 603-834-6010,
triplink@communityrides.org

COAST (Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation) (603) 743-5777 www.coastbus.org

FREE COMMUNITY EVENTS

Please note, that while all events are free, you may need to pre-register; just follow the links or call!

Portsmouth Public Library: Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain

Thur, Dec 9, 6:30

Chef, writer, adventurer, provocateur: Anthony Bourdain lived his life unabashedly. "Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain" is an intimate, behind-the-scenes look at how an anonymous chef became a world-renowned cultural icon. From Academy Award-winning filmmaker Morgan Neville ("20 Feet From Stardom," "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"), this unflinching look at Bourdain reverberates with his presence, in his own voice and in the way he indelibly impacted the world around him.

<https://portsmouthpl.librarycalendar.com/events/roadrunner>

This is My First Christmas Alone

Tue, Dec 7, 7PM

Join Jenny Emerson, LMFT and transitions life coach, as she walks you through celebrating your first Christmas after you have lost your loved one or experienced a divorce/separation. In this workshop you will develop strategies to handle difficult conversations, acknowledge the feelings of wanting to return to the past, create new and meaningful traditions. You will walk away from this free one-hour workshop with action steps and a plan to create a positive holiday season. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/this-is-my-first-christmas-alone-virtual-workshop-tickets-207430850257?aff=ebdssbonlinesearch>

Virtual Nature Journaling Workshop

Sat, Dec 18, 5 PM

All levels welcome, from beginner to advanced. There's always room to learn as long as you have curiosity and interest! The workshop includes sketching and painting with watercolors as you build your journal pages. Feel free to use any color medium of your choice. Topics vary each month. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/virtual-nature-journaling-workshop-tickets-192583752187?aff=erelexpmlt>

NAMI Ask the Expert: Navigating the Winter and Holiday Blues

Thur, Dec 2, 4 PM

Ask the Expert welcomes Dr. Christine Crawford, associate medical director at NAMI, will discuss symptoms that people can experience secondary to Seasonal Affective Disorder, as well as challenges that people can face over the course of the holiday season. Dr. Crawford will review strategies that people can use as they navigate the winter months in order to mitigate their stress during this period of time. After the presentation, NAMI's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ken Duckworth, will moderate a Q&A session. www.nami.org/asktheexpert

Portsmouth Welcome Center: Annual Gingerbread House Exhibit and Contest

Fri, Nov 26 thru Wed, Dec 22, 10 AM- 5 PM

Always a crowd favorite, this annual tradition is always a delight. Come see the amazing creations of individuals, families, and community groups in our area. Then vote for your favorites. You might be inspired to create your own. <https://portsmouthhistory.org/uncategorized/gingerbread/>

INSPIRATION

10 WAYS TO DEAL WITH THE HOLIDAY BLUES

1. Feel your feelings. The only way out is through.
2. Open up to others. You don't have to face this alone.
3. Meditate to quiet the thoughts that torment you.
4. Start a new holiday tradition instead of focusing on what once was.
5. Try light therapy to counter grey weather.
6. Make a gift. Creativity can be therapeutic.
7. Get moving. Exercise boosts endorphins.
8. Get outside, even if it's cold. Nature heals.
9. Treat yourself. A little self-care can go a long way.
10. Give to someone in need and get a helper's high.

LORI DESCHENE

tinybuddha.com

THE MONTHLY PUZZLE

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What's Happening at Connections?

R U M I Y A M A N A H C A N A D R O J T
O N F M U S E U M O F N E W A R T G J P
W H O V R O H D N N X A U L T K S X E N
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MIKE SKINNER
JEWELRY WORKSHOP
NH PEER ALLIANCE

MUSEUM OF NEW ART
JUDY CENNAMI
JORDANA CHANA MAYIM

HOLIDAY OUTREACH
LOW STRESS HOLIDAYS
LARRY HOSACK





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If you are struggling with mental health issues, you may benefit from being with others who have similar experiences. Intentional Peer Support is about making and sustaining mutually supportive

relationships. When people are mutual partners in a relationship, there is equality; one person is not the “helper” to the other, both benefit and can support each other working toward what we want in life. It is a positive, hope-based approach, helping us to determine actions we can take to reach our goals.

CPSC is open to everyone 18 and older seeking support in pursuing mental health wellness with an emphasis on hope and recovery.

All services are free and no referral is required.

Warmline telephone support, staffed by trained peers, available 5-10 PM seven days a week. Please call us at: 603-427-6966

Connections Peer Support Center

544 Islington St.

Portsmouth, NH 03801