Hope Beyond Hurt
Our goal is to support every client in recovering from trauma so she may build a life of health and fulfillment.

Since we first opened our doors, The Women’s Initiative has worked intentionally to decrease mental health stigma, recognized the impact of trauma on the individual, and created safe spaces and reduced barriers to access mental health services. We have done that by embracing a trauma-informed perspective, focusing on healing and recovery through evidence-based treatments and mind-body strategies.

Trauma is the result of physically or emotionally harmful experiences, and it can have lasting negative effects on a person’s ability to function and on overall well-being. Trauma includes emotional, physical or sexual abuse in childhood and/or adulthood. It also includes exposure to poverty, racism or political upheaval.

Trauma is also incredibly common. Among our clients, 95 percent report having been a victim of a crime.

With the right care, women can heal from trauma. We interviewed Ingrid Ramos, LPC, Resilience and Bienestar Programs Director, about trauma and healing.

What does trauma-informed care look like at The Women’s Initiative?
We see people from a compassionate perspective. Not just in counseling but in all we do in our agency. Trauma-informed care is all-encompassing: it looks organizationally at how we are treating clients from the point when they make a phone call, how they come into the waiting room, through their entire experience in therapy and groups. We want to make sure people have a positive experience in all aspects of their care. Trauma-informed care is also about understanding how trauma affects each person’s life and the relationships they have. We work to understand the implications of cultural and historical trauma and issues related to gender. For our staff and volunteers, we prioritize self-care. We also embrace cultural humility, which means creating space to learn from and grow with each other. The goal of all of this is to promote a culture based

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Transforming Challenge into Change: August 12 and Beyond

A Message From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Since our founding, The Women’s Initiative has believed in the power of “transforming challenge into change.” Every day we witness our clients’ capacity to do this, even under the most difficult circumstances. And, in our community, we are in the midst of a larger challenge that brings with it the opportunity for even more transformative healing and change.

With any trauma, the first and most important step toward healing is validating the experience and the pain that has been caused. Racial trauma is part of our history, part of August 12 and continues to occur in our community, particularly impacting the lives of African Americans every day. If we are to move forward, we must start by learning about and acknowledging the ways racism and white supremacy have been institutionalized so that we can begin to deconstruct them.

As we move through August 12, 2018, I am humbled by the enormity of the issues that face us at the individual, community and national levels. What will it take to transform these traumatic experiences into healing and growth? None of us know that answer completely, but this past year has been a time of deep reflection and commitment at our agency to examine oppression and inequity and engage in an ongoing conversation.

Through our commitment to cultural humility we are doing this work at every level: through our own personal self-reflection and learning, through the way we listen and turn humbly toward each other and our clients, and by challenging inequity at the organizational and community level. Organizational examples include: full staff participation in Dr. Kenneth Hardy’s “Race Inside and Outside the Therapy Room”; a commitment to recruiting and retaining diverse staff, volunteers and board members; and the development of a board/staff cultural humility committee led by Dr. Beverly Adams, PhD. We have also helped to launch and continue to support groups like the Central Virginia Clinicians of Color Network, the Creciendo Juntos Mental Health Work Group and the Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Clinical Consultation Group with SJ Langer, LCSW-R.

The definition of cultural humility starts with the most important acknowledgement: that this is a lifelong learning process that requires self-reflection. As a white woman in a leadership role, I recognize that I have a long way to go and humbly invite us all to commit and recommit to this process. I believe that it is vital for effective mental health work and is necessary if we are to find a path forward in our community, as well.

If you have any questions or want to learn more, please don’t hesitate to be in touch with me. Your voice and contribution are a vital part of this ongoing effort.

With love and gratitude,

Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW
Executive Director

What is cultural humility?

The Women’s Initiative has a core strategic commitment to cultural humility, defined by health educator and filmmaker Vivian Chávez as:

- A process of lifelong learning and compassionate self-reflection
- A commitment to recognize and mitigate power imbalances
- A commitment to institutional accountability

WHO WE ARE

MISSION

The mission of The Women’s Initiative is to provide women with effective counseling, social support and education so they can transform life challenges into positive change and growth.

VISION

All women in our community will have access to innovative, effective, evidence-based mental health care.

VALUES

We believe every woman has an innate capacity for healing that, once uncovered and directed, results in better mental and physical health. We believe it is critical to address each woman’s unique emotional, physical and spiritual needs.
Social Support Program

Clients heal through connection

The Women’s Initiative’s mission has always included social support as a key component of programming. Opportunities to build community and friendships reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation which can be detrimental to overall health. And the latest research continues to clearly demonstrate the vital value of affinity-based group support and healing in recovery from trauma.

“Depression, anxiety, and trauma impact all areas of our lives and leave us needing to rebuild,” explains Elizabeth Cobb, LCSW, Therapist and Coordinator of our Social Support Program.

“The Social Support Program strives to provide healing beyond the limits of the therapeutic office by letting women know that they are not alone.”

In 2017, The Women’s Initiative served 540 women in our Social Support Program. This achievement is possible in part because many of our offerings are partnerships with other community organizations. This year, for instance, new social supports include partnerships with Whistle Words, which offers writing workshops for women impacted by cancer, and Planned Parenthood, which leads discussions on sexual health and well-being.

Hope Beyond Hurt
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

on resilience, recovery and healing.

How does The Women’s Initiative help someone with a recent or past trauma heal?

When someone experiences trauma, or when they feel triggered and have intense, difficult memories and symptoms related to a past trauma, it is important that they receive therapeutic support to help them stabilize and feel safe again. Our weekly walk-in clinics mean someone experiencing these symptoms can access care right away.

Our individual counseling incorporates evidence-based modalities to work with trauma such as trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and EMDR.

We also offer groups to help people cope with the impact of trauma, such as the Healing & Growth Group, Sister Circle, and the Grupo de Apoyo (Spanish-language support group). Mind-body groups include Chair Yoga, Nature Nurture Retreats, and Yoga for Women of Color.

The goal is to promote a culture based on resilience, recovery and healing

GROUP SUPPORT

Groups offered by our staff & volunteers or in partnership with other community agencies include:

- C’Ville Walks With Heart
- Knitting Circle
- Nature Nurture Retreats
- West African Dance
- Writing Groups
- Mothering Circle of Charlottesville
- PFLAG Trans Families Group
- Yoga for Women of Color

A SENSE OF BELONGING

C’Ville Walks With Heart (left) provides a way for women to build friendships while working up to a four-mile walk each summer. Our living room provides a comfortable space for social support groups like Knitting Circle (above).
New staff increase impact

To meet the growing demand for trauma-informed, culturally responsive mental health care, we welcome the following new team members in 2018.

- Joanna Ajex, MA, Education Coordinator and Therapist, is now providing individual counseling to refugees at the IRC office and is our liaison for women in residence at the Shelter for Help in Emergency.
- Our Bienestar Program for Latina women has grown with the addition of Bilingual Therapist Varinia Garcia Anderson, MEd and Bienestar Support Specialist Ulises Martinez, QMHP.
- Clinical Services Director Ashley Barlow, LPC, leads a robust clinical team including new staff Part-Time Therapist Judith Curry-EI, PhD; Therapist Shell Stern, MSW; and Therapist Emily Zeanah Shelton, LCSW, who provides counseling to patients of the Charlottesville Free Clinic.
- Operations Manager Molly O’Halloran is improving all our organizational systems so that we can reach and serve more women.

Challenge into Change
Celebrating voices of healing

Challenge into Change is an annual writing program that celebrates women’s stories of growth and renewal. For 2017, 81 people contributed inspiring stories and poems documenting journeys of healing and discovery. We celebrated their accomplishment this spring at a ceremony at the Jefferson School City Center.

Read excerpts from the winning entries below and then stop by our main office or New Dominion Bookshop to pick up a copy of 2017 Challenge into Change containing all 81 entries.

Excerpts from Winning Entries

From “Four Year Old Faith,” by Dr. Allison Kretlow
First Place Winner

"...You ask, ‘Mommy, was it my fault the baby seed died? ’
My soul is crushed, aching.
How could you possibly think that is your fault?
I tell you no. God needed the baby.
This makes you angry.
It makes me angry, too.
I tell you we will try again."

From “Ode to Elsa,” by Linda Martinussen
Third Place Winner (tie)

"...I practice yoga to breathe softly through the pain of irreplaceable loss. I practice to forgive and accept what is. I practice to invite compassion as I gently acknowledge the regret of abandoning myself. I practice to remember the resilient little girl and to meet the strong woman she has become. I practice to honor the mothers who suffer and realize that I am not alone. And even though there are days when I may struggle, I practice gratitude for the experience of this body and this life."

From “Against Adversity, We Can Win,” by Bellamy Shoffner
Second Place Winner

"...It is almost impossible to express the amount of fear and worry that come with a diagnosis of a neurological issue. I woke up every day wondering if my legs were still working. I lived in fear of having a seizure or going blind or having an arm that wouldn’t work at all. I worried about dropping my baby or otherwise endangering my children as a result of the unexpected nature of MS. I struggled with how to reach my goals when some days I could barely reach for a drink of water. But then I learned to see outside of my fear. The natural methods I used to get healthier proved beneficial, and over time I was able to start dreaming again. I challenged myself not to give up. Yes, life was more complicated as a mom with MS, but I didn’t have to let the disease undo me."

From “Giving Birth,” by Christa
Third Place Winner (tie)

"...After I had the abortion, an image came to me of my self on the beach, singing and holding hands with a long line of women - all the women through the ages who have had to make difficult choices in imperfect circumstances. It is a sacred and holy place."

www.thewomensinitiative.org
Volunteer Spotlight: Holly Kennedy, LPC, and Sarah Struckmann

‘We are not meant to mother alone’

Pro bono therapists Holly Kennedy, LPC and Sarah Struckmann cofacilitate our weekly support group for new moms. Each Monday morning, women and their newborns to one-year-old babies gather in our Studio to give and receive support as they navigate this significant and sometimes challenging time.

Tell us about the Moms With Babies Discussion Group.

The Moms with Babies group seeks to provide a supportive space for moms to have open and real discussions about life with a baby and motherhood. Often times various themes will emerge such as expectations versus reality, adjusting to a new sense of self and roles, and changing dynamics with your partner, family, or friends. We are continually inspired by the authenticity, strength, and support that the group members offer both individually and collectively. It is also hopeful that through this process women can feel a sense of connectedness and hope.

Why did you decide to start the group?

We really believe that we are not meant to mother alone and feel like often times there is such a focus on the baby that we can easily lose sight of the need and benefits for taking care of and supporting the mother. So for moms to be able to sit in the same room with others going through the same experience, while it might be experienced differently, can truly create a very powerful sense of understanding, healing and resolve. In addition, both of us had experienced our own postpartum struggles and feel very passionate about helping other women navigate this time and creating more awareness and reducing stigmas associated with postpartum anxiety and depression.

What do you like about volunteering for The Women’s Initiative?

Kennedy: I feel like The Women’s Initiative has such a sense of compassion, empowerment and strength that encompasses all that walk through the doors—the clients, the staff and the volunteers. I feel so grateful and honored to be part of an organization with this mission and to be able to engage the various parts of myself through the work and continue my passion for the counseling process and helping others.

Struckmann: I feel so grateful to be a part of The Women’s Initiative. It has been the perfect platform for me to apply my passion for helping new moms and empowering women. I also feel so fortunate to work with such talented and incredible providers. It has been such an honor to be a part of “normalizing” the challenges of motherhood. I am so excited to be part of this journey with these women and I can’t wait to see how things continue to unfold.

WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN. Thank you to the 2018 Girls’ Night Out Committee, left to right: Barkley Laing; Carmen Carver; Christina Teague; Bryce Harris, Co-Chair; Anne Jones, Co-Chair; Colleen Bassett, Hostess; Louise McNamee; Antoinette Brewster; Bebe Heiner; Elizabeth Irvin; Ginger Graham; Katharine Brooks; Lynn Dengel; Kakie Brooks; and Marcela Foshay. Not pictured: Carolyn Beach, Gardy Bloemers, Jackie Bradley, Catherine Brown, Alida Couric, Scheline Crutchfield, Thomasin Foshay, Lauren Gartland and Alicia Milligan. Photo by Stephen Sinichik.

GIRLS’ NIGHT OUT RAISES $87K FOR VITAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

What could be better than women coming together to support women? With 210+ guests and 22 pieces of gorgeous art, this year’s Girls’ Night Out was the most successful ever. Blue skies, gourmet cuisine, fine conversation and glorious views from Fox Ridge Farm made the evening pure magic. All told, through sponsorships, ticket purchases, art sales and special gifts, we raised more than $87,000! Special gratitude to Colleen Bassett, Anne Jones and Bryce Harris for their passionate leadership and giving hearts.

SAVE THE DATE! | Eighth Annual FAMILY BARN PARTY | Sunday, September 30, 4-7 pm

We look forward to seeing you at our biggest fundraiser of the year at Bellair Farm. To learn about sponsorship and volunteer opportunities, contact Kerry Day at kday@thewomensinitiative.org or (434) 872-0047 ext. 103.
I feel much more in touch with my emotions instead of being afraid of them, and am able to breathe, feel them, and release them.

—2018 Client

**5 Things You Can Do to Create a Trauma-Informed Community**

1. Educate yourself about the impact of trauma on human behavior
2. Learn about mind-body techniques that contribute to well-being and self-regulation
3. Seek support from people that hold your values of compassion, love and social justice
4. Take care of yourself. To one degree or another, trauma is part of the human condition. Trauma work offers the possibility of recovery and healing from the past.
5. Be an advocate of compassion and social justice wherever you are.