Impact Report 2021
Choosing hate is an individual journey, one that often starts with shame, trauma and anger.

As a community founded by former violent extremists, we understand and mentor those who are still navigating the path to wholeness. Change starts with healing.

The best way to disrupt ideologically-driven violence is to make sure individuals do not fall for extremist beliefs in the first place. But if they do, we have to offer a clear pathway out.

The overall health and security of the nation hinges on success.

ExitUSA, a first-of-its-kind intervention and aftercare services program to defuse the violent far-right, combines the credible voices of former extremists with the professional insight of trained mental health practitioners.

We treat clients holistically, taking into account their social and mental health, substance abuse issues, history of past trauma, gender identity and sexuality, and other nuanced aspects of their individual experience.

Since our founding in 2011, we have helped more than 500 individuals and families. In the past 12 months alone, we’ve helped more than 220 individuals and families.
Here’s how we do it:

We help individuals become accountable for their pasts

Those who take responsibility for their journey create the possibility for redemption. We inspire and sustain individual change by forgiving, and empowering others to seek forgiveness.

We never condone unethical or hurtful actions, but we also do not condemn the human being. Instead, we help individuals rebuild their identities by reconnecting them with the positive relationships in their lives before the ideology took over.

“I felt life was over. My name was all over the press. Felt there was no way to rebuild my life. I was in a very dark place. Especially with how unsupportive the local exit community is. Your examples encouraged me otherwise.”

— Luke
We help individuals find a sense of belonging outside the so-called “movement”

Individuals sometimes get pulled into the violent far-right with false promises of status, power, and protection. The attraction becomes even greater for those facing substantial setbacks in their personal and professional lives.

Our strategy is to help formers explore an identity in positive settings and activities, and to highlight how their previous status or sense of belonging was tenuous and transactional at best. Many individuals lose their standing in the movement for minor offenses, superficial shortcomings, and even for improving their lives overall.

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It was fairly obvious from the beginning that there was a lot of drama and discord flowing freely in the far-right, but the sense of acceptance and belonging to something larger than myself overruled common sense for me.

— Angela
The fear of change is often rooted in the fear of loss. For former extremists, this fear is predicated on an incredible sense of uncertainty, and an unwillingness to risk losing what little the violent far-right offered them in the first place.

Our strategy is to help those transitioning from extremists to formers to refocus their attention on what is possible. In addition to rebuilding a positive social network, formers are encouraged to find new ways to contribute to society. During their involvement, formers often see themselves as activists. One goal is to harness that drive to affect change but directing it in more constructive and meaningful ways.

“[ExitUSA] had a very positive effect in me feeling confident about my future... I have a place in the world since leaving the movement.”

— Andrew
We help individuals confront why they became involved in the violent far-right

It’s critical that former extremists understand what shaped their decision to get involved with the violent far-right. We listen with open minds and hearts to create an environment that supports change and healing.

Our team’s experiences and expertise empower us to talk openly about our own shame and guilt which in turn creates a safe space for our clients to do the same. This intimate understanding allows us to connect formers with the professional help they need to confront lingering trauma and other psychological issues that may be present.

“ExitUSA is helping me process my transition and find ways to improve my mental health. I’ve only been communicating with them for a month but I’m already learning to be more empathetic and forgiving.”

— Dan
When dealing with a loved one descending into hate, family and friends commonly feel isolated and alone. And yet, families, especially parents, can be a major source of motivation for violent extremists contemplating change.

We encourage families to remain involved. Our strategy for building this type of resiliency starts with listening, but it includes ongoing support, both one-on-one and through our online community forum.

[ExitUSA] has helped me feel less alone. It makes me feel there’s a chance my family member may be able to turn his life around and exit the movement.

— Darlene

This issue was terrorising and destroying my life, so your services have been invaluable for me.

— John
We’re training mental health professionals to help more formers

We can’t defuse white supremacy without help. An important part of our strategy is to train mental health practitioners on how to support individuals exiting hate groups and hateful ideologies.

We want to help them effectively address violent far-right extremism in their practices and communities as well as to work side-by-side with our ExitUSA intervention specialists. This multi-day course covers violent extremism 101 as well as the fundamentals of our Motivational Interviewing & Trauma Informed Care (MI+TIC) treatment framework.

“I feel as though I have a few more tools to use when communicating with clients. And a greater appreciation of all that Life After Hate offers formers, current extremist members and their families.”

— Volunteer

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