



# GPS

GROUP  
PEER  
SUPPORT

**Integrating Support Groups into  
the Primary Care Pathway  
To Support Behavioral Wellness of Children**

**Liz Friedman, GPS CEO & Co-Founder**

# AGENDA

- Group Peer Support – what it is
- Theory of Change – what we believe
- Barriers to Care – why it's hard to access care
- Impact of Support Groups – how we increase access
- Policy opportunities – ensuring systems change



GPS Support Groups are the **first line of defense**  
in the mitigation of trauma and addressing the challenges of life  
interrupting isolation, normalizing experience,  
diminishing stigma

and inspiring the ability for each person

**to take the next step** for themselves and their family.



# GPS Secret Sauce

- Normalizes: “I’m not crazy.”
- Validates: “Someone gets me.”
- Breaks Isolation: “I’m not alone.”
- Empowers: “I can do this.”

# What is GPS Group Peer Support?



Trauma responsive, evidence informed, community-based group mental wellness support



Promotes personal resiliency, self-efficacy and empowerment



Increases social support and diminishes isolation



Provides a structure that is easy to use, adaptable, anti-racist and inclusive of difference by design

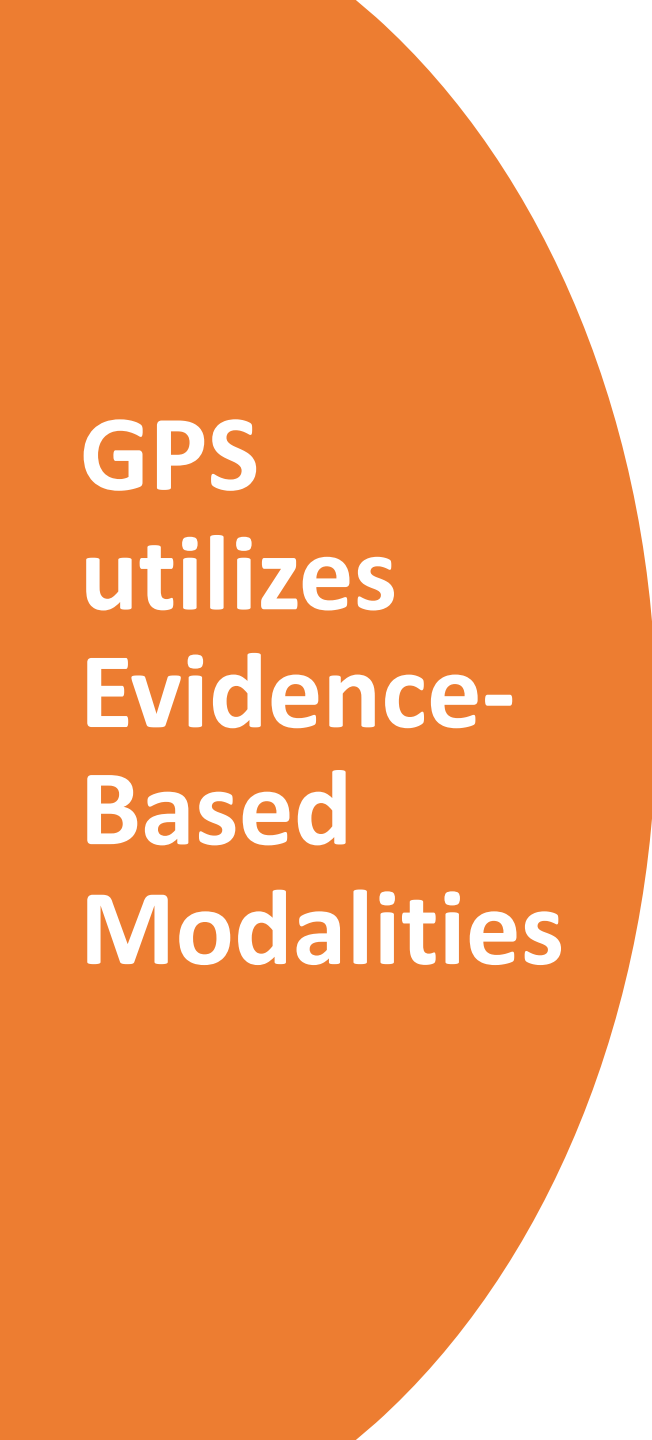


Successfully implemented by paraprofessionals, community health workers and clinical/medical professionals




# GPS Programs

- Addiction/Recovery
  - MA Dept of Public Health Bureau of Substance and Addiction Services
  - Currently/formerly incarcerated
  - Men/Women/Youth/Mothers with young children
  - People currently/formerly homeless
- Frontline Healthcare Workers
  - Betsy Lehman Center for Patient Safety
  - MA Department of Mental Health
- Parental Mental Health
  - MA Child Psychiatry Access Program for Moms
  - Perinatal Support Washington
  - Montana Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies
  - Dignity Health/Common Spirit in California, Nevada, Arizona
- Refugee/Immigrant Communities
  - Ascentria – welcoming immigrants to MA
  - Mexican Consulate – supporting refugees at the border
  - 30 Birds Foundation – supporting Afghan girls
- Ending White Supremacy/Ending Racism
  - Professor and Reproductive Justice Leader Loretta Ross

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# GPS utilizes Evidence- Based Modalities

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Interpersonal Therapy
  - Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction
  - Motivational Interviewing
  - Peer to Peer Support
  - Polyvagal Theory
  - Psychosocial Education
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TER SUPPORT

# GPS is Replicable and Adaptable

*Language, Identity & Culture*



- Latin & Central America - Spanish
- Asian/Chinese - Mandarin
- Afghanistan - Pasto, Dari
- Guatemala - Mayan Indigenous
- Somalia - Amharic/Arabic
- Ukraine - Ukrainian & Russian



- Women, Men, LGBTQA identified
- Black/African American
- First Nations
- All faiths



# GPS Group Structure

1. Mindfulness – practicing being present
2. Guidelines – creating safe & courageous spaces
3. Realities – naming our real experiences
4. Principles – reminding us what's true about us
5. Check In – sharing our own stories
6. Grounding – Being ok with strong feelings
7. Closing – having a moment of reflection

Sometimes all we can  
do is listen.

And that can be everything.

Support from people who care.



**GPS** | GROUP  
PEER  
SUPPORT





# What we believe

- *We are born whole.*
- *Hurt happens.*
- *Healing is possible.*

## Challenging situations that families face

- Living with poverty
- Homelessness/houselessness
- Food scarcity
- Violence at home
- Abandonment
- Accidents
- Health crisis
- Limited resources
- Daily experiences of racism
- Generational trauma
- Historical trauma
- Covid isolation and trauma
- Climate Crisis

Burrwell, T. (2016), Hernandez ND, et al. (2022), Kozhimannil, KB, et al. (2011), Lara-Cinisomo S, Wisner, C (2014), Ward EA, et al. (2022)

## What are normal reactions to challenging situations?

- Anger
- Grief
- Overwhelm
- Exhaustion
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Frustration

Burrwell, T. (2016), Hernandez ND, et al. (2022), Kozhimannil, KB, et al. (2011), Lara-Cinisomo S, Wisner, C (2014), Ward EA, et al. (2022)





*People begin to heal  
the moment they are heard.*

*Cheryl Richardson*

# The goal of GPS's trauma-informed approach

- Create courageous spaces where people can share struggles in a supportive environment
- Express emotions that may have been silenced by trauma or cultural messaging
- Build anti-racist community of understanding and non-stigmatizing care
- Mitigate effects of current and past harm & trauma on self & others
- Support healing and resilience to benefit individual, family and community

# Barriers to integration of mental health support at all levels of care

- Logistical access & healthcare “deserts”
- Stigma & cultural messaging
- Historical harm from the healthcare system
- Systemic and interpersonal racism
- Insufficient number of providers
- Inadequate training
- Professionalization of listening
- Pathologizing of normal reaction to stress and adverse challenges

Burrwell, T. (2016), Hernandez ND, et al. (2022), Kozhimannil, KB, et al. (2011), Lara-Cinisomo S, Wisner, C (2014), Ward EA, et al. (2022)

# Situation for Healthcare Workers

- Covid trauma
- PTSD
- Exhaustion
- Personal losses/grief
- Moral injury
- Burnout
- Isolated from colleagues
- Job related illness or injury
- Wages not keeping up with the cost of living
- Difficulty accessing/prioritizing mental health care

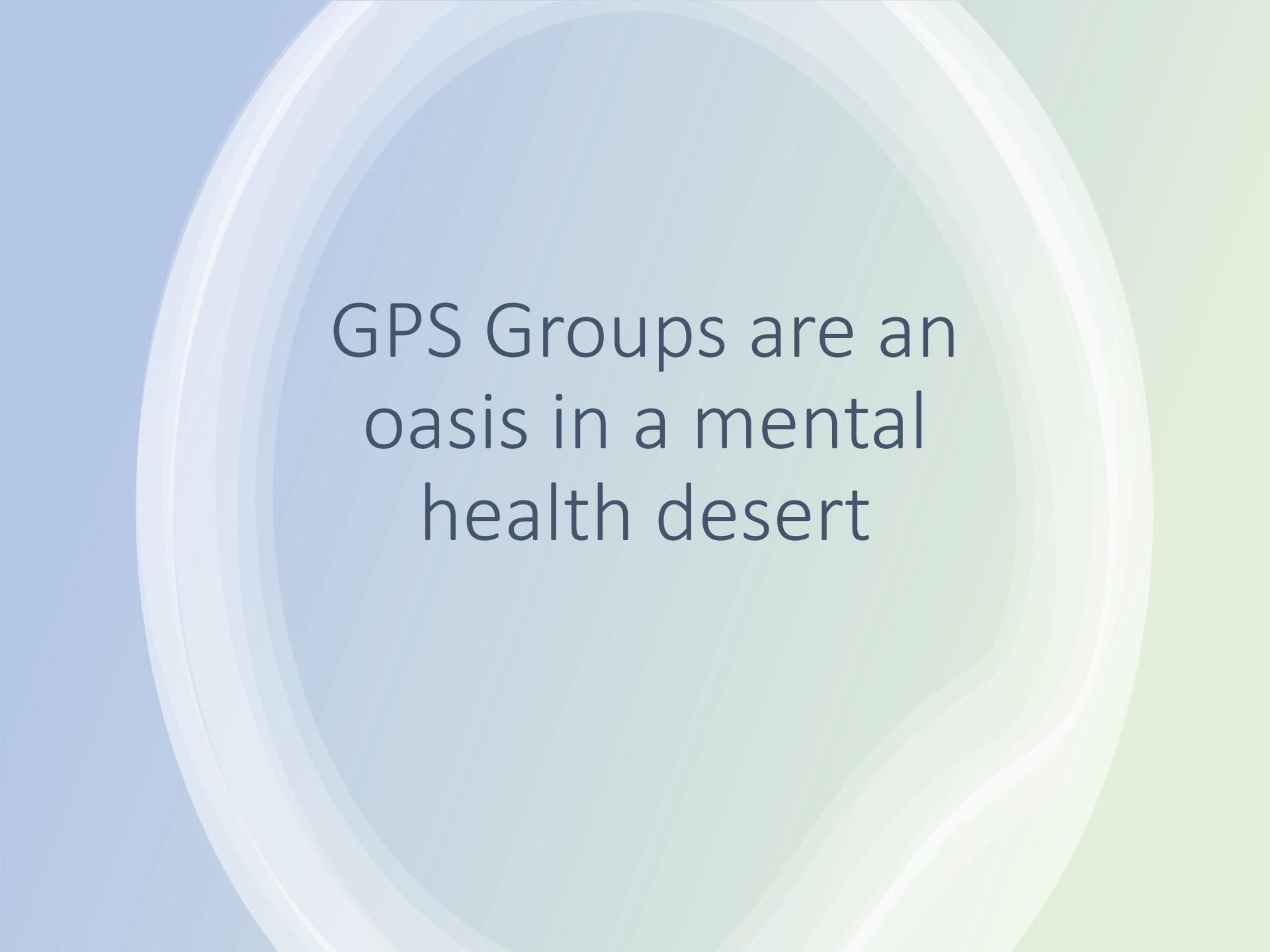






“It’s imperative that the people who care for our most vulnerable community members have access to care themselves.”





GPS Groups are an  
oasis in a mental  
health desert

# GPS breaks through barriers to mental health care

## ACCESSIBLE

- In communities of trust
- Affordable/free
- Led in first language

## TRUST, STIGMA & CULTURAL MESSAGING

- Led by facilitators who share lived experience
- More acceptable to attend groups than therapy
- Normalize experience

## TRAINED GROUP LEADERS

- Led by paraprofessionals, community health workers and clinical/medical team
- Structured, trauma-informed & culturally adaptable
- Apply GPS skills in one-on-one situations

## SUPPORT FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

- GPS MASStrong Program with Betsy Lehman Center

# GPS Benefits Programs

- Confidence in quality of trauma-informed care
- Provides culturally and racially-informed care that is accepted
- Rapidly integrates new staff to program implementation
- Reduces stress/burnout and increases confidence/competence
- Increases program participation, retention and completion
- Reduces challenging situations in groups and programs
- Improves 1:1 interactions between staff and clients

***When they  
tell you, “It  
runs in the  
family,” you  
tell them,  
“This is  
where it runs  
out.”***







# GPS

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## Upcoming GPS Facilitator Training October 2023

*CEUs available for MSWs*

[info@groupeersupport.org](mailto:info@groupeersupport.org)