

Truth and reconciliation in psychiatric, mental health services

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On Wednesday, March 16, from 6-9 p.m., three local progressive grassroots organizations, The M.O.M.S. Movement, Rethinking Psychiatry and The Icarus Project, will host the first Truth and Reconciliation circle. The event will be at The Center for Intercultural Organizing, 700 N. Killingsworth St., Portland.

This will be a healing circle to foster greater understanding between receivers and providers of mental health treatment.

The purpose of the event is to give both receivers and givers of psychiatric services the opportunity to speak their truths. Many receivers of mental health services feel that they have gotten life-saving help and others feel that their voices have been silenced and their basic rights have been violated. Similarly, many providers of mental health services went into this profession to serve and heal and feel great privilege in doing their jobs, yet are deeply frustrated with the system they are working in.

We recognize that these are complicated issues. Many people have mixed feelings about their experiences with the mental health system, and some people have been both receivers and givers of mental health services. We respect that each participant is a complex, unique individual.

This circle is an opportunity for receivers and givers of mental health services to

share their experiences. It is our belief that this can help us to envision what effective, respectful mental health care can look like.

Truth and Reconciliation was the idea of local mental health rights activist Cindi Fisher. Fisher's passion for mental health reform and social justice comes from her son's dehumanizing experiences with the mental health system. Fisher is one of the organizers of the event, along with local social worker Grace Silvia, and local housing activist and psychiatric survivor Ptery Lieght. Our facilitators will create a safe space for respectful, honest dialogue about experiences in the mental health services from both sides of the issue.

The evening will begin with a moving meditation exercise to help the group feel grounded and able to process effectively. This will be followed by an icebreaker activity to help the group feel more comfortable. Then we will move on to the deep discussion.

The format will use fishbowls: at first, people who have received psychiatric/mental health services and who choose to, will sit in the inner circle with a facilitator who has also received services. Providers and supportive community members will sit in the outer circle. The people sitting in the inner circle will have a facilitated discussion, getting to speak their truths with their peers, discovering similarities and differences in their experiences. The outer circle is allowed to witness and is asked to listen in respectful silence.

Next, people who have provided psychiatric/mental health services will move to the inner circle with a facilitator who also is a provider of services. Receivers and supportive community members will sit in the outer circle. The providers in the inner circle will have a facilitated discussion with their peers while the people in the outer circle witness and listen respectfully.

Finally, with everyone sitting in one large circle, people will have a chance to ask questions of one another. People will be invited to check if they are trying to make a point with their question, or whether they are genuinely curious about something from someone who may share a different perspective. Genuine questions are encouraged.

We are aware that for some this will be an intensely emotional experience. We will have facilitators and support people to help keep the event respectful and to offer support during and after to those who need it.

There will be a break in the middle, in which refreshments will be provided. We ask that people come on time, so as not to disrupt this vulnerable group process.

We look forward to a rich, meaningful, respectful discussion on this important topic.

For more information visit: www.rethinkingpsychiatry.org or theicarusproject.net/



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