

# Helping Women Emerge from Trauma

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is important.

“And I’m convinced of it because I know the power of it in my own life, in my children’s life,” she said.

Born and raised in North and Northeast Portland, Saunders was the youngest of three children.

“I was the baby. And both my parents had their own trauma.”

That trauma was passed down through generations. Saunders’ mother experienced abuse, abandonment and deep emotional pain as a child, and as a young woman growing up in the South.

Later, as a mother herself, she was hyper-vigilant and protective “because she didn’t have someone like that in her life as a child,” Saunders said.

Lisa’s father experienced grief and was an alcoholic much of her childhood and young adult life. Her brother struggled with a substance use disorder. He died on his 40th birthday in the Oregon State Penitentiary. Throughout their turmoil, the family’s connection to faith remained. Her mother and father were both gospel singers.

“I had family members who were broken. But when they passed away, they passed away very strong. We really don’t get the chance to heal,” she said. “There’s generations of pain that’s in our RNA and DNA.”

Saunders’ breakup with her boyfriend triggered layers of pain and put distance between her and the things she needed to heal. “I was drunk in the club, in the 90s in Spandex, lis-



PHOTO BY MOTOYA NAKAMURA/MULTNOMAH COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS  
Lisa Saunders holds photo of two young sons. Today, they have flourishing careers and families of their own.

tening to *En Vogue*, doing my own thing. So I wasn’t really attending church.”

But eventually, she reconnected to church and started doing in women’s ministry. She started a Facebook page. Things started changing. “I ended up sharing my story with other women,” she said. “And they just came.”

Small gatherings grew larger. Soon, Saunders began hosting gatherings in coffee shops. She called the events “Crystal Gatherings.”

“I remember I was at home and I had this beautiful crystal vase sitting by the window, and the sun was shining through it. I was thinking about all the cuts and grooves in the pieces of glass. And it was like I heard God say, ‘That’s what makes you beautiful.’”

A common thread among participants was

trauma, but also a hunger for healing — particularly healing in a way that’s culturally relevant, Saunders said.

“There’s physical hunger, but then there’s spiritual hunger,” she said.

Saunders began writing a white paper. She cited work from the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* about African American women in extreme poverty who were also food insecure. Providing food alone wasn’t enough to help those women heal from the rest of the trauma in their lives, Saunders said.

“For African American women, there was so much stress and trauma in their lives that even when presented with food, they couldn’t eat,” Saunders said. “Do we just do a food pantry? Or do we do a food pantry and heal-

ing, that’s culturally relevant?”

“That reinforced a lot of what I know. We have trauma-informed care. We recognize people are in trauma. We also recognize there are triggers to trauma in our systems and physical spaces.

But beyond that, I don’t want to be stuck in trauma.

I don’t want to be defined by my trauma. There needs to be a next step.”

As more women joined Saunders’ Crystal Gatherings, the events grew to include in-depth workshops that covered subjects from “Finding Your Voice” to “Wounds, Bruises and Scars.”

In January 2019, Saunders took a bold step in the next part of her journey helping women heal. She left her full-time job after 20 years and started a new organization that would build on the promise of her Crystal Gatherings: FaithBridge.

“I was sitting in Starbucks, thinking about what I should do,” she said. “And then it just came to me. ‘You should be a bridge to healing.’ So I built FaithBridge. It’s really what I’ve been doing for years, but more codified.”

Saunders’ work reaches career women who seem like they have it all together. FaithBridge also reaches women leaving incarceration, who may also struggle with addiction.

“These are the women who more so need the support,” Saunders said.

The work can unfold at retreats, away from everyday environments, or at transitional homes for justice-involved women.

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## FULL-TIME, IN-PERSON SCHOOL IS COMING BACK.



Anticipation is building for students to return to full-time and in-person school this fall. For kids and families, this can be a mix of anxiety, excitement and opportunity. Local school districts are updating their health and safety plans to serve the needs of their students and families. Learn how your district is preparing at [Oregon.gov/readyschools](https://Oregon.gov/readyschools).



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