



Strides for Peace

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Strides for Peace Hosts Inaugural Wellness Retreat to Address Trauma of Nonprofit Staff Working on the Frontlines of Gun Violence

Hosted at St. Mary of the Lakes, the retreat will be facilitated by NATAL, Israeli Center for Trauma and Resiliency and include eight Chicago community organizations.

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Weekend Wellness Retreat

Strides for Peace is sponsoring a two-day wellness and healing retreat for Community Partner leaders and frontline staff who contend with primary and secondary trauma as a regular part of their work to end gun violence in Chicago. This inaugural retreat aims to address the mostly unaddressed needs of nonprofit staff who experience ongoing personal and professional trauma in the course of their work on the frontlines of Chicago's gun violence.

In addition to providing a direct benefit to the participants, the retreat also will serve as a foundation from which to establish, improve and expand strategies to address trauma experienced by nonprofit workforce, especially for smaller community organizations that lack the capacity and funding to address the need for wellness care.

While more attention has been given to the critical need to address the trauma of gun violence occurring on the community level, especially in young people who live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of violence, focus on how to address the trauma of adults who work in communities to mitigate the violence has been lagging.

Mary Stonor Saunders, Executive Director of Strides for Peace, who organized the retreat, believes it is passed due that Chicago finds new ways to ensure the wellness of the tireless workers who are on the frontlines of chronic trauma: "When I first got involved in community gun violence prevention, it wasn't rocket science to imagine the toll this kind of brave work takes on people – most of whom don't get to punch the clock at the end of the day. They risk so much and carry a heavy load. In the face of so much loss, they are reluctant to ever speak about their own needs – but they shouldn't have to carry it alone."

Physical and personal proximity exposes many of these workers to the threat and consequences of violence on a continual basis, the impact of which typically go unattended at personal and professional cost. Many live in the very communities they are serving. As Diane Latiker, founder of Kids Off the Block and CNN Hero expressed: *"...the retreat will offer all of us who are affected a "safe space" to release the elephant in the room, which is all the trauma we've buried in order to keep doing the work of saving lives. It's there, slowly weighing us down, affecting our health, our emotional well-being and our soul."*

Strides for Peace decided to organize the retreat after reaching out to Community Partners like Ms. Latiker, asking if providing a wellness retreat with other peer organizations would be of interest and value to address trauma.

"We've been trying to integrate staff wellness -- especially for our street intervention workers -- into our work for some time." said Adam Alonso, CEO of BUILD "But we've struggled for funding as well as making space for it programmatically.

It's great to get this started thanks to Strides and to do so with other sister organizations who do similar work across the city. We get so focused on keeping the peace and other people's trauma, we're typically the last ones to tend to our own. This should be SOP for everyone the field."

Several who are participating, are exposed to community violence, but have suffered the loss of a family member, deepening the trauma they contend with on a daily basis like Pamela Bosley, founder of survivor group Purpose Over Pain and Violence Prevention Manager at St. Sabina: *"I am always giving my all to everyone, which can sometime become overwhelming mainly around the holiday season. This is a time when depression overtakes me since Christmas was Terrell's and my favorite Holiday. So, I am looking forward to taking time for self. I am looking forward to a chance to escape, pull back, unplug and reset and start afresh. Then I will be ready once again to help other families that are in this unfortunate situation."*

As Matt DeMateo, Executive of Director of New Life Centers, who is sending to of his veteran gang intervention staff: *"Street outreach workers are on the front lines of responding to violence. We need resources to care for them and support them. They are running into some heavy situations, dealing with the violence in our city, and should be taken care of as violence prevention and intervention specialists. A retreat like this is a huge support and blessing and we need to build more spaces and supports for our street outreach workers across the city."*

The response to Strides for Peace's organizing the wellness retreat has been overwhelmingly positive – both for those who are participating and those in the field who view the need for such programs and the desire to connect people doing similar work as critical. The hope is this retreat will provide both a model and an incentive to replicate across Chicago.

Background

Central to Strides for Peace mission is trusting community organizations as the best experts on what they need to end gun violence. The retreat, which brings together 8 organizations is one of the first (if not the first) in Chicago, to bring multiple and highly varied organizations from across Chicago in response to community workers – advocates, program, street intervention – having little to no tools or resources to address their own trauma and their eagerness to get assistance and create a new network of support.

Using funds from their annual Race Against Gun Violence and individual donations, Strides has both organized and underwritten the retreat so it can be provided to participation free of charge.

- Provide care and support to those with the hardest jobs in the city
- Create a network of support
- Develop an experience and insight bank of best practice to share with other organizations and initiatives contending with or seeking to address trauma embedded in the work they do.

The trauma informed workshops will be led by international renowned NATAL at the University of St. Mary on the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois.

About Strides for Peace: Strides for Peace is a registered 501(c)(3). Strides for Peace is dedicated to increasing collective impact of nonprofits working to stop gun violence and create a stronger Chicago. To that end, we work to empower existing community organizations, promote collaboration and elevate solution-driven dialogue of those on the front lines of ending gun violence. The annual Race Against Gun Violence is one of Strides signature programs, which in 2019 year brought 70 organizations and people from more than 200 zip codes together to support and celebrate those working end gun violence in Chicago.

We believe all of Chicagoland has a stake in ending gun violence and that by working together, we change more than the narrative of our city — we save lives. By focusing on what we share in common, we can find new ways to support the work on the ground and bring out the best in our city.

About NATAL: Israel Trauma and Resiliency Center

NATAL is the largest and most comprehensive trauma treatment and resiliency training organization in Israel, whose mission is to address the prevalent problem of psychological trauma related to terrorism and war.

Since 1998, the organization has changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by advancing the resiliency of Israeli society through treatment, prevention, public awareness, and research. While NATAL's work began in Israel, its mission resonates worldwide. In recent years, NATAL has been called upon to deliver its expertise to at-risk communities and populations outside of Israel. As part of that, NATAL has led and participated in groundbreaking work to assist American wounded warriors dealing with PTSD, partnering with inner-city Chicago to assist in dealing with trauma that stems from urban violence, as well as, providing First Responders resilience training.

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