



Tend to Hope

November 2019

A Newsletter about Mental Health

Tend to Hope is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to inspiring hope, restoring dignity and providing comfort to individuals during times of crisis.

welcome to our newsletter!

We are a mother and daughter inspired by personal experience to build a community of support around our friends experiencing mental health crises.

We create Seeds of Hope Boxes for facilities to distribute to individuals in distress. Please read more about our boxes on page two.

Our Newsletter is a forum for sharing — ideas, projects, book reviews, announcements, and anything else which might shed light on our common mental health struggles or help make a difference in the lives of those in extreme distress. We have no vested interest other than spreading kindness and compassion to an often-forgotten or neglected population.

We believe that the more community members join our mission the more humane our society will become. Welcome to our cause!



Seeds of Hope Boxes



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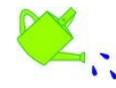
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"We human beings are all fundamentally the same. We all belong to a common, broken humanity.

We all have wounded, vulnerable hearts.

Each one of us needs to feel appreciated and understood; we all need help."

— Jean Vanier



The Concept behind Seeds of Hope Boxes: Admission to any type of crisis facility can be a frightening and impersonal experience. When individuals are fighting to hold on to their sanity, they now find themselves alienated from everything they know and lacking the most basic amenities of home. Imagine receiving a “box of hope” at this most vulnerable time!

What We Do: Distribute our boxes, filled with quality self-care items and hope-building resources, to crisis facilities. Our boxes include:

- * **Pair of cozy socks**
- * **Toothbrush and toothpaste**
- * **Shower Gel or soap**
- * **Hair brush**
- * **Deodorant**
- * **Shampoo and conditioner**
- * **Non-spiral-bound journal**
- * **Activity book or coloring book and crayons**
- * **Card of hope**
- * **Letter of encouragement with ideas on how to build hope**
- * **Package of sunflower seeds**
- * **“Tactile toys” for stress reduction**
- * **Chap stick**
- * **Small stuffed animal**



How We Are Funded: We rely on monetary, as well as product donations. (All donated items must be new, sealed or have tags on them.)

*****Because of facility restrictions, all items must meet safety requirements.**

Benefit to the Community:

- * Instill dignity and generate hope in our population of individuals in crisis facilities
- * Relieve the financial burden on their families and loved ones
- * Provide comfort to those without family or close friends
- * Plant seeds of hope for the greater well-being of the entire community
- * Contribute to the recovery movement in a tangible and memorable way through a show of community support and compassion

How these Items Help:

- * Reduce anxiety
- * Suggest concrete ways to build hope
- * Evoke the comforts and solace of home
- * Increase self-respect and instill dignity
- * Promote self-reflection
- * Provide an outlet for self-expression
- * Promote healthy socialization



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Please contact us if you would like to contribute financially or with product donations:

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Interview with: Annie Stafford

Co-Founder of Tend to Hope

Annie, can you please share a little bit about your mental health journey? My challenges began pretty early in life, around seven years old, after I experienced a life-altering trauma. Very quickly after that, the happy, carefree girl my family had known was gone, replaced by a child paralyzed with fear and guilt. My parents quickly recognized these troubling behaviors and brought me to a therapist and then to a psychiatrist. I had tremendous anxiety and OCD and suffered so much in silence. In the years between 2nd and 5th grade, my mental health continued to deteriorate. When I entered middle school my symptoms came to a head. While I had always been someone who took pride in my quirky nature, suddenly I wanted to jump out of my skin, out of my body entirely. I engaged in self-harming behaviors, and I was hearing voices and seeing things that others did not. I began to completely isolate myself and started losing friends. I was prescribed high doses of anti-psychotic medications that made it difficult for me to speak, think or even move. There were countless inpatient hospitalizations, partial programs, therapeutic services and a stay in a residential facility. For a long time, I was caught in the revolving-door cycle of the mental health system. The residential stay profoundly affected me. After that, I never wanted to go inpatient anywhere again. I wanted to reclaim my life. I tapered off the crippling medications, met several times a week with my family-based team and therapist, and tried my best to work through past traumas and develop coping skills. Slowly, very slowly, I began to come back into myself. I stayed within the “Emotional Support” program in high school, which really helped me. I missed most of middle school, and these high school teachers were able to make accommodations for my anxiety and work closely with me on the academic side. I haven’t been able to find any medications that made much of a positive difference, but I’ve been in therapy all these years and feel that has been crucial in my recovery. I think my experiences have shaped me into a fighter in a way I never dreamed possible. I was told that I would never be able to live a life without medication, be independent, have a job, a license ... that I should get used to conforming my dreams to fit the parameters of my “mental illness” because a life outside these limits was not possible. I will continue to fight against these words and to use my experiences as motivation to be the best ally I can be to others navigating the system. My story has also shown me that beautiful things can grow from the darkness and that there is a healing power in love and kindness.

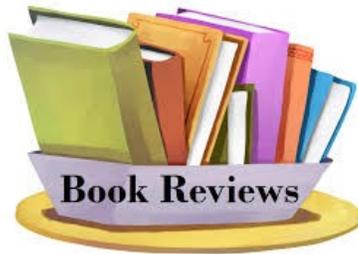
Where did the idea of Tend to Hope come from? I’m often asked what could have been better about the services I received, and I always think back on those hospital stays. They were terrible times for me. I was scared and lonely and wanted desperately to be back home. It would have been so comforting to receive a care package of sorts, just containing some feel-good items to remind me I wasn’t forgotten and that there was hope for me. I identify with people at that stage and thought maybe this was a way we could help them, when they’re at that most vulnerable point.

What are your goals for Tend to Hope? We really want to involve the community. If people could receive a “box of hope” when they’re in the hospital and realize that it came from a whole community of support, it might really lift their spirits. We also want to bring Tend to Hope into the schools. We could start the discussion around mental health and get the students involved with creating boxes. I’m also very interested in helping students who have been hospitalized transition back to the school environment. This was always hard for me, and I think we could address that through a Tend to Hope movement in the schools. Ultimately, we would love to shift the mindset around inpatient hospitalizations. I know it’s a tall order, but rather than a time to mostly try out different medications, it would be great to see it viewed more as an opportunity for change and growth.

How did you learn to “tend to hope” in your own life? I had some amazing people who held the hope for me when I wasn’t able to. They reminded me of my dreams and who I was before my life became so troubled. I “tend to hope” by expressing my emotions through artwork, spending time with the people I love (and my dog), working out, practicing yoga, taking classes, reading, knitting, watching the 76ers, and by using my voice to advocate for change within “the system.”

The Promise by Michael Runningwolf

Reviewed by Tricia Stafford



Michael Runningwolf was a name I became familiar with during Annie's Peer Support Specialist training. She had been apprehensive about the training, but by the end of those two weeks she was more transformed

than I had ever seen her. She was lit from within by a new passion to somehow blaze a trail in the world of mental health. Michael Runningwolf was the conduit for that inspiration.

I remember the day, midway through the training, when Annie came home and said, "Guess what? Michael Runningwolf is a voice-hearer!" She had already expressed her growing admiration for Michael, but after that day I could see that she felt less alone, more understood, especially because most of the others in the class were dealing primarily with addictions. When she informed me that he had self-published a memoir on Amazon, I immediately ordered it, eager to get to know this galvanizing figure in her life. I was not disappointed. This is a painful story told straight from the heart, with unflinching honesty and almost heartbreaking sincerity and goodness.

When Michael's life unraveled, he was happily married, a well-loved and respected high school teacher, dedicated sports coach, devoted church member, and independent business owner. The first sign of trouble was a vague but steadily increasing feeling of anxiety. Eventually he became nearly paralyzed by cruelly harsh voices, paranoia, visions and other unusual sensory perceptions. His mental health struggles led to the dissolution of his marriage, career and sense of self. Hospitalized, incarcerated, unemployable, beset by terrifying voices, he spent years barely surviving and yet always working toward ways to re-gain his footing and improve his life.

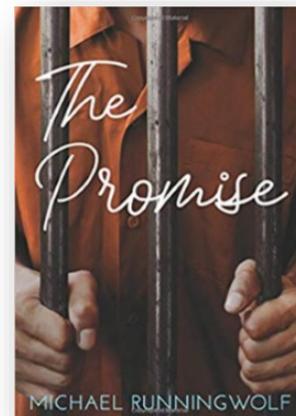
Running was always therapeutic for Michael, but his life radically changed when he walked through the doors of

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Arizona. He was met with kindness from the start, and he credits NAMI with saving his life. As he states in his book's introduction, NAMI "gave me a place to heal and taught me recovery was indeed possible." He volunteered his services in any way he could, which NAMI's staff welcomed and came to rely upon. In time, he was chosen to train as a Peer Specialist Master Facilitator. His life took on deep meaning as he not only worked to recover from his own intense struggles but to help support others in their own recovery journeys.

The Promise is raw and straightforward, concerned foremost with conveying his truth and fulfilling the promise he made in prison to do everything in his power to help others like himself. I felt completely drawn in to his story and was grateful for the courage Michael demonstrated in so explicitly describing his experiences. We rarely obtain such precise insight into "psychosis." He narrates this account with refreshing openness and without shame. His positive attitude and utter determination to achieve recovery should give hope to *anyone* who reads this book.

Today Michael has once again found personal happiness and has a thriving career as an international mental health Master Facilitator. He embodies hope, the kind of hope you work at, cultivate, and nourish with great self-effort. His story is the perfect way to exemplify the kind of hope we espouse here at Tend to Hope.

We wish him all the best!





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Bucks Learning Academy in Warrington, PA, is joining us in a year-long community service project. Annie Stafford will speak to the student body on November 20th about her mental health struggles in order to raise awareness and kick off this collaborative effort.



The Lodge at LVF is a new crisis residential center, the first and only of its kind in Bucks County. The Lodge offers a much-needed alternative to conventional psychiatric hospitalizations. Crisis intervention treatment is provided in an open, home-like setting, with 24/7, on-site staffing. Less restrictive than most facilities, the staff works to maintain contact with the individual's family and other community resources during treatment. A stay is between three and ten days, and upon discharge all necessary outpatient services are in place.

The Lodge signed on with Tend to Hope to receive Seeds of Hope Boxes — they were at the bedside when their first guests arrived.

The Montgomery County Hearing Voices Network has provided scholarships for a group of voice hearers, family members and support workers to attend the 11th Congress of the World Hearing Voices Network, held this year in Montreal, Canada, November 11-13th.

Look for some impressions of this event in our next issue.



Thanks for reading our first issue!

Tricia Stafford



Annie Stafford