April 2022 Vol.005



A community partnership to Help, Empower and Lead



LATEST NEWS, UPDATES, & STORIES



IN THIS ISSUE

FROM DESPAIR TO HEALING: A STORY OF RESILIENCE

PROJECT HEAL CELEBRATES FIRST FULL YEAR

NEW PROGRAM GRANT AWARDED TO IMPROVE REACH

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS WEEK EVENT APRIL 29TH

MEET THE TEAM: PROJECT HEAL'S PROGRAM MANAGER While growing up in Haiti, Peterson, an active Project HEAL client, recalls watching American films and imagining what life would be like in the States. "I remember thinking how great life looked in the movies," he said. "Coming here and moving into the environment I did, I realized it wasn't like how I thought it was going to be."

For Peterson, life in Haiti was difficult. Government corruption, food shortages, inequality and violence left a lasting impression on him. "I saw a lot of people dying," he recalled. "Even the wild dogs were violent, we had to run away from them on a daily basis." These conditions forced Peterson's mother to immigrate to America with the hope of establishing herself and sending for her family later. However, this left Peterson and his sisters in the care of his father, who was abusive. Peterson describes being beaten so badly by his father that he could barely walk afterwards. These experiences would be the first of many that would lay the groundwork for Peterson's journey.

At thirteen years old, Peterson and his family were finally able to move to America and live with his mother, who was residing in a lower income section of Queens, New York. His introduction to America was one of violence and racism within the black community in Queens, who were distrusting of Haitian immigrants. "We basically had to band together in the Haitian community to survive," said Peterson. "So many people would have a problem with us because we were Haitian, they would wait outside for us at school. Some had gang affiliations and guns." After living in Queens for almost four years and avoiding any serious injury, Peterson and his family moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey when he was seventeen. 1 April 2022 Vol.005



Moving as a teenager is a big adjustment for anyone. Thankfully, Peterson quickly established a core group of friends when moving to Asbury Park. He was able to avoid trouble at first but it was not long before he was swept up in the community violence that plagued Asbury Park at the time. It was a familiar story for Peterson, having to band together with friends in order to avoid being violently assaulted in the community. Unfortunately, his luck would eventually run out. One evening, Peterson was viciously attacked by multiple individuals, knocked unconscious and hospitalized for a period of time. "Something just snapped after that, I wasn't the same," he said. "I was just sick of being abused from every angle, seeing my friends get shot. I was angry after that and wanted to hurt the world like it hurt me." These events set Peterson on a path where he would eventually succumb to his environment, reacting in the only way he thought he could protect himself...by picking up a gun.

After receiving his first gun charge at eighteen years old, Peterson spent the next twenty years doing whatever he could to make money on the street. He cycled in and out of prison multiple times, always falling back into the same pattern. "You come out of jail and it's really hard, your mind is different, you feel like a loser. You have nobody to help you do anything. You just forget about everything and go back to the same pattern because it's easy," said Peterson. He goes on to stress that doing the wrong thing is easy, it's making a change that is the hard part. After being charged with distribution in 2016, Peterson served five years in prison. Upon his release, he vowed things would be different.

Peterson was tired of being angry and wanted to make a change, especially after the recent birth of his son. He fully immersed himself in the New Jersey Reentry Corporation (NJRC), a non-profit agency with a social mission to remove all barriers to employment for citizens returning from jail or prison. Through NJRC, Peterson was referred to Project HEAL for trauma-informed, wraparound services and support. "From the door, the moment I came in, it was very welcoming. Tracy, the secretary, made me feel at ease. It felt like a family atmosphere here," said Peterson. "The questions I came in with, the answers I wanted; I found out I had them all along. I just needed help finding them on my own." Peterson has been involved with Project HEAL for the last six months and expressed this has been the first time he really addressed past traumas.

At Project HEAL, Peterson engaged in trauma-informed individual therapy to address symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder related to his long history of trauma. Peterson also identified a few case management needs that were resolved with Project HEAL's assistance i.e. obtaining a driver's license, enrolling in a Nonprofit Management program at Brookdale Community College, and advocating for visitation rights with his son.

Today, Peterson is focused on keeping his head in the books and out of trouble. He dreams of starting his own non-profit organization to help kids who struggled like he once did. He believes his calling to help others is not too far out of reach. "I'm 39 years old and I'm in school because of Project HEAL," said Peterson. "I never thought I'd be in school. I feel like I'm doing something with my life, working towards my goals."



April 2022 Vol.005

PROJECT HEAL CELEBRATES ITS FIRST FULL YEAR IN OPERATION



As the snow began to fall in January 2021, final additions to the Project HEAL team were materializing. Clinicians, nurses, peer recovery specialists and communications specialists were all being brought on board to round out the team. The groundwork had been laid since the summer of 2020, but it was not until the team was fully settled that the process could begin to move forward and the work could begin. "To come into a new, forwardthinking program like this and help build it from the ground up was really special," said Content & Outreach Coordinator, Chris Kuhn. "We prepped so much with training, procedures, branding- when we finally opened our doors in March, we really hit the ground running." The team engaged in 26 different training sessions to focus their approach and effort to properly treating victims of violence. From the soft launch in March through the end of June, the team had served almost 50 new clients, provided nearly 150 counseling sessions and introduced two new group therapy offerings that were tailored to the needs identified by our clients.

Coinciding with the work inside the office, building initial community connections was essential in creating meaningful and collaborative relationships with well-established, local community groups. Project HEAL attended numerous community events, networking and building relationships in an effort to help facilitate the referral process and assist those in the community in dire need of trauma-informed services. In addition to these events, Project HEAL was able to integrate itself within a collection of community groups which focused on preventing juvenile crime and promoting positive outcomes for youth.

Celebrating a full year of operation means so much to the Project HEAL team, especially since the program is centered around such a new approach to treat victims of violence and rethink public safety. As anyone in this line of work knows, it can be equally challenging and rewarding at the same time. "Just thinking about where we started and where we are now is very inspiring," said Randy Scales, Project HEAL's Case Management Supervisor. "It has been challenging, with long days and some sleepless nights. But in my heart, the most important part is that I enjoy giving the clients my all." Project HEAL's most recently released Quarterly Report shows that in its first year, it has served 178 clients, provided more than 800 counseling sessions and helped clients with a variety of other services including emergency financial assistance, health screenings, and referrals.

"If you asked me when we first started to predict where this program would be in 1 year, I would have never guessed where we are now. Our initial goal was 65...100 if we were being really optimistic! It blows my mind that in this short time, especially being a brand new program that launched during a pandemic, that we served 178 individuals," said Lisa McDermott, Project HEAL's Clinical Program Manager. "This success has everything to do with the unwavering support provided by our hospital leadership, the amazing collaborations with community partners who are equally passionate about this work and the dedication, commitment and selflessness of each and every person on the Project HEAL team. Project HEAL shows no signs of slowing down, as they were just recently awarded additional funding that will help expand efforts further into the community, reaching at-risk youth. There is also a hope that with continued success, the program can expand across the HMH network and reach communities where this type of help is needed most.

Project HEAL's Founding Medical Director, Dr. Aakash Shah, shared a heartfelt message from Washington D.C. where he is currently serving as a White House Fellow in the Biden Administration. "I firmly believe that there is nothing more important than bringing your head, heart and hands together to make a real, tangible difference in the life of another. In just its first year together, the team at Project HEAL has done that day in and day out for far more of our friends, families and neighbors than we could have expected. I am excited about all the more it will do in the many years ahead."

April 2022 Vol.005

NEW GRANT SEES PROJECT HEAL REACH FURTHER INTO COMMUNITY



Project HEAL was awarded \$500,000 to expand services to Monmouth County's at-risk youth, ages 13-20, and provide them with the holistic support needed to break the cycle of violence.

"As we celebrate our 1 year anniversary, Project HEAL will build even greater connections with local school districts and faith-based organizations to deploy Peer Specialists, who are local, young adults, impacted by violence, who can act as role models and help lead kids down a positive, safe and fulfilling path," said Lisa McDermott, Project HEAL's Clinical Program Manager.

This award is part of \$8.2 million in new funding for community-based violence intervention programs Governor Phil Murphy announced in February, the largest such investment in New Jersey history. Originally, Project HEAL was funded in part by a \$20 million dollar federal grant in 2020, which was the largest such investment in the United States to address recurring instances of community violence. Project HEAL was awarded this new grant, along with 25 other recipients across the state, to continue this vital work and reach further out in the community. This would not have been possible without the hard work of the Project HEAL team and all those who have supported the program. For this, Project HEAL thanks you and will continue to do everything in its power to serve the people of the community and connect them with the help and resources they need.

PROJECT HEAL SPEARHEADS EVENT IN SPRINGWOOD PARK

Project HEAL will host a community event on Friday, April 29th in Springwood Ave Park to highlight National Crime Victims' Rights Week (April 24th-April 30th). Since 1981, The Federal Department of Justice has led National Crime Victims' Rights Week and has challenged the Nation to confront and remove barriers to achieving justice for all victims of crime. During NCVRW, we celebrate the accomplishments of the victims' rights movement and reflect on how far we have come.

Project HEAL partnered with the Office of the Monmouth County Prosecutor, WeBuildNJ, the Asbury Park Kiwanis Club, the Asbury Park Public Library and the City of Asbury Park to hold a resource-centered event that will connect community members with resources to aid them in their struggles with victimization. In 2020, statistics provided by The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office and the Victims of Crime Compensation office found that only 5% of reported victimizations received compensation from the Victims of Crime Compensation Office.



This is usually because victims are not aware of their rights and do not know there are resources to help them. Project HEAL and its partners felt creating an event to promote awareness and provide information and resources was essential. The event will feature community agencies with information and resources, healthy living activities, local food vendors, trauma-informed health screenings and keynote speakers. The event will end with a candlelit vigil to honor those we lost to violence. All are encouraged to attend!

April 2022 Vol.005

MEET THE STAFF: PROJECT HEAL PROGRAM MANAGER, LISA MCDERMOTT



Like many in this line of work, a call to help others can often be traced back to an early age. "As a young person, I found that peers would turn to me and share information that they didn't share with others," said Lisa McDermott, Clinical Program Manager for Project HEAL. "I vividly remember thinking to myself, 'I just want to help in whatever way I can." McDermott grew up in Hawthorne, a small suburban town in northern New Jersey.

After graduating high school, McDermott attended Arizona State University. It was here that she found herself in a domestic violence relationship she could not get out of. "I tried to tap into some resources but always found myself back at square one," McDermott said. After a few years and with the support of those around her, she decided to move back home and attend William Paterson University.

It was there that she met a professor who just received grant funding to start a violence prevention program on campus. "It was the universe sending me a sign, a sign of hope and healing, and encouraging me to move forward with my life." McDermott helped launch this program at William Paterson University and eventually became the Campus Victim Services Coordinator, receiving referrals from students and staff and providing resources for those impacted by intimate partner violence.

McDermott went on to earn a Masters of Social Work degree from Rutgers University. She became a duallylicensed Clinical Social Worker and Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor and worked in the field for over 10 years in various treatment settings. In early 2020, McDermott was contacted by her colleague with whom she built the campus violence prevention program with. She was informed about a potential opportunity to build another program, this time, serving victims of violent crime in Monmouth County. "Once again, here was the universe sending me a sign. It was a risk and a leap of faith but I knew this was my calling. I came full circle," said McDermott.

McDermott was hired as Clinical Program Manager for Project HEAL in August 2020, and in coordination with Found Medical Director, Dr. Shah, built the program brick by brick. Starting a new program during a pandemic, finding the right team, building relationships, creating policy and procedures, finding office space; "It takes a long time to develop a program and lay the foundation to be successful," McDermott said. "We had the right support, the right environment and the right team in place to get where we are today." McDermott hopes to see Project HEAL expand its services across the entire health network of Hackensack, and with continued hard work and dedication, believes the program can get there.