

IPS Newsletter Spring 2015



Featured Artwork by Lauren E. Kenneally

Lauren Kenneally is a massage therapist, crisis bed counselor, artist, and soon-to-be nursing student. Her paintings and drawings often convey an intense sense of emotion through a strong use of color. Some common themes of her work include mental health, pregnancy, bird imagery and lonely industrial landscapes.

Gouache, ink, mylar and art marker are preferred media due to their color-layering abilities. Lauren is also a needle felting artist and creates whimsical creatures out of wire and wool. No matter the medium, art is paramount to aiding her in recovery and getting her through episodes of extreme moods.

She currently lives with her partner and two small dogs outside of Burlington, Vermont. Her art has been featured in various shops and fairs across Boston and Vermont.

You can explore her work further at www.lkenneally.weebly.com or at www.artfulingo.etsy.com.

In this Issue

- ◆ Listening Differently by *Shery Mead*
- ◆ Changing the World and Other Extreme Sports by *Dani Scott*
- ◆ Poem by *Herminio Zuniga Jr*
- ◆ Upcoming IPS Core Training - Baltimore, MD
- ◆ Upcoming IPS Facilitator Training - Portland, OR

Moving Towards

Intentional Peer Support has been evolving now for around 20 years, and over that time thousands of people have been trained, including well over 100 facilitators. So what is Intentional Peer Support? Is it something you *do*, something you *do to* people, or something else? I like to think of it as a way of being aware or mindful of our presence in relationships. It's a 'practice' rather than a technique or model. It can be used in the past to reflect on what happened in a relationship (did I connect/disconnect? perhaps I could have been more curious about the untold story/worldview?) It can be used in the present (how can I connect? how can I validate, or ask for what I need in a way that can be heard?), and it can be used in the future (how can I be present to this difficult conversation?)

This spring, IPS marks some milestones—the Parachute Project in New York City comes to the end of its contract period at the end of June. 'Parachute' was birthed from a SAMHSA grant and adopted by NYC to provide a coalition between mobile teams and peer-staffed respites to use NATM (an Open-Dialogue affiliated way of working with people in crisis) alongside IPS. Although the project will come to an end, the work will continue with different funding sources. There is also a growth in the number of peer-run and -staffed respites around the US and the world, and IPS continues to be involved helping develop many of them.

We are grateful to Shery Mead for her ongoing inspiration. Although mostly retired, she is updating some materials. We are also indebted to the numerous IPS contractors, facilitators, and champions around the US and around the world for their tireless energy, support and creativity...

Listening Differently

By Shery Mead

Listening Differently sounds strange to us. Most of us probably already know what it means to listen. You just don't talk, rather you take in what the other person is saying... But is that all you do? Actually, even when you're not speaking you are communicating all sorts of things—by your facial expressions, where you cough, lose your attention, and probably a myriad of other reactions. So I would add that listening differently really means listening with intention...the intention of curiosity and wonder.

Let me go back a few steps. When we engage in conversation we already have opinions, biases, and judgments. This is not a bad thing, it just is. We can't help it, we've been in this world for a while, had many conversations, formed ideas and thoughts about many things. We may try to hide it from the person we're listening to but in some ways these biases may come out.

This is where we can learn something from anthropology: listening from a position of not knowing. Anthropologists learn to put aside their ideas, thoughts, biases and judgments (or at least bracket them) when they are trying to understand someone. They presume an attitude of not understanding the culture, the ideals, the history, and they work really hard to listen for clues that will let them inside someone else's world (even if only briefly).

Here's an example: *Mary and John have been having a conversation and John feels a connection. After awhile he says to Mary, "I'm so depressed I just want to die." Mary listens knowingly and nods. John then asks Mary if she's ever felt this way and she nods again. John says, "So what did you do?" Mary says she just rode it out and eventually felt better which is a subtle way of saying to John that he should 'just ride it out.'*

What if Mary instead said to John, "I know what it was like for me to feel depressed John, but I really don't know what it means for you. Can you tell me what it's like for you?" This would have given John the opportunity to open up and go into more detail rather than Mary assuming she knows what John's talking about. Listening differently may take some practice, but at the end of the day may also lead to deeper, more meaningful relationships.

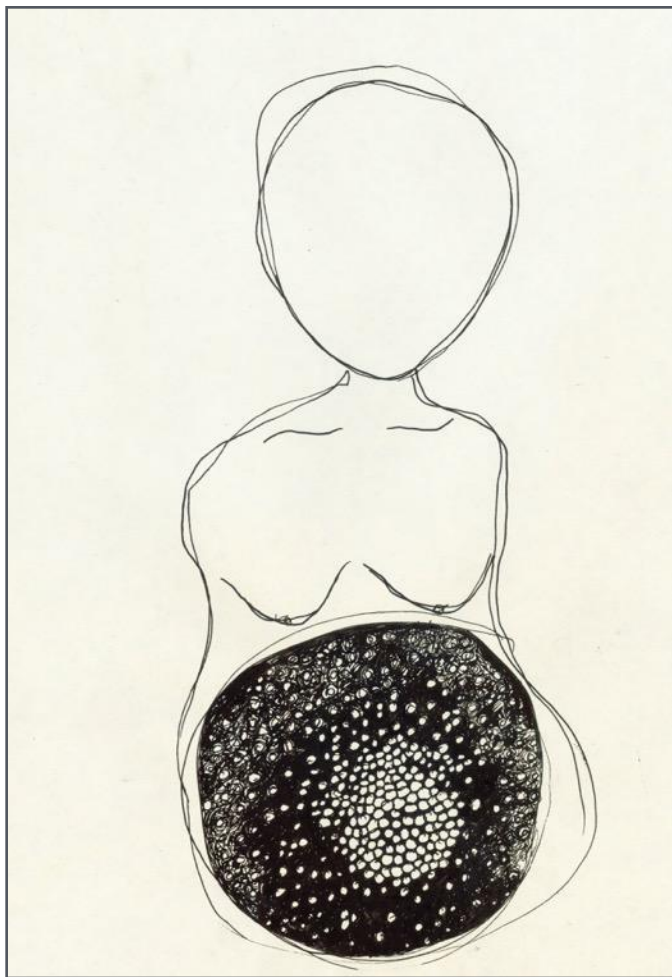


Changing the World and Other Extreme Sports

First published on Mad In America: www.madinamerica.com/2015/03/changing-world-extreme-sports/

By Dani Scott

“Okay. Someone is standing on the roof of your respite. It’s thunder and lightening, and they’re saying they wanting to kill themselves? What do you do?”



This sounds like a game of “What If” being played at a party, yeah? But, friends, I tell you, this was a *real* question from one of the last conferences where we presented on Afiya. For anyone who’s unfamiliar, Afiya is the first peer-run respite in Massachusetts and it is one of only about 18 in the country. It’s no surprise, then, that people are confused about how we do things. But, it’s not just confusion. I’ve come to realize there is actual defensiveness that arises at times when we talk about what we do at the house. If I’m wearing my activist hat, this can be supremely annoying. However, when looking through more compassionate eyes, I can see how what we’re doing rubs uncomfortably against some people’s commonly held beliefs about mental health and causes discomfort in those who have been doing things a certain way for many years in the field.

We definitely try to do things differently than traditional spaces might do, and it starts right from the first conversation. The person who wants to stay contacts us and that starts a dialogue (in person or by phone) focused on what’s happening for that person and how they’re imagining Afiya might be helpful. Once both

those calling and working agree it seems like a good fit, someone is invited to stay. When they arrive to the house, we offer a cup of coffee, tea, food, etc., and show them the house, and their private room. We then ask that, some time in the next few hours, we sit down to fill out a few sheets of paper. And, it truly is *just a few* pieces of paper. Of those sheets, one asks what would be helpful to do during the stay at Afiya. Mind you, this is NOT to be confused with a goals sheet. Rather, what it’s getting at is understanding what someone believes will support them to move through their tough time. That looks wildly different for different people

and there are no real wrong answers. For one person, it may be all about having peace and quiet and getting some much needed sleep, while for another, it may involve having safe space in which to explore frightening visions or voices. Yet another may have concrete tasks they want to accomplish in the outside world (setting up and getting to appointments, addressing housing issues, etc.). And so on. Regardless of the particular person's focus, a belief in someone's ability to know what will be most helpful in their lives and what will support them in moving through distress is a crucial part of what we do.

What ensues during the seven days that someone hangs out with us looks different from person to person, but the thread that is common throughout is the mutual support that's offered. Everyone who works at the space (including all leadership) identifies as having some variety of 'lived experience.'

And, varied experience it is! Some who work with us have been homeless, addicted to different substances, have withdrawn off of psych drugs, been mistreated by the mental health industry, experienced trauma, struggled with suicidal thoughts, and any number of other struggles life has to offer. This having "been there" seems to create more potential for a truly open and genuine dynamic to form between people staying and people working. In other words, if I'm full of shit, someone staying can tell me so, and if they're full of shit, I can do the same (in words that will vary based on the relationship formed!). It's a beautiful part of the peer-to-peer relationship—this authenticity. I would even say that it's a necessary part of getting meaningful support from another human. We're not doing each other any favors by hiding our truest selves. This willingness to be vulnerable with another human being takes so much courage and it is the essence of what it means to be a 'peer.'



While training for a job at a different organization many years ago, I asked if we could share parts of our personal story with people using the service if it seemed relevant in the moment. You know the sound made when someone stops a record short? That is exactly what it was like! The trainer said absolutely not; that this would just be a self-serving action and we were to keep our "boundaries" high during all interactions. I'll spare you my response (and the story of how I was asked not to come back for training day two), but it brought up real

questions for me when I started at Afiya. Was I being a bit selfish in sharing my stuff with people and sometimes getting support from those who were in “crisis”? How much was too much? Time and again, though, I see how sharing my story and hearing others share their stories has really changed the way someone sees themselves and the world. Personally, I can clearly remember times when hearing about someone else’s life has brought enormous relief, hope and humility into my own. In truth, I find myself endlessly touched and changed by others’ accounts of life struggles and triumphs. Is there potential for someone working to take up too much space and over share? Sure. I just don’t think that having rigid limits applied in a cookie-cutter fashion to each conversation one has with someone in a tough space yields anything resembling the authenticity that is crucial to supporting them to move forward.

It’s a good point to touch on, actually: this flexibility of relating. We do not have any set model that we’re working off of at the house. The team has received any number of trainings and we appreciate some more than others (e.g, Intentional Peer Support as developed by Shery Mead and led by Chris Hansen), but we keep things open in order to have conversations stay as organic as possible. We also do not have rigid protocols at the house. We do have guidelines, but these are written flexibly and are real living documents. It seems that rigid rules stem more from fear than anything, and our hope is to move from a place of openness rather than trying to anticipate every tough thing that could happen at the house.



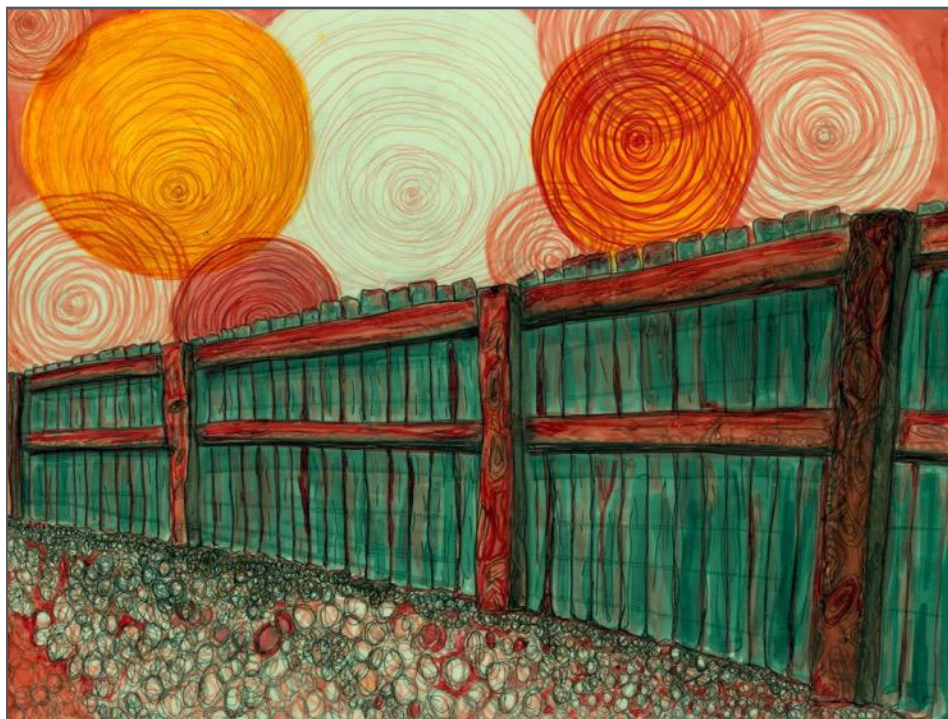
This flexibility includes a comfort with sitting in discomfort. This may sound silly or not possible, but I’ve actually seen myself and others on the team get really good at this. The brain tends toward categorizing, judgment and making things right and wrong. I would say that these are tendencies to work on noticing and letting go of for anyone, but that is especially true for those offering peer support. Sitting in the space of “I don’t know” is tough. It requires courage and trust that what is best will ultimately come to pass (even if it doesn’t look like what we expect or assume). One person’s way of dealing with hearing voices, for example, might not fit with your idea of how it “should” be done, but if it works for them and they are happy with the life they lead, that’s what matters. It also requires a certain amount of humility and sharing of power. Everyone wants to be the person that has the answers, I think; there is confidence and a reaffirmation of one’s

importance that can arise from it. But, to be the person who can sit with someone working their way through the murky complexity of life without having to direct that person... Well, that is what we're all about.

This is difficult work, and it's certainly not for everyone. That's why I gave this piece the title I did. Some may think of it as pretentious and, maybe it is, but Afiya (and the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community to which it is connected) certainly is calling for a paradigm shift. As I said, some feel really ready for this to happen. Others are resistant and are digging their heels in. Unfortunately, the money tends to stay with the black and white concepts, too, so finding funding for these ways of seeing the world and distress is not easy. But here we are, making it work.

As much as I hope that at least some of what I talk about above resonates with readers, I know that a bunch of text can't take the place of seeing things for yourself. In fact, knowing that was one of the driving forces behind our team's desire to create a film about Afiya and the peer respite concept. So, in conclusion, I also want to offer up our now completed 24-minute 'Afiya' film. This video was directed by fellow team member and filmmaker, Evan Goodchild, and further supported with contributions from many throughout our community. I hope that you will take the time to watch and share far and wide. The video can be found at: <https://youtu.be/9x8h3LvEB04>

Dani Scott is the Director of Afiya in Northampton, Massachusetts, and can be reached at dani@westernmassrlc.org



Poem

By Herminio Zuniga Jr

IPS Core Class Los Angeles, California 2015

I have smelled many flowers
Flowers of courage to help others better
By not being afraid to grow
IPS sings: we encourage one another
To evaluate how we've come to know
What we know

Our movement is like a humming bird
Small but very strong
Some people say that seeing is believing
Together we smell the flowers
Of Intentional Peer Support
It's about giving and receiving



In order for me to see, do, and get
peer support
I sing the flower of unity
IPS sings:
It's about connecting and reconnecting
With family, culture, and community

Upcoming IPS Core Training!

Baltimore, Maryland

Venue to be determined

September 14th - 18th, 2015

Cost of Registration: \$850

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Payment is not required at time of registration. Registrations are taken on a first-come, first-serve basis, so please register early!

Further inquiries:

info@intentionalpeersupport.org



IPS Core Training NYC 2014

What is Intentional Peer Support?

IPS is a way of thinking about and creating powerful and transformative peer support relationships. It is a process where both people use the relationship to look at things from new angles, develop greater awareness of personal and relational patterns, and support and challenge each other in trying new things. IPS is used across the world in settings ranging from peer-run respites to traditional mental health services. We come from a history of grassroots alternatives that focus on the possibilities that emerge when relationships become mutual, explorative, and conscious of power.

About the IPS Core Training

Our Core Training is a 5-day introduction to the IPS framework and is designed to have you practicing right away. In a highly interactive environment, participants learn the tasks and principles of IPS, examine assumptions about who they are, and explore ways to create mutual relationships in which power is negotiated, co-learning is possible, and support goes beyond traditional notions of "service." IPS is all about opening up new ways of seeing, thinking, and doing, and here we examine how to make this possible. Our Core Training is for anyone interested in peer support and has been widely used as a foundation training for peers working in both traditional and alternative mental health settings. Specific topics covered include:

The Four Tasks: Connection, Worldview, Mutuality, Moving Towards * The Three Principles: From Helping to Learning, Individual to Relationship, Fear to Hope * Looking at language and story * Listening differently and with intention * Understanding trauma worldview and re-enactment * Rethinking old roles and ways of relating * Working towards shared responsibility in relationships * Examining power and privilege * Negotiating boundaries and limits * Navigating challenging scenarios * Understanding crisis as an opportunity * Using co-reflection to sustain values * Creating social change

"IPS offers a way of being in the world – whether or not we're working in conventional or alternative mental health – which is congruent with a healing and recovery-based community. It can be life-changing. It was for me." - Participant, IPS Core Training 2014

Upcoming IPS Facilitators Training!

Portland, Oregon

August 3rd — 7th, 2015

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE
INFO AND TO APPLY](#)

Applications must be received by
June 8th. Accepted applicants will be
notified by June 12th.

For further inquiries:

info@intentionalpeersupport.org

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Our Facilitator Training is a 5-day, hands-on seminar that prepares and certifies IPS practitioners to pass on the content of our 5-day Core Training to folks within the organizations where they work.

We are looking for IPS practitioners who have a solid grasp of the principles and tasks, who can clearly communicate the value of mutual relationships, and who are passionate about creating social change through peer support.

Oregon Residents – If you or your organization would like Peer Specialist or Recovery Mentor certification to be included when you train participants in IPS in the future, please fill out an application and contact Community Connections at info@letsbridgetogether.com

IPS Facilitator Training Vermont 2014

