



# The Greater Houston Healing Collaborative

A Community-Based Self Care Program

[houstonhealing.org](http://houstonhealing.org)

## Welcome from Our Leadership

Welcome to the Greater Houston Healing Collaborative! We are a community-based program offering healing to all human beings through the power of mind-body medicine.

We began this work in 2017, in response to the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. From the beginning, we felt called to build a sustainable program that could help to heal all forms of trauma and serve the many psychosocial needs of our community. We have reached hundreds of organizations and communities and thousands of individuals, bringing healing and a new way of living to all those who have participated. We are fostering a culture of healing to help repair divisions and overcome traumas that we face as individuals and as a community.

We hope you will join us in building this program for Greater Houston and beyond.

Cyrus Wirls, Program Director  
Gwen Brehm, Collaborative Chair



## How We Began: Responding to Hurricane Harvey

On August 26-29, 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated the Greater Houston area. As the flood waters receded, we knew that the emotional and psychological healing from Hurricane Harvey was just beginning. Local psychotherapist Gwen Brehm reached out to the Institute for Spirituality and Health (ISH), and together with six other local organizations we formed the Greater Houston Healing Collaborative (GHHC) to relieve the community-wide stress and trauma caused by the disaster. We partnered with The Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM), which for 30 years has delivered population-wide healing programs around the world.

Support from the Greater Houston Community Foundation, American Red Cross, Rotary District 5890, and the Feeding Souls Ryan Anderson Foundation enabled our collaborative to provide CMBM training to 120 physicians, nurses, counselors, educators and spiritual leaders. These trained facilitators offered evidence-based psychological support services to over 12,000 traumatized children and adults across Houston in the first two years after Harvey.

"After Harvey, I was unable to cry; I was so afraid my tears would be overwhelming. Today I was able to cry- but they were tears of joy and relief for the compassion and support shared through this process."

- LaVonne Carlson, UT Health HCPC



## The CMBM Model

Our facilitators were trained by the Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM), the world's most extensive and most effective evidence-based program for healing population-wide trauma and stress. The CMBM model, developed by James Gordon, MD, brings together techniques drawn from the world's healing traditions with the rigor of modern medicine to empower communities to heal themselves. CMBM has taught thousands to heal millions through their programs in Gaza, Kosovo, Sub-Saharan Africa, Haiti, New Orleans, California, Florida, Puerto Rico, and of course, Houston.

CMBM's train-the-trainer program teaches individuals of all backgrounds how to use self-care and group support as transformational tools for healing trauma and building resilience. The program teaches participants stress-reducing mind-body skills such as breathing, meditation, writing, drawing, and movement, and gives them the opportunity to safely share their experiences in a supportive small group environment. These Mind-Body Skills Groups have repeatedly demonstrated 80-90% reduction in levels of PTSD.<sup>1</sup>

Learn more about the model at [cmbm.org](http://cmbm.org)

<sup>1</sup> Gordon JS, Staples JK, Blyta A, Bytyqi M, Wilson AT. Treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder in postwar Kosovar adolescents using mind-body skills groups: a randomized controlled trial. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2008; 69(9):1469-1476



## What is Mind-Body Medicine?

Mind-body medicine is based on the understanding that the body and mind are interconnected, and that self-care is at the root of healthcare. What we think and how we feel affects every system in our bodies. Conversely, what happens in our bodies, and how we take care of them, impacts what we think, feel, and believe. Healing begins from within.

### How It Works

Mind-body approaches use the conscious mind to directly affect the workings of the brain and body. The techniques exert their effect on the hypothalamus, which controls the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system, and the immune system. The scientific literature on these approaches is now robust. Studies have demonstrated the power of mind-body techniques to balance over-activity of the "fight or flight" and "stress" responses and create beneficial changes in blood pressure, stress hormone levels, pain response, and immune functioning, making a significant clinical difference in conditions as diverse as hypertension, HIV, cancer, chronic pain, and insomnia as well as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>1</sup>

### The Techniques

Mind-Body Skills include breathing, movement, meditation, biofeedback, guided imagery, autogenic training, genograms, and explorative drawing and writing exercises that facilitate authentic self-expression and posttraumatic growth.

### The Group

Mind-Body Skills Groups offer a safe space to learn, experience, and share these evidence-based skills in a supportive group environment. Lasting between 6-10 weeks, the groups allow participants to connect deeply with one another, become more aware of themselves physically and emotionally, and learn to improve their own health.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from [cmbm.org](http://cmbm.org). For more information, visit [cmbm.org/research](http://cmbm.org/research)

"The mind-body practices have enlivened me again and again. The small group experience is transformative. I believe everyone should receive this training for all of life's stresses."

- John Graham, MD, President/CEO of the Institute for Spirituality and Health

## A Different Kind of Program

### Destigmatizing

In underserved communities that experience the highest levels of trauma, people often resist seeking mental health support. Mind-Body Skills Groups are therapeutic but not therapy, offering a non-clinical space for people to express their emotions, find support, and become empowered as active participants in their healing process.

### Equitable and Inclusive

Our team of 120 facilitators is made up of teachers, physicians, students, counselors, community health workers, entrepreneurs, service providers and community leaders of all ages, races, personalities, and life experiences. Together, we represent the wonderful diversity of the Greater Houston community that we serve.

### Community Driven

Healing requires trust. Our trained facilitators offer mind-body skills groups and workshops within the communities where they live and serve.

### Creating a Culture of Healing

Our program is based on skills anyone can learn and practice, so the impact grows organically. We train the facilitators, who teach their community members, who in turn share the skills with family, friends, and coworkers. In this way, we are cultivating a community culture of mutual support and self-care.



## Our Impact



WE HAVE TRAINED:

**120**  
Mind-Body Facilitators

**17**  
Certified Leaders

**4**  
Local Faculty Trainers



WHO HAVE PROVIDED:

**250+**  
Community Workshops

**175+**  
8-Week Mind-Body  
Skills Groups

**25,000+**  
Individuals Served

## Connectedness During COVID-19

During the pandemic, 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder...up from one in ten adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019.<sup>1</sup>

In response to the anxiety and isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we rapidly mobilized to provide virtual groups and workshops for self-care and community connectedness. We launched an initial round of groups for healthcare providers, teachers, veterans, and teens, and organized a series of collaborative workshops with YMCA, Camp Shield, Peace Corps, and Rotary. One of our first groups to begin was our Open Group for Togetherness that has run every Monday since March 2020, welcoming over 500 participants from Houston to New Zealand. To date, we have served over 5000 individuals with mind-body skills online.

"I am usually not so vulnerable. In this group, every Monday, I feel the freedom to be me and express myself in ways that I wouldn't otherwise."

- Participant, Open Group for Togetherness

<sup>1</sup>KFF, The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use



## Together We Breathe - Addressing Health Disparities

The words of George Floyd, "I can't breathe!", resonated across the globe. To address health disparities and provide healing for the community, the BeyGOOD Foundation supported our collaborative in offering free mind-body programs within communities of color. Partnering with the Fountain of Praise Church and Avenue 360 Health & Wellness, we offered a series of live-streaming workshops called Together We Breathe.

Our Spanish-speaking leadership team partnered with Buckner, Easter Seals of Greater Houston, and Sunnyside Elementary to facilitate groups in Spanish for promotores and Latinx communities. In collaboration with the Women's Resource Center, we are providing training and group support through churches and community centers in the Third Ward, Fifth Ward, Sunnyside, and South Park neighborhoods of Houston.

"After taking the Mind-Body training, I was excited to help change the lives of others through the skills I learned. The training became a lifestyle for me. My mother passed away a few months ago and the skills helped me to "just breathe."

- Laverne West, Women's Resource Center



## Healing Santa Fe

On May 18, 2018, less than eight months after Hurricane Harvey, another tragedy struck the close-knit community of Santa Fe, TX, when a teenage boy shot and killed eight fellow students and two teachers at Santa Fe High School. Our leadership reached out and met with Mayor Jason Tabor and other community leaders. They shared the anger, shock, and pain felt within their self-reliant community, and the need for non-stigmatizing support. Spearheaded by our partners with Houston Galveston Institute, we offered three support and resiliency workshops at multiple community centers and churches, led six 8-week mind-body skills groups for teens and adults at the Santa Fe Strong Resiliency Center, and trained four local residents who continue to share mind-body skills as the community heals.

“Following the mass shooting at my son’s school, I enrolled in a Mind-Body, Medicine program to learn skills that I could bring home and use to help my family heal. I got so much more. I found lifelong friendships bonded on a deep and almost spiritual level. I also gained self-care skills that I still use two years later. The Mind-Body Medicine classes kept me on track when I thought the whole world was falling apart.”

- Mandy Jordan, mother of Santa Fe High junior and community volunteer



## Serving Veterans

Much of our work has served veterans. Our trained participants and certified leaders work daily with vets, and have offered over 40 intensive 8-week mind-body skills groups for veterans, their families, and their caregivers within the DeBakey VA Medical Center, the VA Conroe Community Based Outpatient Clinic, Easter Seals of Greater Houston, Catholic Charities, and Camp Shield, serving thousands of service members to date. Our trained facilitators in these organizations continue to integrate mind-body skills with their fellow staff, peer support specialists, and the veterans they serve every day.

“Before the group, I would completely shut down. Now I have skills to help me move through it.”

“I waited my whole life for people to help me with this... Now I have the confidence. I can lean on myself.”

“Being in civilian life is not what I thought it would be. You get exactly what you put into this group. You can change within yourself. You don’t have to be afraid of change.”

- Participants, Veterans Groups at Easter Seals of Greater Houston



## Founding Collaborative Partners



## Supporting Foundations

Greater Houston Community Foundation  
 American Red Cross  
 Rotary District 5890  
 Feeding Souls Ryan Anderson Foundation

BeyGOOD Foundation  
 The Elkins Foundation  
 MD Anderson Foundation

## Communities Engaged

### Community Centers

Bear Creek Community Center  
 Friendswood Library  
 Glazier Senior Center  
 Hiram Clarke Multiservice Center  
 Milton Lusk Community Center  
 SHAPE Community Center  
 YMCA

### Faith Communities

Bellaire United Methodist  
 Congregation Beth Yeshurun  
 Ecclesia  
 El Tabernaculo Church  
 First Presbyterian of Pasadena  
 Harvest Time Church  
 St. John Vianney Catholic Church  
 San Matthew Church  
 St. George's Episcopal  
 St. Paul's Episcopal  
 St. Paul's United Methodist  
 The Fountain of Praise

### Healthcare

Avenue 360 Health and Wellness  
 Baylor College of Medicine  
 Legacy Community Health  
 MD Anderson Cancer Center  
 Memorial Hermann Hospital  
 Michael E. BeBakey VA Med Center  
 Conroe VA Outpatient Clinic

St. Austin Center  
 Texas Center for Lifestyle  
 Medicine  
 University of Texas Health  
 Science Center  
 University of Texas Medical  
 Branch  
 UNLV School of Medicine

### Mental Health

Center for Mind Body Health  
 EnCourage: Trauma Healing  
 Center  
 Harris County Felony Mental  
 Health Court  
 Houston Association of Black  
 Psychologists  
 Houston Galveston Institute  
 Interface-Samaritan Counseling  
 Center  
 Linking The Gap Counseling  
 Services  
 Mental Health America of Greater  
 Houston  
 Mindful in Practice  
 The Center for Stress  
 Management  
 The Council on Recovery  
 The Menninger Clinic

### Schools & Universities

Be the Peace Be the Hope  
 Berry Elementary  
 Clear View High  
 Communities in Schools  
 De Zavala Middle School  
 Houston ISD  
 Lone Star College  
 Michael E. DeBakey High School  
 for Health Professions  
 OASIS School  
 Tanglewood Middle School  
 The Broad Center  
 University of Houston Downtown  
 UH Graduate College of Social  
 Work  
 Westchester Academy for  
 International Studies

### Social Services

Alliance for Multicultural  
 Community Services  
 BakerRipley Neighborhood  
 Centers  
 Buckner  
 Camp Shield  
 Catholic Charities  
 Children's Assessment Center  
 City of Houston Housing and  
 Community Development  
 Combined Arms  
 Dia de la Mujer Latina

Disaster & Humanitarian Services  
 East Harris County Empowerment  
 Council

Easter Seals Greater Houston  
 Harris County Domestic Violence  
 Coordinating Council  
 Healthcare for the Homeless  
 Houston Area Parkinson's Society  
 Houston Area Women's Center  
 Houston Food Bank  
 Memorial Assistance Ministries  
 My Sister's Keeper Houston  
 Northwest Assistance Ministries  
 Santa Fe Strong Resiliency Center  
 SEARCH Homeless Services  
 Women's Resource Center

### Wellness & Community

American Leadership Forum  
 Compassionate Houston  
 Healing Circles Houston  
 Health Luminary  
 Institute for Spirituality and Health  
 Living Well Therapies  
 Shell Alumni of Greater Houston  
 The Jung Center  
 Urban Paths Houston

## We Need Mind-Body Medicine

According to the CDC, chronic diseases - impacting 6 in 10 Americans - are the “leading causes of death and disability and the leading drivers of our \$3.8 trillion annual health care costs.” Lifestyle behaviors are a major factor in developing these diseases.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Mental Health America reports that 47 million Americans suffer from mental illness.<sup>2</sup>

Mind-body medicine empowers us to be the source of our own wellbeing, reconnecting us with our bodies, our emotions, and with one another. Mind-body skills promote positive lifestyle changes and reduce the risk factors for chronic illnesses, as well as anxiety and depression.

Beyond individual wellness, mind-body medicine can help us heal societal wounds and divisions that exist between us and rebuild mutual trust. Mind-body skills help us calm the areas of the brain responsible for fear and judgement, and activate the areas that facilitate compassion and creativity. Amidst today’s pressure on short-term self-image, mind-body skills groups foster authentic self-discovery and self-expression, and offer a safe space in which we can recognize our common humanity.

<sup>1</sup>Center for Disease Control website, Chronic Diseases in America

<sup>2</sup>Mental Health America website, The State of Mental Health in America



## Bring Mind-Body Healing to Your Community

Whether you are seeking resources for yourself or a partnership to serve your community, we look forward to connecting with you.

### What we offer:

#### Mind-Body Workshops

Teaching essential skills for self-care and stress management

**1-3** hours

**20+** participants - staff, community, congregation

#### Mind-Body Skills Groups

Facilitating a transformational healing experience

**8-Weeks**, once/week

**10** participants

Serving:

- Healthcare Professionals
- Teachers and Educators
- Case Managers and Service Providers
- First Responders
- Veterans
- Underserved Communities
- Children and Teens
- Anyone!

To learn more about our work and find a group or workshop for you, visit [houstonhealing.org](https://houstonhealing.org)

Or reach out to us directly:

**Cyrus Wirls, Program Director - [cwirls@ish-tmc.org](mailto:cwirls@ish-tmc.org)**

**Gwen Brehm, Collaborative Chair - [brehm.gwen@att.net](mailto:brehm.gwen@att.net)**

### Support our efforts:

We are always seeking funds to support our facilitators in offering groups and workshops free of charge to communities in need.

To contribute to mind-body healing in our community, please visit [houstonhealing.org/contribute](https://houstonhealing.org/contribute)