

WHO WE ARE

Our suffering includes isolation and depression, wild energy, severe mistrust, paralyzing terror, oppressive voices, aching despair, confusing beliefs, self-injury, and difficulty communicating; we are also gifted with powerful visions, soaring creativity, spiritual awakening, and empathic sensitivity. Instead of compassion, society too often confronts us with fear and mistreatment. We are condemned to live as the “mentally ill,” labeled with disorders, locked up and restrained, patronized by bureaucracies, drugged into compliance, manipulated by corrupt science, and offered few options to heal the way we want to heal.

Freedom Center believes that to truly help people suffering from madness, the traumatic legacy of psychiatric abuse must end. We call for new respect for extreme emotional distress and altered states of consciousness. We need a new language, new holistic health options, new places of safety, and new honesty about the dangers of drugs and the stigma of diagnosis. We need communities of caring open to all and based on deep listening, diversity, and self-determination.

We stand outside the either-or, one-size-fits-all approach. Many of us choose to take psychiatric drugs, and many don't. We respect choice, and we help people reduce or go off their psych drugs and find alternatives if they want. We need support to discover what works for us, and options about how to live our lives.

Recognition

We received the '03 Class Gift from Smith School of Social Work, the '04 Advocacy Award from Stavros Center for Independent Living, a gift from the Mount Holyoke College psychology Honor Society, a national leadership nomination from the American Association of People with Disabilities, Best Law Presentation by Survivors award at the '06 ICSP conference, and a Northampton City Block Grant. We have led trainings at ServiceNet, Stavros, Safe Passage, and for police, hospital, and agency staff, and given presentations around the country and in Europe. Press includes New York Times, Forbes, NPR radio, Adbusters, an editorial in the Hampshire Gazette, and cover stories in the Gazette and Springfield Republican. We are volunteer-run and funded by donations and grants. We accept no money, or free pens, from pharmaceutical companies.

Our Vision

Create voluntary mutual aid networks of caring support among equals, based on safety, listening to our experiences without judgement, and helping empower ourselves for change. Strengthen communities, not bureaucracies.

Support choice. Help people get off psychiatric drugs if they want to try, going slowly and carefully with support and alternatives. Fund research into alternatives.

Promote equal low-income access to effective alternatives, such as holistic health, peer-run services, safe houses (such as Soteria), nutrition, exercise, housing, income, nature, exercise, and voluntary individual and family therapy.

Educate for choice, options, and informed consent. Ensure accurate information about the dangers of psych drugs and diagnoses. Oppose drug pushing and pharmaceutical profiteering. End direct-to-consumer ads.

Oppose all force and coercion in mental health: end restraints, seclusion, forced drugging and involuntary treatment. Care must do no harm: replace force with effective alternatives, and respond to crisis without further traumatizing people. Services and housing should never be tied to treatment compliance.

Stop imposing degrading, scientifically-unsound diagnosis labels on people. Labeling people with 'disorders' spreads lifelong hopelessness and removes attention from trauma, poverty, nutrition, and oppression. Allow us instead to define our experiences for ourselves in ways that work for us.

End all psychiatric abuse, coercion, and drugging of children and adolescents.

Respect alternative realities and worldviews. We oppose the racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in psychiatry, and value perspectives outside the dominant Western scientific reason model. Diverse-ability not “disability.”

Educate and reach out to the public. parents.



freedom center

Freedom Center
is run by and for
psychiatric survivors
and people who
experience extreme
emotional states

We help each other
take back control of
our lives

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www.freedom-center.org

WE OFFER:

Weekly drop-in support groups to make contact, share resources, discuss experiences and offer ideas. Confidential, non-judgemental atmosphere of respect, diversity and self-determination. Our community helps us navigate crisis and regain control of our lives. People taking and not taking medications welcome. We offer help coming off meds if people want to try, but accept all choices. Allies welcome.

Weekly free yoga and acupuncture for relaxation, grounding, and recovery. Effective for many in helping with anxiety, stress, sleep and addictions. Free Writing Groups.

Networking and resources to stand up against mistreatment. We are part of the word-wide psychiatric survivor movement working to challenge injustices, end discrimination and oppression, protect human rights, and get voluntary and peer run services the resources they need.

Public education including Speak Outs, films, public events, a website, and a radio show.

Psychiatric drug information and education, including harm reduction and coming off meds.

Support for peer run alternatives such as the Recovery Learning Community and for effective alternative programs like Open Dialog and Soteria House.

Coalitions with Mindfreedom, ; MPOWER; the Access to Equality Coalition; Health Care For All; SHaRC, the Statewide Harm Reduction Coalition; INTAR, and the Icarus Project.

All groups FREE to low-income, please donate if you can afford to.

JOIN US!

DROP-IN SUPPORT GROUP: Thursdays 7pm, 43 Center St., left side entrance. Survivors and allies only. Mental health staff allies welcome but please call first.

TWO FREE WEEKLY YOGA CLASSES: Mondays 7pm 32 Masonic, rear entrance. Thursday 3:30 at Forbes Library. Drop-in, beginners welcome! Certified instructor; open to everyone.

FREE ACUPUNCTURE CLINIC: Monday 4:30-5:30pm (arrive before 5:15), 43 Center St. Northampton. Certified acupuncturist; open to all.

HEARING VOICES GROUP: Tuesday. Co-Sponsored with the Recovery Learning Community www.westernmassrlc.org.

WRITING GROUP: Contact for info.

EMAIL DISCUSSION LISTS: Contact us.

MADNESS RADIO SHOW: Heard on Valley Free Radio 103.3FM and syndicated on Pacifica. Online: www.madnessradio.net.

www.freedom-center.org

The Facts

Mainstream treatments often cause more problems than they solve: doctors and drugs frequently harm patients, promote despair, and make problems chronic. Drug companies and doctors mislead the public and corrupt the science.

Psychiatric drugs can be helpful to suppress symptoms, but are toxic and create dependency. They can even cause chronic illness and make psychosis worse -- and many are no more effective than placebo (sugar pills). Crisis after suddenly going off psych drugs is often withdrawal, not illness. Read Robert Whitaker's book *Anatomy of an Epidemic*.

There are proven and effective alternatives to psych drugs, and many people recover without them. Even people on meds long term can reduce or go off them, usually very slowly and with support.

Science has never shown we are genetically or physically different from 'normal' people, or have a 'predisposition.' There is no proof of 'biological based disorders' behind schizophrenia or bipolar labels: our brains are not defective. The only shown chemical imbalances are created by psych drugs themselves. Corporate profit puts the focus on genes and biology and "medicalizes" oppression.

Stereotypes claim we are more violent than 'normal' people -- but we are instead victims of violence and trauma at much higher rates than the mainstream. Emotional trauma from violence and abuse frequently lead to symptoms that get labeled 'mental disorders.'

Forced treatment can traumatize and drive people away from services.

The majority of mental illness diagnoses are given to women; doctors tend to be men. Children are being diagnosed and drugged at alarming rates.

People of color with the same symptoms as whites are more likely to get worse diagnoses and forced treatment. Poverty is one of the biggest factors in a severe mental illness diagnosis.

Our experiences often reflect great sensitivity, creativity, and spirituality. Studies show that helping us safely explore and go through our madness, instead of suppressing it, can often lead to recovery and renewal.

Sources: British Psychological Society Report, "Recent advances in understanding mental illness and psychotic experiences;" Robert Whitaker "Mad In America." Check our website.