



*Healing the Mind, Body & Spirit Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy*

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

*“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars”. Kahlil Gibran*

## **The Surviving Spirit Newsletter February 2022**

Hi Folks,

Welcome to the February Surviving Spirit Newsletter

Three key points of interest for February are:

- [Black History Month](#) (United States and Canada)
- [LGBT History Month](#) (United Kingdom)
- [American Heart Month](#) (United States)

Kudos to the advocates addressing Homelessness - grateful for my small part in this article

[Manchester organization seeks solution for a persistent, intractable issue](#) by [John Angelo](#) @ the Granite State News Collaborative

From approximately 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. on Jan. 27, first responders, advocates for the homeless, human service workers and volunteers will undertake the annual count of homeless people in New Hampshire.

“Federal HUD dollars are allocated according to this point-in-time snapshot of the homeless population,” Manchester’s Homeless Initiatives Director Schonna Green explained at the most recent [HOPE \(Housing Options Promote Empowerment\) Outreach Committee](#) meeting at 587 Maple St. in Manchester. The address, the site of Rootz Natural Hair Shop, will soon host a donation center geared toward the housewares individuals need in making the transition from the streets to more secure housing.

Green addressed both what is working in helping homeless people during this critical time of year and what the network-building of HOPE and its allies seeks to accomplish.

She praised the Manchester Fire Department for its outreach to those in need of physical safety in cold temperatures and pointed out that Families in Transition has 138 beds available daily, with requests for shelter running at about 125-132 nightly.

Manchester Alderman-at-Large June Trisciani noted that the warming station at [Union Street's Café 1269](#), which provides a place out of the cold for approximately 50 people during the day, has not turned anyone away to this point.

“As critical issues arise, we will address them,” Green told committee attendees. “There is a critical need for the expertise of clinicians and for added staff to ensure safety. This is where funds are needed now.”

“We have affordable shelter coming down the road,” Trisciani said. “We’re in a better position than we’ve ever been in, but it will take time.”

“We need permanent supportive housing,” Green added. It is hoped that funds can be raised to provide a second warming station by next winter. Public spaces not designed to fill this need, such as the Manchester City Library, currently provide a place out of the cold. Some \$136,000 was needed to ensure the 1269 Café site met Manchester fire codes.

Others see the affordable housing crisis as directly affecting their stability even as they work and volunteer within New Hampshire communities. Briefly looking at three of those populations who might not be thought of as being affected by housing insecurity and the lack of affordable housing might help explain why the housing crisis leaves many on the outside looking in. These three groups are those with intellectual or developmental disabilities (ID/DD), those with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and abuse survivors attempting to flee their abusers.

Concord-based ABLE NH (Advocates Building Lasting Equality in New Hampshire), which seeks affordable, appropriately supportive and accessible housing for the ID/DD population and its caretakers while meeting universal design specifications.

According to an ABLE NH survey of 300 people with disabilities and their caretakers, 68 percent of family caretakers stated their loved one is presently at risk of homelessness. This finding makes sense when noting that 60 percent of caretakers reporting their age as between 55 and 74.

Many people with ID/DD are thus currently limited to living with family members who obviously won't be around forever. According to the survey, more than 50 percent of people in the ID/DD population would like to live independently with appropriate assistance and supportive housing.

New Hampshire Council on Developmental Disabilities member Forrest Boudoin-Friede told the audience, “Living on my own is important to me. It’s a matter of dignity ... Tell me: What other class of protected citizens are expected to live their whole lives with their parents?”

**‘Significant histories of trauma’** - The New Hampshire Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH) composed a 2020 State of Homeless in New Hampshire report after that year’s Point-in-Time count. The nonprofit has branches throughout the State.

Therese Siebert, NHCEH’s board chair and a sociology professor at Keene State College who teaches a course “Homelessness in New Hampshire and the USA,” introduced the report, put together under the leadership of Cathy Kuhn, NHCEH director from 2012 to 2020.

The report noted an overall 21 percent increase over the previous year in the homeless population to 4,451 individuals. This follows national statistics. The study opined that the number of homeless family members, 1,577, is likely vastly underreported. Couch-surfing and bouncing to different relatives every few months for shelter is not technically homelessness, and like ABLE NH's population, this housing-insecure population is often one kind family member or friend away from homelessness.

NHCEH also found that people of color are three to four times more likely to experience housing insecurity, that 60 percent of New Hampshire's homeless citizens live outside Manchester, and a 112 percent increase in the number of chronically homeless people in New Hampshire over the previous year.

"People who are homeless have significant histories of trauma," the study noted.

A 2020 article in [Neurology Today](#) titled "[Traumatic Brain Injury in Homeless People is Underrecognized](#)" said 53.1 percent of people experiencing homelessness or marginal housing and the violence that can go with it suffer from TBI. Drawing on 18 studies of 9,702 individuals in six countries, including the United States and Canada, first detailed in *Lancet Public Health* in December, 2019, found that one-quarter of homeless adult men struggled with illiteracy.

There is the double-whammy, the article explained, of TBI leading to the downward slope of housing insecurity, and the greater risk of TBI while unhoused. TBI leads directly to mental confusion, outbursts of anger, depression and clouding of the senses.

The Veterans Administration and veterans are overrepresented in the homeless population, heads its online section on TBI: "Motor vehicle crashes. Explosions. Falls." The Department of Defense found 375,000 cases of TBI across all service branches from 2000-2017.

As Green has noted, the chronically unhoused population is dealing with multiple layers of disability, whether it be mental illness, addiction, domestic violence or TBI.

**'Support from all angles'** - According to the website [stopchildhomeless.org](#), 83 percent of homeless youth experienced violence by the age of 12, with LGBTQ youth at greatest risk. "The problem is bigger than you know," the site says. "The victims are smaller than you think."

Mike Skinner is a nationally known advocate and abuse survivor addressing trauma, abuse and mental health concerns and is the Executive Director of Portsmouth and Northwood's Connection Peer Support Centers (CPSC), a nonprofit that prioritizes hope-based recovery. CPSC assists consumers of mental health services with housing, legal issues, respite and substance abuse and misuse problems. It also offers creative arts, speakers, self-help groups and outings, prior to Covid.

"I've learned that the high incidence of TBI in marginalized populations is true since the mid-'90s because of my work as an advocate and consultant on mental health issues," Skinner said. "Physical and emotional abuse impact mental health."

Those fleeing continued abuse at a young age are another group overrepresented in the homeless population.

“During high school, I couch-surfed and spent an entire winter living in a pickup camper top,” Skinner continued. “My lived experience as a survivor of physical, emotional and sexual abuse has given me a new perspective on what is termed mental illness. People need hope, a path to wellness. A diagnosis is not a destiny.”

“My role is to call in support from all angles,” Green said at the most recent HOPE Outreach Committee meeting.

To that end, the HOPE Housing and Homeless Fund has been set up. The flex fund could contribute to [Manchester’s Affordable Housing Trust](#) but would also fund additional needs, such as a second warming station. Donations can be made to the Hope Housing and Homeless Fund, 100 Merrimack St., Manchester 03101.

Business partners and donations of land and housing are also being sought by Green.

*“Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.” - Leonard Cohen*

*“I keep moving ahead, as always, knowing deep down inside that I am a good person and that I am worthy of a good life.” - Jonathan Harnisch*

#### **Newsletter Contents:**

1] Eden for the Homeless. A retired couple built a community for the homeless - RT Documentary – YouTube

1a] Free Documentaries Online - RTD

1b] Eden Village – No One Sleeps Outside Conference – March 24-25-2022

2] How The Brain Rewires Itself After Losing A Loved One - by Mary-Frances O’Connor  
Audio Link 28:49 minutes - Mary-Frances O’Connor - neuroscientist and author  
Book – The Grieving Brain by Mary-Frances O’Connor, PhD

3] Lexie Manion – My journey of speaking up, choosing recovery and creating a life worth living  
Artwork – Lexie Manion

4] Letters to Strangers – Mental Health Made Personal  
Dear Stranger - Diana Chao – TEDxTeen -You Tube

5] The therapeutic power of art in mental health recovery - NC Health News by Taylor Knopf

6] Ritual Abuse Survivors Read Their Poems of Suffering and Healing

7] Psychiatrist Thomas Insel Looks for a Cure to America’s Mental Health Crisis By Emily Bobrow  
Healing - Our Path from Mental Illness to Mental Health by Thomas Insel, MD

8] Do you feel burnt out? It’s not just about working too much by Caroline Dooner @ The Guardian

9] An Olympic Athlete Takes on Depression - Raven Saunders - PBS Short Docs – YouTube  
“Out of the Dark:” Raven Saunders Shares Mental Health Journey In Mini-Doc

10] Collective voice of disability community captured by new song, 'Spaces' – YouTube  
Artist With SMA Pens Song ‘SPACES’ About Looking Beyond Disability – SMA News Today

**Please note excerpts are shared from all of the above – the full article is posted online**

*“In the thick of this work we often forget about our own needs...” - Shery Mead*

*“The Bad News. Every person you love will be impacted by your unresolved trauma.  
The Good News. Every person you love will profoundly benefit from your healing.” - Dr. Heidi Green*

1] [Eden for the Homeless. A retired couple built a community for the homeless](#) - RT Documentary – YouTube 53:56 minutes

Eden Village is a tiny home community for chronically homeless with a disability in Springfield, Missouri. There are dozens of fully-furnished homes built for people who had no roof over their head for a long time. Eden Village is a brainchild of Linda Brown and her husband David, who wondered why some people end up on the streets.

They took on a mission to provide the homeless with a permanent housing and support from community. Residents pay \$300 a month to live in Eden Village. They also can't use drugs if they want to stay in their homes. Still, there are more people on the waiting list than there are homes in the community. In the meantime, people can stay at the Revive 66 nightly rental.

Over half a million Americans are homeless and millions more are ‘a paycheck away’ from becoming homeless. Substance abuse, addiction, disability, mental health problems, poverty- a multitude of things can make a person homeless. The documentary features heartbreaking stories of the Eden Village residents about how they lost their home and how it feels to start anew.

In the meantime, founders of Eden Village share their views on why homelessness is a community problem and why it the problem has to become visible. Find out how they are making people pay attention to homeless people.

1a] [Free Documentaries Online - RTD](#) - Documentary channel RT Doc joined the RT news family in 2011. Since then, RT Doc has produced and broadcasted more than 500 films - about private struggles and global milestones, the human soul and expanses of nature, tales from the past and events unfolding right before our eyes

1b] [Eden Village – No One Sleeps Outside Conference – March 24-25-2022](#)

*“Be careful what you water your dreams with. Water them with worry and fear and you will produce weeds that choke the life from your dream. Water them with optimism and solutions and you will cultivate success. Always be on the lookout for ways to turn a problem into an opportunity for success. Always be on the lookout for ways to nurture your dream.” Lao Tzu*

2] [How The Brain Rewires Itself After Losing A Loved One](#) - by Mary-Frances O'Connor @ Science Friday - Neuroscientist Mary-Frances O'Connor explores what happens in the brain when you experience grief and why it's a struggle to accept loss.

[Audio Link](#) 28:49 minutes - Mary-Frances O'Connor is a neuroscientist and author of *The Grieving Brain*. She's based in Tucson, Arizona.

[Book – The Grieving Brain](#) by Mary-Frances O'Connor, PhD

A renowned grief expert and neuroscientist shares groundbreaking discoveries about what happens in our brain when we grieve, providing a new paradigm for understanding love, loss, and learning.

*“Do something nice for yourself today. Find some quiet, sit in stillness, breathe. Put your problems on pause. You deserve a break.” - Akiroq Brost*

*“There is no growth without real feeling. Children not loved for who they are do not learn how to love themselves. Their growth is an exercise in pleasing others, not in expanding through experience. As adults, they must learn to nurture their own lost child.” - Marion Woodman*

3] [Lexie Manion](#) – My journey of speaking up, choosing recovery and creating a life worth living.

I am a twenty-something writer, artist, mental health advocate and dog lover from New Jersey. I work in healthcare and am studying to become an art therapist.

As a young teenager, I found solace in writing poetry and drawing in the midst of new mental health struggles. I dreamt of one day sharing these emotions and experiences with others. I have always had a strong desire to help others battling their own demons because I knew loneliness, trauma and hardship firsthand.

I began sharing my writing publicly online around 2015. Early on, I found a deep love for the body liberation movement because of its activist roots and its rallying for every person's right to be seen and respected — no matter what they look like. I am devastated by how some people are quick to judge and assume other people's health or worth just from their appearance alone.

[Artwork – Lexie Manion](#) - I paint out of self expression and a desire to capture beautiful creatures and moments. Flowers may wilt and people and pets get older or change, but I can capture the beauty in life just as it is in this moment.

*“People who love themselves come across as very loving, generous and kind; they express their self-confidence through humility, forgiveness and inclusiveness.” - Sanaya Roman*

*“If a man carries his own lantern, he need not fear darkness.” Hassidic saying*

4] [Letters to Strangers – Mental Health Made Personal](#)

Did you know that [450 million people worldwide](#) currently suffer from a mental illness? That number

may be astounding, but you have the power to help. All you need is a piece of paper and something to write with to start, but don't stop there. Join us in our youth mental health movement. Tell your story. Mental health matters, so *let's do something about it!*

Letters to Strangers (L2S) is a global youth-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit seeking to destigmatize mental illness and increase access to affordable, quality treatment for youth aged 13 to 24\*.

\*We welcome anyone outside of this age range as long as their affiliated site pledges to be a safe haven for youth and includes youth members.

We want mental health made personal, because each person deserves to be treated as the individual they are. No one's identity should be buried beneath statistics. Indeed: often there is nothing greater than a person-to-person human connection.

[Dear Stranger - Diana Chao – TEDxTeen](#) -You Tube 15:43 minutes

The state of our mental health is an epidemic. Calling all strangers. This is all true: 1] Diana Chao is a 19-year-old Chinese-American immigrant; 2] She grew up in California and currently studies physics at Princeton University; 3] She spent a lot of her life confused. Growing up in an English tongue-tied family, she found herself working at a young age [12-hour labor shifts on weekends came before gym membership, hands down]. Then the confusion set in. She fell temporarily blind multiple times due to uveitis, yet pursued photography nonetheless. Her stubbornness about elevating POC stories to the fine art industry led to features by Vogue Italia, Adobe and Redbubble. To date, Diana has exhibited to over 75,000 people. She received a publishing deal for fantasy fiction at the age of 13, was recognized by the U.S. Navy for her research on dengue virus when she was 16 years old, and researched for NASA with a feature at the American Astronomical Society conference by the time she was 18 years old. This talk was given at a TEDx event using the TED conference format but independently organized by a local community.

*“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.” Carl Jung*

*“Despite the chaos, I was promised a path that rises with a strong foundation to keep me from falling to the bottom. Every day the sun rises and as long as I can feel my feet on the ground, so will I.” - Angel Jimerson*

5] [The therapeutic power of art in mental health recovery](#) - NC Health News by [Taylor Knopf](#)

*People have long used art as a way to express themselves and work through life's experiences and emotions.*

For Iggy Cosky, music has been the one constant in his life.

“The therapeutic value of music was very obvious to me at a very young age,” he said.

At 7 years old, he fell in love with the guitar when he first heard Eric Clapton playing on the car radio. After that, Cosky's father found the young boy strumming tennis rackets and broomsticks; he bought Cosky his first guitar.

“I love recording music,” explained the now 32-year-old Raleigh-based musician. “I use it as a process to psychoanalyze what’s going on with myself because subconsciously lyrics will come up to the surface. I don’t know what I’m saying but they tell me what’s going on with me. The song tells me how I’m feeling.”

Cosky has always leaned into music as a way to help him understand and cope with his life’s trauma. As a child, he witnessed the deaths of both parents in a murder-suicide. Cosky moved in with a legal guardian, his older half-sister, whose husband was a guitar teacher.

“He saw I had an interest in art and music, and he provided me with everything I needed to express myself,” Cosky recalled of the man who became like a father to him.

“He essentially gave me the keys to myself, which is the most freeing thing an adult can do for a teenager who has experienced horrors in life,” he said.

Cosky later lost another sister to suicide and his brother to a drug overdose. He said he self-medicated with drugs and alcohol and was later diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Cosky went on to survive more trauma, including his own suicide attempts, homelessness and a near fatal drug overdose that landed him in the emergency room at age 30. There, he decided to make a change.

From the hospital, Cosky asked to go to [Healing Transitions](#), a residential addiction recovery program in Raleigh. He’s been in recovery for two and a half years and released [an album](#) last year.

**Art in therapy** - “Art making is inherently therapeutic. [Art therapy] creates a space for people to have the benefits of just processing the meaning and content of whatever comes up in their artwork. It’s using art in order to better express yourself or discover certain patterns that you’re engaging in,” said [Anna Celandor](#), a licensed clinical therapist and art therapist based in Durham.

Celandor has led art therapy sessions for patients in every kind of setting, from hospital inpatient units, to intensive outpatient programs to private therapy, both in-person and virtually. She’s worked with a lot of patients going through life transitions, or dealing with medical diagnoses such as cancer, or who are struggling with addiction issues. She’s also counseled caregivers of people with long-term physical or mental illness.

*“It’s all about falling in love with yourself and sharing that love with someone who appreciates you, rather than looking for love to compensate for a self-love deficit.” - Eartha Kitt*

*“Self-care means giving yourself permission to pause.” - Cecilia Tran*

## 6] [Ritual Abuse Survivors Read Their Poems of Suffering and Healing](#)

This is the third in a series of free online poetry readings by survivors of ritual abuse and/or mind control. As a group, we are very creative people, but there are few opportunities for us to come together and share the work that gives meaning to our lives. We write, paint, sing, and dance for ourselves, but seldom do we have the joy of knowing that others have heard our voices.



We have been brutally silenced in childhood by our abusers and as adults by society. There was a long and effective campaign by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation to spread lies like “ritual abuse doesn’t exist,” “child sexual abuse is rare,” “children make up stories of abuse,” and “therapists put false memories into people’s heads for money.” We know our truth, and we speak it. And we bear witness to others' truths.

At this event, three poets will read their writing. After a short break to ground ourselves, we will ask for comments and questions. Then, if there is time, members of the audience may share one of their poems.

The event is open to all, not just ritual abuse survivors. As long as you want to stand beside us as we speak out, we welcome you with open arms.

To attend, get a ticket through Eventbrite at [https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/ritual-abuse-survivors-read-their-poems-of-suffering-and-healing-tickets-248429829307?keep\\_tld=1](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/ritual-abuse-survivors-read-their-poems-of-suffering-and-healing-tickets-248429829307?keep_tld=1). Your name and email address will not be made public. To remain totally private, join ZOOM without your video and change your screen name.

There will be three poets reading their work at this event, followed by questions and conversation. If we have time at the end of the readings, we will open up the floor for open mic (you can nominate yourself on the day - 3 to 5 minutes per person).

Ritual abuse and mind control, by their very nature, can trigger strong emotions. The poetry will not be censored and we are not asking the poets to give trigger warnings. We will give a general trigger warning and suggestions for self-care at the start of the program.

This invite is open to survivors, therapists, support people and allies.

Presented by- Jean Riseman, River, Rishi and Leni of [GrassRoots Ritual Abuse/Mind Control Survivors Collective](#)

Chaired by Leni of Grassroots Collective

Please review the time zone in your local area. Time zones include:  
Saturday February 19, 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm Pacific Daylight Time  
Saturday February 19, 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm Mountain Daylight Time  
Saturday February 19, 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm Central Daylight Time  
Saturday February 19, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm East Coast Daylight Time  
Sunday February 20, 11:00 am -12:30 pm Melbourne AEST

*“The fear of abandonment forced me to comply as a child, but I’m not forced to comply anymore. The key people in my life did reject me for telling the truth about my abuse, but I’m not alone. Even if the consequence for telling the truth is rejection from everyone I know, that’s not the same death threat that it was when I was a child. I’m a self-sufficient adult and abandonment no longer means the end of my life.” - Christina Enevoldsen, The Rescued Soul: The Writing Journey for the Healing of Incest and Family Betrayal*

*“Eighty two percent of the traumatized children seen in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network*

*do not meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD.15 Because they often are shut down, suspicious, or aggressive they now receive pseudoscientific diagnoses such as “oppositional defiant disorder,” meaning “This kid hates my guts and won’t do anything I tell him to do,” or “disruptive mood dysregulation disorder,” meaning he has temper tantrums. Having as many problems as they do, these kids accumulate numerous diagnoses over time. Before they reach their twenties, many patients have been given four, five, six, or more of these impressive but meaningless labels. If they receive treatment at all, they get whatever is being promulgated as the method of management du jour: medications, behavioral modification, or exposure therapy. These rarely work and often cause more damage.” - Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma**

7] [Psychiatrist Thomas Insel Looks for a Cure to America’s Mental Health Crisis](#) By Emily Bobrow @ Wall Street Journal

The former director of the National Institute for Mental Health believes that treating mental illness is about finding connection.

Although breakthroughs in other areas of medicine have led to plummeting death rates from heart disease, stroke and most infectious diseases, he notes that new insights into the mechanisms of mental illness have done little to help the mentally ill.

In his new book “Healing,” Dr. Insel, 70, writes that during his tenure as the “nation’s psychiatrist,” the U.S. suicide rate climbed 33%, overdose deaths tripled, and rates of poverty, homelessness and incarceration among people with brain disorders went up. Today suicide claims more than 47,000 lives a year, three times as many as homicide, and the rate continues to rise in the U.S. even as it is falling in nearly every other country. He recalls a presentation of the institute’s research in 2015 when he was chastened by a man whose son had schizophrenia and was living on the streets. “Our house is on fire,” the man told Dr. Insel, “and you are talking about the chemistry of the paint.”

**Audio Link posted at the website - 3:02 minutes**

[Healing - Our Path from Mental Illness to Mental Health](#) by Thomas Insel, MD

A bold, expert, and actionable map for the re-invention of America’s broken mental health care system.

In the United States, we have treatments that work, but our system fails at every stage to deliver care well. Even before COVID, mental illness was claiming a life every eleven minutes by suicide. Quality of care varies widely, and much of the field lacks accountability. We focus on drug therapies for symptom reduction rather than on plans for long-term recovery. Care is often unaffordable and unavailable, particularly for those who need it most and are homeless or incarcerated. Where was the justice for the millions of Americans suffering from mental illness? Who was helping their families?

*“Learn from the past, set vivid, detailed goals for the future, and live in the only moment of time over which you have any control: now.” Denis Waitley*

*“What religion you practice in life isn't that important, it's how much you practice peace and love that really matters.” Themis Eagleson*

8] [Do you feel burnt out? It's not just about working too much](#) by Caroline Dooner @ The Guardian

Our culture doesn't understand burnout – including the fact that we can get burnt out on a perfectly 'normal' 40-hour work week.

A few years ago, I found myself really burnt out. Well, at the time, I wasn't actually sure that's what it was. At first "burnout" seemed like a dramatic way to describe what I was experiencing. But I was really, really tired. I was struggling to motivate myself and looking at my calendar started filling me with a sort of low-grade dread.

But the confusing part for me was that on the surface there wasn't any obvious reason why I would be so tired. It didn't seem warranted. I didn't deserve to be so tired. Sure, I was busy, but no more busy than anyone else. So what was wrong with me?

But when I couldn't shake it off after a few weeks and when I ruled out more serious health issues, it became clear that what I was experiencing was, in fact, burnout. And at a certain point it hit me: my burnout wasn't stemming from my distant past; it had actually been more than a decade in the making. I realized that I'd been resistant to truly relaxing for at least 15 years. Even when I had "time off" I never actually relaxed. I never felt as if I was allowed to relax. And so I didn't. I never let myself off the hook. Taking downtime made me feel guilty. The guilt was subtle – but incessant. And over time it wore me down, physically and mentally.

What I learned pretty quickly is that our culture doesn't understand burnout, what it stems from or how common it is. We do not understand that a lot of us can get burnt out on a perfectly "normal" 40-hour work week. That's partly because that 40-hour work week is a completely arbitrary creation, and ignores data that shows that most people can only give three to four hours of focused attention to their work a day before there are diminishing returns. (I highly recommend the book [Laziness Does Not Exist](#) on this.) But the other reason we can get burnt out on a "normal" schedule is that overworking isn't always the cause.

Job burnout is very real, but it is not the only cause of burnout. We tend to think that taking a rest or a break from work will always reverse our burnout. (And sometimes it will!) But because we can also get burnt out from other, less obvious causes, the cures are often less obvious as well. We can get burnt out from years of stress. We can get burnt out from unresolved emotions or unresolved trauma. And we can get burnt out from simply living the wrong life for us (the wrong job, the wrong career, the wrong relationship, etc).

If your cause of burnout stems from one of those less obvious places, just taking a break from work will not cure your burnout. You are going to have to do a little more digging to figure out the cause of your depletion. The cause may be more emotional and spiritual than merely physical.

*"Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow; it only saps today of its strength." A.J.Cronin*

*"If someone thinks you're being dramatic or selfish, then they obviously haven't walked a mile in your shoes. It's not important for you to explain yourself. You get a pass here. Don't let anyone else try to saddle you with guilt or shame. If you need your space, take it." - Sarah Newman*

9] [An Olympic Athlete Takes on Depression - Raven Saunders](#) - PBS Short Docs – YouTube 9:08 minutes

Olympic shot putter Raven Saunders was riding high after the 2016 games, but she wasn't prepared for what came once she returned home.

This short documentary tells the story of Olympic shot putter Raven Saunders, the intensity of her 2016 Olympic experience, her childhood trauma, and the pitfalls of celebrity that challenged her mental health. After receiving care for depression, Raven spoke out about her struggles and became a leading advocate for mental health dialogue among athletes.

Subscribe so you never miss a new episode: <https://to.pbs.org/2XewHgX>

[#MentalHealthAwareness](#) [#LetsTalk](#) [#Documentary](#)

This film is part of the [#WellBeings](#) "Out of the Dark" docuseries showcasing the inspiring personal stories of the most influential youth activists in the mental health space. Each episode takes an in-depth look at the struggles each overcame, the impact of their work, and their continued mental health journeys. Learn more at <https://wellbeings.org/outofthedark>

[“Out of the Dark:” Raven Saunders Shares Mental Health Journey](#) In Mini-Doc

Raven Saunders was nicknamed “The Hulk” in high school because she was affable outside the shot put ring and ferocious when it came time to throw.

Yet both sides of her personality were hiding a secret. In January 2018, Saunders was so tormented by depression and anxiety that she thought about ending her life. There was a huge drop-off along a Mississippi highway and in that hour of darkness Saunders was tempted to drive over the edge.

A text to an old therapist pulled her back and now Raven “The Hulk” Saunders is truly a superhero: She is helping others as an advocate for mental health awareness.

Saunders, who was fifth in the women's shot put at the Olympic Games Rio 2016, is featured in a nine-minute documentary called “An Olympic Athlete Takes on Depression.” Released last week, it is the first installment in the Well Beings “Out of the Dark” web series and is available on [WellBeings.org](http://WellBeings.org) and as part of the PBS Short Docs collection on PBS Voices.

“A lot of people are moved by it,” said Saunders, who will turn 25 on May 15. “One of the craziest comments that I've seen is a guy was telling me about his bad days and today he knows he can go forward after watching it.

“People are starting to see mental health differently. It's not something to be stigmatized. It's not something to be afraid of or put down or looked down upon. All of us go through things and nothing can change it so it's something that we can have open and honest conversations about.”

Saunders hopes the documentary will get a lot more views “because if it doesn't help you, it can possibly help someone around you,” she said. “What may seem like the end isn't really the end - it's

just the obstacle that you can always overcome.”

On Twitter, Saunders said, “Go watch now especially if you are having a tough time right now with depression. You are not alone.”

*“If you don’t love yourself, nobody will. Not only that, you won’t be good at loving anyone else. Loving starts with the self.” - Wayne Dyer*

*“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” - Helen Keller*

10] [Collective voice of disability community captured by new song, 'Spaces'](#) – YouTube 3:29 minutes

James Ian’s new song called "Spaces" is made by, and for, the disabled community. While the song highlights a disease known as spinal muscular atrophy, or SMA, it also celebrates the talent of the much broader disability community. This report is part of our arts and culture series, CANVAS.

[Artist With SMA Pens Song ‘SPACES’ About Looking Beyond Disability](#) – SMA News Today

A song written and performed by an artist with [spinal muscular atrophy](#) (SMA) is the latest project to come out of Genentech’s [SMA My Way](#) program, a collaboration that allows those in the SMA community to share knowledge and experiences with others affected by the disease, as well as raise awareness.

“[SPACES](#)” was primarily written by singer James Ian, who was diagnosed with [SMA type 3](#) as a teenager. It was released on all major music platforms on Nov. 9. The accompanying [music video](#) was directed by Dominick Evans, a disability consultant in Hollywood and an SMA type 3 patient, who had to work on the film remotely from his bed outside Detroit, Michigan. And the cover art of the single was created by [Zarek DeMarco Elizondo](#), who has [SMA type 2](#).

The inspiration for the title and lyrics of the song comes from a group collaboration with Ian, SMA patients, and heavy-hitting, Grammy-nominated record producers and executives; it was sponsored and coordinated by [Genentech](#).

However, the basic premise for “SPACES” came from Ian, who, at 39 years old, feels like SMA has made him invisible to others. In a video interview with SMA News Today, Ian said the disease has always overshadowed the SMA community’s accomplishments.

“That came from this idea of not being seen as people with SMA, people with disabilities, and kind of being looked through or looked past and just not really considered or taken seriously,” Ian said. “We’re here in these spaces whether you like it or not. We’re doing really cool things in these spaces.”

Further proving that point is the director of the film, Evans, who also is transgender, queer, and non-binary. Because of a lack of access to equipment in his past and a history of accidents, he has chronic pain and is unable to walk or sit up straight.

Evans graduated from Wright State University, in Ohio, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in film in 2015, but this is the first opportunity he's had to direct a video of this magnitude — with a full production crew and an on-site director. The director, Zach Merck, has worked on commercials for brands such as Chevy, Travelocity, Ram, and GMC.

“It's been amazing because I feel like people actually believed in me that I could do this and I was given my first chance to show what I can do and I hope people see that I can do really awesome things,” said Evans, 40.

The production team ensured that Evans could Zoom into the set and direct the music video as if he were there. A large computer monitor situated in front of him allowed him to see the scene directly through the camera, and another metal arm extending from there held his iPhone and allowed him to FaceTime with the crew.

Evans, who started a popular Twitter chat [#FilmDis](#), which focuses on disability representation and now produces full-length studies on the topic with his partner, knew that he wanted the stories in the music video to be diverse, not just disability-wise, but also gender, race, and age.

*“If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.” - Fred Rogers*

*“The greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion. The more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being.” - Tenzin Gyatso*

***Thank you & Take care, Michael***

PS. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know – [mikeskinner@comcast.net](mailto:mikeskinner@comcast.net)

***Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Martin Luther King, Jr.***

***A diagnosis is not a destiny***

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***"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi***