



**The Garrison Institute  
Wellness Project  
2004 - 2009**

**A pilot model for integrating contemplative  
methods into a training to ameliorate vicarious  
trauma (VT) among domestic violence workers**

A program of the Garrison Institute's  
Initiative on Transforming Trauma

**June 2009**

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**A pilot model for integrating contemplative methods into a training to ameliorate vicarious trauma (VT) among domestic violence workers**

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Garrison Institute  
PO Box 532, Garrison, New York 10524  
Telephone: 845-424-4800  
[www.garrisoninstitute.org](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org)

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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This report presents an overview of the Garrison Institute's Wellness Project, a five-year-old pilot program for workers in domestic violence shelters and agencies in the New York City region. The Wellness Project is innovative in the field of trauma care in integrating a broad spectrum of contemplative and somatic methodologies together with previously-developed best practices in order to build staff awareness of vicarious traumatization (VT), provide staff with skills for its alleviation, reduce burnout rates, enhance effectiveness of services provided to clients and promote incorporation of wellness principles and practices into workplace culture. While it has been piloted in the domestic violence (DV) context, the Wellness Project provides an innovative model for adaptation in the human services sector generally.

### The Need

Human services workers who work closely with trauma survivors are deeply impacted by their empathic connection with those they serve. While their work to heal others can bring great fulfillment, they are at high risk for experiencing their own vicarious traumatization (VT), which can include anxiety, burnout, depression and disruptions in family and other relationships.

The term "vicarious traumatization"\* was introduced by Pearlman and Saakvitne in an article published in the Journal of Traumatic Stress in 1990:

Vicarious traumatization is a process through which the therapist's inner experience is negatively transformed through empathic engagement with clients' trauma material....The therapist is a witness to his clients' traumas, through their vivid descriptions of traumatic events, reports of intentional cruelty and sadistic abuse, and experiences of reliving terror, grief, and yearning. He is both a witness to and a participant in traumatic reenactments within and outside of the therapy relationship.

Multiple studies are in agreement that well over half the general population will experience one or more traumatic incidents during their lifetimes. Thus, the risk to human services workers of repeated exposure to others' trauma is substantial. In one study of child protective service workers, 37% demonstrated clinical levels of emotional distress associated with prolonged contact with a traumatized population.

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\* The Wellness Project prefers to use vicarious trauma, rather than traumatization, to avoid any suggestion of victimization

In addition to its impact on individual workers and their effectiveness in serving clients, VT has significant economic implications. It contributes to chronically high turnover rates among staff. A 2004 study funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies found that direct-care staff turnover costs employers on average \$3500 per worker, with a total nation-wide price tag of \$2.5 billion annually. The study concludes: "The inescapable conclusion is that direct-care turnover is a business problem, a quality of care problem, and a significant public resource problem."

In his 1999 book *Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-Care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, & Educators*, Hudnall Stamm urges change at the policy level:

We need to begin building structures that contain safety nets for impaired professionals and moderating structures that support people in all aspects of their work. We will not be able to completely prevent workers from being affected by their work with the traumatized, but we can build better environments to support workers when they are affected. . . . It requires the administrative and policy structures to recognize the costs of caring, the challenges of providing care, and the support necessary to counteract those costs.

## **The Program**

The Garrison Institute is dedicated to building some of the "moderating structures" that Stamm calls for. Rooted in its deep commitment to healing humanity and the planet, the Transforming Trauma Initiative seeks to promote contemplative-based wellness and resilience practices that address trans-generational trauma, interpersonal violence and victimization of women and children, as well as the host of other traumas that cause deep human suffering. Within this broader mission, Garrison decided in 2003 to concentrate its initial efforts on creating a model program to provide information, skills and tools to help frontline domestic violence workers cope and thrive in the face of their intrinsically daunting work.

Garrison anticipated that in meeting the needs of frontline domestic violence workers it would learn things that could be adapted to other human services settings such as children's services, victim's services and humanitarian and social justice work. This has indeed occurred. For instance, because of its commitment to cultural and spiritual diversity, the Wellness Project is structured in such a way that it can easily accommodate different cultural and spiritual preferences and practices appropriate to particular communities or teams of workers.

A second track of the program was introduced in 2005 for shelter supervisors and directors, who requested it after seeing the transformative effects on their frontline workers. Different formats, settings and curriculum content have been tested over the period of the five-year pilot. In 2008 the core offering was codified into a six-month curriculum delivered on-site at domestic violence agencies. It consists of six day-long trainings, with half of each day for frontline workers and half for directors and supervisors, given over a six-month period. When circumstances permit, five day-longs are given followed by a three-day residential retreat at the Garrison Institute. As of May 2009, the Wellness Project has trained 400 frontline workers, supervisors and directors from 40 agencies in and around New York City.

The program has three principal goals: 1) to acknowledge that VT exists and to educate about how it manifests, 2) to build a set of tools for working in this difficult arena by focusing on one's own experience and 3) to strengthen or build personal connection within a supportive, engaged community. All three are essential and are mindfully interwoven and balanced in the Wellness Project. Each practice session builds on the previous ones, with the goal of deepening participants' familiarity and facility with specific skills and various modalities. Taken together, the different training components provide a combination of learning and direct experience that catalyze individual and group potential for effective self care and healing. As confidence grows, participants are able to carry these accomplishments into their professional lives, enhancing the quality of client care, as well as into their personal lives.

The detailed description of one module appended to this overview provides concrete examples of how the Wellness faculty approaches the process of skill building and integration into the workplace for the domestic violence worker population. Key components are briefly described here.

The VT Education component provides workers a conceptualization of VT and an approach to ameliorating it by means of a set of coordinated methodologies for personal, professional and organizational transformation. This component draws heavily on the pioneering work of Laurie Ann Pearlman, Lisa McCann, Karen Saakvitne and their colleagues in identifying and describing vicarious traumatization and developing ways to address it. The Wellness Project makes use of their "ABC" model—Awareness, Balance and Connection:

- Awareness is defined in Wellness Project as being attuned—cognitively, intuitively and somatically—to one's needs, limits, emotions and resources, and having a conscious and consistent focus on mindfulness and acceptance as foundational paradigms and practices.
- Balance involves maintaining a healthy balance among work, play and rest and attending to all aspects of oneself, including one's mind-heart-spirit and body.

- Connection means deepening and maintaining connection to oneself, to others and to something larger, expressed through communication that reduces isolation and increases validation and hope.

The central importance of acknowledging the existence of VT—not as pathology but as a natural and expected reaction to traumatic material in the workplace—is testified to by comments from Wellness Project participants:

“Had it not been for the program I would not have even been aware of how large and disruptive stress is and how much it can affect me.”

“I am able to put a name ‘vicarious trauma’ on to some of my behaviors that had become second nature for me. For example, not wanting to answer the phone at home from twenty-odd years of answering a hotline.”

While the VT Education component draws on existing best practices, the highly experiential Skills Acquisition component of the Wellness Project offers a new paradigm by integrating contemplative practices as a primary methodology for addressing VT. It is well known that human service providers must exercise good self-care in order to be effective. Pearlman and Saakvitne state unequivocally that this means embracing the full spectrum of human needs: physical, psycho-emotional, and spiritual. The Wellness Project uses a series of carefully selected exercises to develop an integrated set of emotional, psychological and physiological competencies. Specific skills and capacities that the training cultivates include self-awareness, attention, empathy, tolerance, compassion, balance, perspective, presence, peace and safety.

Skills are introduced through three frames:

### **1. Mind-Heart-Spirit: including mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation and various types of visualization, prayer, ritual and ceremony**

The Wellness Project highlights the essential role of mindfulness in promoting human service worker wellness. Leading mindfulness teacher and Wellness Project co-founder Sharon Salzberg defines mindfulness as “being aware of what is occurring in the present moment without the kind of automatic judgment that confuses us as to what is actually happening, keeps us stuck in habitual reactions and limits our sense of options.” Researchers Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan state:

Mindfulness may be important in disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits and unhealthy behavior patterns and thus could play a key role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioral regulation, which has long been associated with well-being enhancement. Further, by adding clarity and vividness to

experience, mindfulness may also contribute to well-being and happiness in a direct way.

Mindfulness is cultivated through sitting in silence and purposefully paying attention to what is happening in the present moment. It is the ability to be present to thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations as they arise without adding to or pushing them away. It is a tool for becoming more centered and present, and less reactive to and judgmental of ourselves and others. Since the introduction of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979, numerous scientific studies have validated the benefits of mindfulness practices. Studies specifically on the impact of mindfulness meditation on the stress levels of health care professionals have shown significant improvements in mood and overall functioning.

In addition to the basic practice, several alternate forms of mindfulness practice are taught:

- Awareness of breath meditation uses the natural movement of the breath to anchor awareness in the present moment. In this meditation, the goal is to experience the breath without directing or changing it.
- Walking meditation uses the act of walking to ground oneself in the present moment by focusing attention on the movement of the feet.
- Eating meditation focuses on sensations, especially taste, smell and touch, at mealtimes.
- Loving-Kindness Meditation is a practice of consciously directing caring thoughts toward oneself, toward loved ones, to friends and colleagues and finally to all beings. One study of Loving-Kindness Meditation concludes, “When people initiated a practice of LKM, they enjoyed payoffs both immediately, in terms of self-generated positive emotions, and over time, in terms of increased resources and overall well-being. Meditators even experienced enhanced positive emotions in ordinary life situations, especially those involving other people.” A Wellness Project participant commented: “Loving-kindness meditation is one of the best things that ever happened to me. It is so powerful to focus love inward and then shine your intention out into the world and to have compassion for others. Working in this field hardened me and the tools introduced by the Wellness Project made me softer.”

Visualization, Ritual and Ceremony – In various well-developed trauma treatment models, the first step in treatment involves the establishment or re-establishment of safety and stability, and various cognitive and behavioral strategies are used toward this end. Visualization, ritual and ceremony are integral to most spiritual traditions and are harnessed in the Wellness Project in the service of ameliorating VT. They are especially useful in directing participants’ attention to the active development of inner and outer safety. In one exercise participants are invited into a deep relaxation and guided in

creating their own place of sanctuary and their own scenario of healing. Another practice involves the use of ritual and ceremony to deepen the sense of connection with themselves, the earth and each other.

Cognitive Reframing – In traditional trauma treatment models, it is understood that the trauma sufferer’s perception of the self, others and the world is distorted and tainted by traumatic experiences. In VT the same phenomenon applies, with sometimes disturbing and deep shifts in the worker’s personal and professional functioning. The cognitive reframing component highlights the key role of perception, assumptions and beliefs, with the intent of helping workers to see different options and make new choices as they move toward positive change. Core faculty member Claudette Faison has developed a particular methodology for this process called “Conversation for Possibility.” In her own words:

Conversation for Possibility takes mindfulness “off the cushion” and into the real world. Participants explore the difference between what they think they know and what they really know. They uncover the beliefs from which their thoughts are generated and learn how such beliefs determine their actions in the world.

Various guided exercises assist participants in gaining a sense of ownership and accountability in their lives and stepping out of a state of “victimhood.” The Conversation for Possibility leads to a deep sense of empowerment and hope, both critical to the core message of the Wellness Project.

## **2. Body, Movement and Expression: including progressive relaxation, body scanning techniques, yoga, Alexander body-awareness technique and creative process**

Bessel van der Kolk, in his seminal article “The Body Keeps the Score,” notes that trauma by its very nature overwhelms and dysregulates an individual’s neurobiological processes. The Wellness Project explicitly works with the body, first to rebalance it and ultimately to facilitate its natural capacity for balance and resilience.

Body Scan is a technique in which practitioners slowly and mindfully move their awareness through the different regions of their body, beginning at the feet and ending at the top of the head, or vice versa.

Hatha Yoga is a practice for “yoking” together the body and mind, which are typically disconnected from each other. As it has been specifically adapted for the Wellness Project, yoga incorporates mindfulness meditation: while doing yoga postures (asanas), practitioners become aware of the feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations they are experiencing. Yoga is energizing and grounding; regular practice provides the somatic scaffolding for psychological and spiritual strength, balance and flexibility. The many health benefits of

yoga are supported by a large body of evidence. Research has been accelerating in recent years, thanks in part to the creation of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health in 1998. There are more than 200 scientific articles covering its positive effects on a wide range of conditions, including depression, anxiety, chronic pain and cardiovascular disease.

The Alexander Technique fosters awareness of habitual body/mind habits, helps develop a more sensitive, reliable kinesthetic sense and cultivates an ability to stay self-aware while actively engaging the world.

Creative Expression is viewed as a natural capacity in all workers and is used in surfacing the distress of VT and promoting resilience. Introduced in various forms such as art-making, dance, voice work and journaling, creative process and the products created serve as vehicles for recognizing negative effects of VT and exploring options for positive change. Creative expression promotes hope, self-esteem, insight and self-efficacy.

### **3. Connection and Community, including creation of supportive community during the training itself and fostering a culture of wellness in the workplace**

Creation of a supportive community of professionals reflects the findings of studies that show how important social support in formalized settings is to minimizing the risk for VT. Connection and community are especially important in the context of trauma, where fragmentation in one's sense of self and disconnection from others can be profound. The overall tone of the Wellness Project trainings is permeated by qualities of mindfulness, loving-kindness and safety, with a goal of establishing a sense of sanctuary internally as well as externally. In this nurturing container participants observe and share their inner world as it comes more fully into awareness.

The program is highly interactive. Participants are frequently in dyads and small groups. The faculty model teamwork and healing connection and are available for one-on-one engagement outside of the structured sessions. All faculty, regardless of roles, are attuned to group process and continually observe what is happening, frequently touching in with individuals to offer support when they sense a need or opportunity.

Creating an institutional culture of wellness – Participants are guided to create a workplace culture of wellness. Acknowledging that there are many impediments to institutional change, Wellness Project helps workers brainstorm three levels of positive change for implementation: changes that can be made immediately and easily; changes requiring planning, cooperation and/or resources; and profound, best-case changes that may require “the ability to move mountains.”

## **Participant Feedback**

Participants have repeatedly testified to the many ways that the program strengthens them to face the challenges they encounter on a daily basis in their work, and enhances the services they provide to clients. They report having better interpersonal boundaries, being able to recognize trauma patterns in themselves earlier and address them more quickly and efficaciously, as well as feeling overall more hopeful and resilient. A sampling of participant comments:

“The meditation and restorative yoga were extremely helpful in relieving tensions throughout my body, tensions, I believe, brought on by vicarious trauma. Specifically, the Alexander Technique has not only helped but has brought attention to the weight or tension I carry in my neck. The yoga, meditation and the Loving-Kindness has really enabled me to appreciate healthy silence and stillness, as well as getting to know my body and how it reacts to the continuous day to day stresses in this work.”

“I have seen myself and others deteriorate physically and become emotionally drained. The workers that I have worked with who have gone to the Garrison Institute trainings have much more energy and stick to it-ness and have not stopped going.”

*Effects over time:* “When I returned from the first weekend, everyone who interacted with me immediately noted the difference. And I immediately made changes in my life. Yoga became a regular part of my week. I started to pay much more attention to the ways that I experienced my workdays. And, when the feeling of overwhelm crept in, I was not surprised by it; I simply gave myself a few minutes to become more aware of where I was and to breathe. . . . now, three and a half years later, I am still keenly grateful to the Wellness Project and to the Garrison Institute. The yoga studio I attend is a second home, and my sanctuary. . . . The awareness I have now of the impact of my work cannot compare to what I thought I understood then. And when I get tired and some of the practices I started at Garrison slide away a bit, I feel it. And I run to a yoga class. I cultivate silence. I have an eating meditation breakfast. I breathe. And I remember and reconnect with the commitment to myself that was forged there.”

*Benefit for clients:* “I have been more conscious of bringing these practices to my work, whether that means setting an intention to be present and listening with an open heart with clients, teaching a child to focus on their breathing, or being more creative and aware during counseling sessions and groups.”

*On Wellness Project faculty:* “I love to watch the staff relate to each other. I felt calm and respected. Finally! And I appreciated very much the return to self and self care strategies.”

## **Replication and Adaptation**

The Wellness Project Core Curriculum is designed to be presented either as a series of six day-long sessions given once a month over a period of six months, or as five day-longs followed by a three-day retreat at the Garrison Institute (or another retreat site). Each day-long requires at least two faculty members, one of whom is the event coordinator. The residential retreat, which is strongly recommended to deepen and stabilize participants’ skills acquisition, requires a minimum of six faculty for up to 50 participants. Faculty roles include coordinator, therapist, VT educator, two yoga instructors, one or two meditation instructors, and an Alexander teacher. Under some circumstances it may be possible to conduct the retreat with a smaller faculty; however, it should be remembered that the efficacy of the program depends on the varied expertise that each faculty member brings and on intensive faculty teamwork in creating a safe and nurturing container.

Adaptations of the core curriculum can be made to suit local needs and circumstances. Parameters for consideration include: 1) cost, 2) time commitment, 3) degree of institutional investment in staff wellness (from an introductory training day to a long term commitment to positive culture change), and 4) number or percentage of staff to be trained to catalyze organization-wide change. Any level of commitment has potential value. However, experience shows that the longer multi-session programs, inclusion of a residential retreat and trainings that include a whole community of workers (e.g., all workers at a specific site) promote the deepest integration of learning and skills.

Attention should be paid to balancing personal strategies, professional strategies, and organizational strategies, as well as to cultural sensitivity. Because the Wellness training model is committed to reflecting the goals and cultures of those served, careful consideration should be given to which particular exercises and methods are used to represent each of the core components of the curriculum. While the core outcome objectives of the program are fixed, specific techniques and activities for achieving them may vary. Advanced training series are also available to extend and deepen staff mastery of wellness practices.

## **Conclusion**

Now in its fifth year, the Garrison Institute Wellness Project offers a model for training professionals working in settings where trauma is prevalent. It is unique in the extent to which it integrates experiential and contemplative methods alongside previously known education and training practices. In a

carefully constructed environment of safety and support, workers learn to recognize the signs of vicarious trauma and to cultivate a repertoire of mutually-reinforcing skills that counter its effects and build confidence and resilience. While scientifically rigorous evaluation has yet to be performed, a host of anecdotal evidence gained in a variety of pilot trainings strongly supports the efficacy of the Wellness Project for ameliorating VT, strengthening and re-inspiring professional staff and enhancing the quality of service that clients receive.

The Garrison Institute is currently exploring with prospective partner organizations avenues to carry the work of the Wellness Project forward in new contexts, including international humanitarian and social justice work, victims' services, children's services and therapeutic support for female veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

# WELLNESS PROJECT SAMPLE CURRICULUM

*Note: The curriculum is presented here as a script, but each trainer will vary her presentation based on the setting, nature of the group, and the trainer's personal style.*

## MODULE 1/DAY 1: CREATING COMMUNITY, VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND YOGA AS A WELLNESS PRACTICE

### Introduction to the Day

Hello to you all and welcome. We are very happy to be here with you as we create a community for wellness over the next 6 months. Today we begin the program with an exploration of what vicarious trauma (VT) is, your experience of it and how it may be impacting you. We will be teaching about VT so that you will be able to identify VT and to start to recognize when VT is present for you. We will be teaching you tools and practices to help you intervene in the experience of VT and to bring some peace and wellness to your time here, at your job and perhaps even to be used in your day-to-day life, if you choose. As you become more familiar with and more alert to the signs of VT and employ the tools and practices you will be learning, you will become more able to easily create a work environment where wellness is present. You will also be able to use some of the tools and practices you learn with your clients. We hope that this training will be a unique, dynamic, joyful experience and that you will take what you learn and put it into practice as you make a commitment to wellness for yourself.

### Creating Community

In this first of our 6 sessions, we want to begin by creating connection. We will begin by first going around the circle and introducing ourselves. Although many of you know each other already, we consider that presencing ourselves in the circle is a first step in creating connection different than what you may already know about each other. We will go around the circle and state our names, title, role or position in the agency and how long we have each worked there and in the

#### **Activity for Reflection**

Turn to the person next to you and share how it felt to introduce yourself to the large group. When you have finished sharing in your pairs, return again to the larger group and share any observations with the whole group. Reflect on the following questions in your sharing:

- How do you feel about engaging with the topic of VT, yoga, wellness?
- How do you feel about being with each other in a more intimate way than usual?

field as a whole. We will then go around again and ask that you share what expectations you may have for the day and/or what anticipations you are aware of. This would include any apprehension or concerns you may have about the day.

As you introduce yourself in this way, you have an opportunity to discover who this community is that is coming together for this 6-month period. You will also learn about what you have in common and will be able to get to know one another at a personal level that may not be typical in your day-to-day interactions in the workplace. As you participate in the trainings, we anticipate that you will see positive and profound changes in the culture of your organization as these ways of being are gradually integrated into your day-to-day interactions with your clients and co-workers.

### **The Web of Connection**

We will create a “web” in this next activity. The web is a symbol of our connection with one another and to others in our communities (family, clients, co-workers etc.). A web represents numerous things: for example, a spider first weaves a web in order to catch its food. The web is strong yet flexible and in the world of insects can withstand quite a lot of push and pull by the elements. The web sustains and nourishes the spider. The web is

#### **Web of Connection Instructions (20 minutes)**

- Stand in a circle with a comfortable amount of space between you and the people next to you.
- Close your eyes. If you are not comfortable with having your eyes closed, find a spot in the room where you can gently rest your gaze.
- Take in three deep breathes.
- Now take a few minutes to identify something that you want to let go of or release that is a barrier to your experience of overall wellness. It can be something from your personal life or your work life. To help you focus on the issue, ask yourself the questions: What would I like to leave behind when I walk out of here today? What would help me feel a little bit less stressed?
- Take in another deep breath and open your eyes.
- The facilitator will throw a ball of yarn to someone in the circle after placing their own release into the web.
- When you catch the ball of yarn, hold it and say a word or two about what you want to release and imagine you are placing it in the web.
- Then throw the ball of yarn to someone else randomly in the circle. Be sure you hold onto the piece of yarn at the point where you caught it.

*Continued on next page*

*Web of Connection Instructions, continued*

When everyone has caught the ball of yarn and released their concern into the web, we will have created a web of connection through those things you have committed to releasing. This process is most powerful if you state aloud what you are releasing or letting go of. However, if that just doesn't work for you and you prefer to keep it to yourself you can pause and silently place it in the web before throwing the ball of yarn. After every group member has caught and thrown the ball of yarn (including the facilitators) we will place the yarn web on the floor. The facilitator will be responsible for picking it up and discarding it before we move into the next section of the training.

sticky so that it catches whatever comes into its path. In this same way the web we will create will symbolically and psychically catch and hold what you verbally and symbolically put in it. This will create an opportunity for a clearing in your thinking. By symbolically tapping into the energy and function of the spider web those thoughts and concerns that you release to the web are in a way removed from your focus or worry.

## **The Silent Witness: Exploring the Impact of Vicarious Trauma**

We will now move on to explore what vicarious trauma is, how it is defined, how you experience it and what the process is. Vicarious trauma is a process that happens as a result of the impact on therapists and other helping professionals of being exposed over prolonged periods of time to clients' stories of trauma. This process was defined and named by Laurie Ann Pearlman and I. Lisa McCann. While we are all aware that there are many rewards that come from working in a field that deals with human suffering, Pearlman and McCann explain that VT, when it develops, causes a transformation or change in a helper's inner experience as a result of their empathic engagement with clients.

### **Defining Empathy**

Etymology: Greek *empathia*, literally, passion, from *empathes*, from *em-* + *pathos* feelings, emotion  
1: the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it  
2: the action of understanding, being aware of, sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner

*From Merriam-Webster Online:  
[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy)*

Empathic engagement describes our ability to feel deeply for another person's suffering and pain. Empathy, by its very nature, can change us in both positive and sometimes difficult ways. In Pearlman and McCann's understanding of VT, they emphasize how a person's identity, worldview and spirituality can change over time, rather than focusing on the symptoms. Developing signs of VT is not a result of failure, weakness or a lack of professionalism. It is a natural **process** that is **normal** and even ordinary because we care. Even if we are good at managing interpersonal boundaries and being present to others' suffering, we may still find ourselves affected over time by the suffering we are witness to. There are many variables that may put us at risk for developing VT, including our own trauma history, how well we take care of ourselves, our work environment, our connection with a larger support network and others.

Sometimes we can carry a sense of guilt or shame in response to the troubled feelings, thoughts, habits and patterns we develop as a way to maintain our resilience in the face of our clients' traumas. We may feel embarrassed or somehow feel a sense of failure or inadequacy in how we are managing.

### **The Silent Witness Activity**

The Silent Witness exercise you are about to experience is an opportunity to

#### **The Silent Witness: Instructions (30 minutes)**

- You will be given a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.
- Close your eyes and be silent. If you are not comfortable closing your eyes you can find a point of focus in the room where you can gently rest your gaze.
- Identify three ways that your work with clients and trauma may be affecting you.
- Write them down on the piece of paper. Since you will be sharing what you wrote with others in the group, do not write down anything that you would prefer not to share.
- When you have finished writing these three things down, walk around the room and exchange papers with others in the room.
- Read in silence what has been written by the other person.
- When you have finished reading, lift your eyes from the paper and acknowledge what you have read by looking the other person in the eyes and silently nodding or whatever gesture feels appropriate to honoring the other's experience.
- When the whole group has had an opportunity to walk around and witness everyone's written testimony, return to your seats and sit in silence with eyes closed or turned downward and allow the experience you have just had to settle in.
- You will then break into pairs to share how the experience affected you.
- Then return to the larger group and we will share and process this experience.

increase your awareness about VT in a supportive community. It will help you to move out of feeling like you have to hide or downplay your discomfort. You will discover that it is the nature of the work you do in

which responding with care, support and nurturing is a job requirement and that VT is a job related outcome. As you engage with this activity, hold that you are acknowledging the personal costs of empathy, the courage and fortitude to face what you do everyday, and the ways you have learned to cope. There is no right or wrong in how you have held on to your natural resilience. There is only the truth of what the potential costs can be to your whole self and your sense of meaning and purpose in the world.

One of the main things to remember here is to keep the silence from the beginning of the exercise through the completion. The silence allows for a degree of safety and authenticity in which truths can emerge about how you are impacted by VT.

### **Break! (10 minutes)**

Breaks are an important part of maintaining our natural resilience through good self-care. Take a break to attend to the needs of body, mind and spirit.

### **Body-Oriented Technologies: Yoga**

The practice of yoga is a key component of the Wellness Project. In addition to providing you with new knowledge about trauma and VT, we believe it is important to give you ways to work with the body. When you are strong and flexible in your body, it is far easier to maintain balance in the mind. Therefore, the yoga routines we have developed for the Wellness Project are designed to help you develop and maintain **awareness, balance** and

#### **Worried About Yoga?**

If you already know a little bit about yoga, you may worry that you will be required to push your body into pretzel-like poses. There is no need to worry. You will be taught how to make modifications to fit your body's unique make-up. Eventually, you will be comfortable with fine-tuning each posture to suit your level of strength and flexibility. On the other hand, you should try to push the edges of what is habitual or comfortable at least a little bit. You should do this without causing any abnormal distress or pain whatsoever. Experiment with the postures to see what the difference is between normal discomfort from a muscle not used to stretching and what feels like it could be causing harm. This practice of learning the difference between the two is part of developing greater self-awareness.

**connection.** We have drawn upon a variety of different yogic schools to create something customized for this program.

Yoga is a tradition that comes from India. It uses a language that is no longer spoken called Sanskrit. The word yoga itself means “union” or “to yoke” or “bind.” Yoga seeks to unite the body, breath and mind.

When we practice yoga, we learn what are called asanas. Asanas are the postures you will be given to tone, strengthen, stretch and align the body. By working with these postures on a regular basis, the body will gradually become more flexible and strong.

The practice of yoga not only works on the level of the body, but also on the mind. It is important to have a mind that is also flexible and strong. Yoga holds that when we condition the body, we are conditioning the mind. As the body becomes more grounded and stable, the mind follows. Therefore, practicing the postures, or asanas, is a first step into a meditation practice.

Breath is very important in yoga and essential to the work we are doing in the Wellness Project. You will learn here specific ways to work with the breath to help release tension and promote flow through asanas, to balance the body and mind, and to cultivate self-awareness. These practices are called pranayama in Sanskrit. By developing awareness of and manipulating the breath in these ways, we are promoting greater flexibility in both body and mind, and therefore overall wellness.

The underpinnings of all the yoga movements you will learn are rooted in intimate knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Therefore, as you learn the asanas in this program, you will also learn a little bit about how they are affecting the muscles, bones, and nervous system. Yoga is a wonderful tonic for creating overall good health.

## **The Asanas**

*Props:* 1 chair per person, yoga mat & blocks or cushions

### **Sitting Pose Sequence**

#### **Grounding**

- Begin by sitting at the edge of the chair with feet planted on the ground. If feet do not easily touch the floor place blocks or a cushion under them
- Bring your attention to your hands
- Rub them together until they feel warm
- Open your hands like a book placing the heels of your hands on your closed eyes
- Allow the warmth of your hands to relax your eyes

- Slowly remove your hands and maintain that soft quality in your eyes
- Allow gaze to fall on the floor a few feet in front of you
- Instead of having a sharp focus, let your eyes be soft and take in the periphery
- Let your hands rest easily on your low belly

**Pranayama (Belly Breathing)**

- Include in your awareness your breath
- Feel it moving in and out of your nose and moving over your upper lip
- Pay attention to your breath the same way you would watch your favorite story/movie evolve
- Pay attention to the story of your breath
- Notice the beginning, the inhale
- Observe if there is resistance to relax your belly when you inhale
- See if you can feel your belly move towards your hands as your breath in and away as you breathe out

**Warm Up (Repeat entire warm up 3x)**

- As you exhale slide your hands down towards your knees
- Cup your knees with your hands and draw your belly towards your spine
- Your back will round forward
- Allow your chin to drop towards your chest
- As you inhale slide your hands to the top of your thighs
- Press them down
- Feel your thighs grounding down into your chair
- Continue to press your thighs down while you lift your heart towards the ceiling
- Release your chin towards the ceiling
- If this hurts your neck, lift your chin less
- If you feel a pinch in your low back, arch your low back less and lift your heart away from your grounded thighs more
- Repeat 3x



- Reach both arms up
- Exhale, side bend to the right
- Ground your feet into the floor and bottom into seat

- Inhale, arms up
- Exhale, side bend left
- Remind yourself to ground
- Inhale, arms up
- Make space between each vertebra
- Exhale, twist to the right
- Place your front hand on your right thigh, back hand on the chair
- Inhale, arms up, make space
- Exhale, twist left
- Place your front hand on your left thigh, back hand on chair



***Ardha Surya Namaskar (Half Sun Salute, Repeat 3x) in chair or standing***

\*\*This can be done either standing using the seat of the chair for support in *uttansasana* ~ standing forward bend or seated.

- Begin in *tadasana* ~ mountain pose, feet hips distance apart facing the seat of the chair or sitting at the edge of the chair with feet fully grounded on floor
- Feel your feet grounded on the floor
- Lift the crown of your head away from the groundedness of your feet
- Inhale, lift arms over head for *urdhva hastasana* ~ upward hands pose
- Exhale as you swan dive over your legs to *uttanasana* ~ standing forward bend
- Inhale, place hand on top of thighs and lengthen spine to *ardha uttanasana* ~ half standing forward bend
- Exhale *uttanasana*
- Inhale *urdhva hastasana*
- Exhale *tadasana*

\*\*Modifications for tight hamstring and/or low back: remain seated for standing sequence: bend the knees when in *uttanasana* and *ardha uttanasana*.

\*\*Modifications for pain in neck and shoulders: only lift arms to the height where there is no pain. Explore widening the arms like a "V" when overhead.

### **Standing Pose Sequence**

*Props:* 1 chair

\*\*Practice poses piecemeal taking 3-5 breathes in each pose and then link them together in a flowing sequence connected to your breath.

\*\*If the movements feel too strenuous or the heart feels like it is working too hard, work with the hands on the hips. When the arms move higher than the heart, more effort is needed to sustain the integrity of the pose.

### ***Adho Mukha Svanasana* ~ Downward Facing Dog**

- Stand behind your chair with seat of chair facing away from body
- Place your hands on the back of the chair and slowly walk your feet away from the chair
- Stop when you feel sensation in your legs or back
- Take a few deep belly breaths
- Notice if your deep breathing changed what you feel
- Continue walking your feet away from your chair, if you feel it is appropriate for your body, until you make a 90 degree angle with your spine and legs
- Do your best to lengthen your spine by reaching your seat away from your chair
- Do not allow your head to fall beneath your arms so you do not unnecessarily stress your upper spine
- If you feel too much stretch in the back of your legs bend your knees slightly
- Pay attention to your breath



### ***Virabhadrasana I* ~ Warrior I**

- From *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, exhale stepping your right foot forward and spin left heel down to the ground, left toes will be angled out about 45 degrees
- Inhale, lift arms over head
- Continue to lift, making space between each vertebrae as you inhale

- Keep energy in the arms by gently straightening the elbows
- Have the feeling that the front of the hips are like headlights. Make sure that your headlights are pointing forward
- Lift the low belly away from the floor. Using the abdominals will help to support the low back
- Make sure that the front knee is over the ankle

\*\*Modifications for neck and shoulders: same as *tadasana*.

\*\*Modifications for sacroiliac pain and low back pain: widen feet left to right and shorten stance front to back

### ***Virabhadrasana II* ~ Warrior II**

- From *Virabhadrasana I*, exhale as you mindfully open the body to the left
- Front knee remains bent and over the ankle
- Arms spread wide, stretch through fingers
- Feel the groundedness of the feet
- Relax shoulders

\*\*Though the intention is to square the headlights of your hips to the side of your mat, it may not be possible to completely do so. The range of motion allowable is determined by the positioning of your bones as well as the balance of strength and flexibility of your hips and legs. However, turning the shoulders to be square to the side of the mat is a more accessible task.

### ***Trikonasana* ~ Triangle Pose**

- From *Virabhadrasana II*, press the feet into the ground as you inhale to straighten the legs
- Exhale, place the hands on the hips and swing the hips away from the chair
- Inhale stretch the arms out like a "T" reaching the front hand to touch the chair
- Try to keep both sides of the torso long, pressing the hand into the chair will help
- Second arm reaches up for the ceiling
- Turn your chest towards the ceiling
- Instead of allowing the body to collapse reach out in all directions - through your hand, legs, arms, and tailbone
- On an inhale come up to vertical

Reverse the order of the poses to return to *Adho Mukha Svanasana* as follows:

- *Trikonasana*
- *Virabhadrasana II*
- *Virabhadrasana I*
- *Adho Mukha Svanasana*
- Repeat on the other side

## **Seated Pose**

*Props:* 1 or 2 blankets to sit on or chair

These poses can be done sitting in a chair or on blankets

### ***Agnistambhasana* ~ Fire log/Ankle to knee Pose**

- Begin by sitting with just the seat on the blanket/chair with spine long
- Exhale, draw the right knee toward your chest
- Cross the right ankle over the left knee
- If seated on blanket place hand on the blanket behind the pelvis. Bend the straight leg, drawing the right shin bone closer to the chest
- Inhale arch your back making sure you consciously lift your heart towards the ceiling to create space between the vertebra
- Exhale round forward, noticing how the movement of the spine changes the sensations you feel
- Repeat 3 times
- If seated in chair exhale and fold over your legs.
- Pause and place the forearms on the shin. If more movement is accessible let the arms and torso drape over the leg
- Inhale, return to vertical
- Repeat on the other side

## **Restorative Pose**

*Props:* 2 blankets, eye pillow & 2 firm pillows, yoga mat

### ***Savasana* ~ Final relaxation pose**

- Sit on the floor
- Place one of the firm pillows underneath your knees (you may replace the pillow with a thick blanket rolled tightly)
- Cover your legs with one blanket
- As you lie back place the other pillow underneath your head and neck
- Put eye pillow over your eyes
- Cover the remainder of your body with the blanket
- Pay attention to your breath, especially your exhale
- Exhale deeply and relax your feet
- Exhale, relax your legs
- Exhale, relax your torso



- Exhale, relax your hands and arms
- Relax your head

The yoga portion of the training day concludes with the community sitting in a chair or on the floor on mats and engaging in some final *pranayama* and chanting. It is always ended by saying *Namaste*.

## **Closing the Day**

As we come to a close of this day, take a moment to reflect on what you have learned about VT, how you have been impacted by working in the human services field, and how you might begin to integrate or practice some of what you learned here today to help develop awareness, balance and connection.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- Do you feel more connected to yourself?
- To others?
- Do you feel more able to share with others how your work may be affecting you?
- Do you feel more relaxed and grounded or are you more aware of anxious or agitated feelings?
- Are you more present to your authentic self and feelings?

### *Instructions*

Take a moment to turn to a partner and share some of your reflections with each other. Now return to the full group. Are there any observances, reflections, questions or thoughts anyone would like to share with the larger group about today?

We always close our day standing in a circle. Take a look around and notice and acknowledge each other as you move forward in this journey together. Take in three deep breaths and allow a word or two at the most to surface about where you are right now in this moment. Starting to my left, go around and say your word into the circle to complete the day of learning. Until our next meeting, Be Well!

## WELLNESS PROJECT CORE FACULTY

**Claudette C'Faison** is a pioneer in designing, facilitating and administrating innovative programs that provide emotional and mental health services and education in high risk communities. She started her career in 1977, managing the runaway homeless youth program for the NYC Department of Youth Services; later she expanded her focus to include parents, educators, and youth service providers. In 1985, Claudette became the National Director of the Breakthrough Foundation's Mentoring Program based in San Francisco. Before returning to New York, she trained over 3,000 volunteers and youth throughout the United States. In 1989, she co-founded Youth At-Risk, Inc. (YAR) where she currently serves as the Executive Director. In 1997, Mrs. Faison successfully merged the U.S. cities that incorporate youth at-risk curricula into a international consortium, Global Partners for Youth (GPY). She is a GPY board member and founded the GPY Leadership Training Academy, in which she serves as faculty. Claudette is an international training consultant and speaker, and has become an expert resource for organizational development of mentorship programs and transformative educational methodology.

**May Krukiel**, M.A., M.Ed, is a psychotherapist who has practiced in New York City, Rockland County and Connecticut for more than 25 years. Her training in psychology and her long-standing commitment to social justice work led to a specialization in working with women survivors of sexual violence. Having served as a director of a rape crisis center and board member of the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault, May has an appreciation of the difficulties inherent in working with victims of violence and the profound impact of vicarious trauma on the helper. She is currently the Director of Victims Assistance Services in Westchester, and agency providing clinical and support services to all crime victims.

May frequently trains on the topics of vicarious traumatization, trauma and the importance of integrating gender-specific and trauma-focused treatment into chemical dependency programs. She is the founder of The Wren Collaboration, a loosely-linked gathering of healers who come together to provide retreats, workshops and healing ritual.

**Sharon Salzberg** is a leading spiritual teacher and writer. In addition to her latest book, *The Force of Kindness* (Sounds True), she is the author of *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience* (Riverhead Books, 2002), *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Shambhala Publications), and *A Heart as Wide as the World: Living with Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Compassion* (Shambhala); co-author with Joseph Goldstein of *Insight Meditation: A Step-by-Step Course on How to Meditate* (Sounds True) and editor of *Voices of Insight* (Shambhala).

Sharon's work is non-sectarian, though based on the ancient Buddhist practices of mindfulness and metta (lovingkindness), the aim of which is to cultivate love and compassion both for ourselves and for others. After she first became interested in meditation, Sharon spent several years engaged in intensive practice and study with respected meditation teachers from India, Burma, and Tibet. In 1976, she established, with Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts -- now one of the most prominent and active meditation centers in the Western world. Sharon also teaches internationally, and has spoken or taught at such prestigious events as the State of the World Forum and the Peacemakers Conference.

**Gayla Marie Stiles** has over 10 years of experience leading diverse populations of people in physical, therapeutic, and creative movement. She has accumulated her knowledge from her training in Laban Barteneiff Fundamentals, the Pilates Method, Yoga, meditation in the Shambhala lineage, as well as her career as a professional modern dancer. Gayla completed her Dance Medicine Internship in addition to her Core Dynamics Pilates mat Certification in 2000. Her love of movement and its ability to inspire, educate, and heal naturally drew her to yoga. She has studied Iyengar, Hatha, Restorative, and Vinyasa styles of yoga. Gayla received her teacher training from OM Yoga Center and continues her studies there and throughout New York City. She will be completing her restorative certification with Judith Lasater in May 2005.

**DaRa Williams**, a psychotherapist, meditation teacher and wellness coach, has been a clinician and administrator in the field of Mental Health for over 25 years. She is currently the Wellness Project Coordinator at the Garrison Institute. Prior to her position at Garrison Institute she was the Director of School Based Mental Health Services, for Graham Windham Services for Families and Children. In that position she created and managed mental health programming in an elementary school located in East Harlem and an intermediate school in West Harlem. She has also been a consultant at the Rockland Family Shelter providing services in the sexual assault unit for rape and incest survivors. DaRa maintains a private practice in Manhattan, and volunteers with New York Youth At-Risk, an organization that aims to transform the lives of young people.

DaRa has been a meditator for the past 20 years and is a practitioner of both Vipassana and Ascension meditation. She is a member of the Board of Directors for the Insight Meditation Society in Barre Massachusetts. She has practiced yoga and has studied various other healing systems, and believes in the power of these tools to heal. A result of her practices enable her to provide compassionate, quality care and support for others in her professional capacity.

**Janet Wise-Thomas**, LCSW, a seasoned social worker, has held directorship positions in several NYC domestic violence programs within a 12 years span. Most notable, she served as the Clinical Director at Sanctuary for Families' Sarah Burke House. Sarah Burke House is one of the largest shelters for domestic violence in New York City.

Currently, Janet is the Director of Senior Services at Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC), where she is using her 28 years of management and training experience in the field of social work to develop a continuum of services for seniors in Harlem through the development of a NNORC (Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Community). This program will feature an elder abuse prevention program to address a problem that remains hidden and is poorly understood in many communities. As the senior population grows exponentially in the coming years, Janet feels it is important to educate seniors and their caregivers to these issues, as well as to develop and coordinate collaboration between elder abuse and prevention networks and senior services providers.