



# Supportiv

THE SUPPORT NETWORK

↑ anonymous, peer-to-peer



## National Post-Traumatic Growth Through Peer Support

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA | MARCH 8, 2022



Today's Presenter

**Helena Plater-Zyberk**  
CEO & Co-Founder



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<https://supportiv.com>

## WHAT

- Live, anonymous, peer-to-peer small group chats that are PROFESSIONALLY MODERATED in real-time, across every topic, that:
  - Instantly, dynamically matching peers with shared lived experience
  - Resolve 75% of mental & emotional struggles in real-time with clinical-grade outcomes measurements

## HOW

- Cutting-edge NATURAL LANGUAGE UNDERSTANDING (NLU) for instant precision matching of:
  - People's related struggles into peer groups
  - Expressed needs to hyper-useful resources

## WHEN & WHERE

- 24/7/365 | Never a wait | Any device

## WHY

- Engages hard-to-reach segments: BIPOC, Boomers, Males, Disabilities, Gender/Sexuality

## WHO

- Two Fortune 5s | 750,000+ users
- User age range: 13-80 | Median age: 46

Anger  
STRESS Parenting  
struggles

**BURNOUT** Social  
isolation  
Caregiver  
burden

**DEPRESSION**

**ANXIETY** unmotivated

Hopelessness  
RELATIONSHIP  
CONFLICT

Dread overwhelmed

Disconnectedness Fear

**LONELINESS**

**Underperformance**

SADNESS Angst  
Pressure

Bad lifestyle choices

Financial  
uncertainty Political  
Fracture

Grief

Unfulfilled  
Aspirations

We are living through  
population-wide:

- Health Scares & Long-Term Vulnerability
- Political Madness
- Economic Instability
- Racist Attacks
- Violence
- Geopolitical Tension & War
- Environmental Catastrophes
- "Always On" Expectations

... while grappling with the  
impact of two years of fear  
& social isolation.

# Let's talk about the word TRAUMA...

The New York Times

## If Everything Is 'Trauma,' Is Anything?

February 4, 2022

### *The Atlantic*

The Greek term for “wound,” *trauma* was initially used to refer to physical wounds. Although today’s best sellers seem to provide all the answers, psychiatrists began to widely embrace the notion of purely psychological trauma only around World War I. But the disorder has evolved since the days of shell shock. The current diagnosis of PTSD dates back to only 1980, applied to the flashbacks experienced by some soldiers who had served in the Vietnam War.

In the decades since, *trauma* has come to signify a range of injuries so broad that the term verges on meaninglessness. The American Psychological Association, for example, describes trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster” —*like, but not only*. “Like weeds that spread through a space and invasively take over semantic territory from others,” *trauma* can be used to describe any misfortune, big or small, Nicholas Haslam, a psychology professor at the University of Melbourne, told me. That concept creep is evident on TikTok, where creators use “trauma response” to explain away all kinds of behavior, including doomscrolling and perfectionist tendencies.

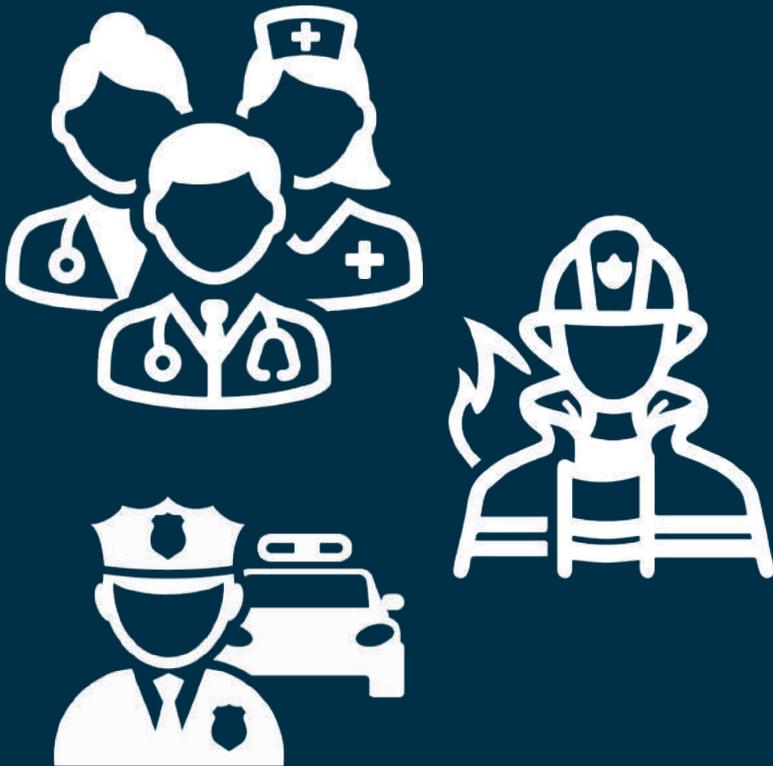
From: “The Self-Help That No One Needs Right Now” by Eleanor Cummins | October 18, 2021

# The Pandemic: Trauma or Not?

1. This is happening to us. As individuals, as communities, as a world population.
2. We do not have agency over what is happening.
3. We have zero say on when or if it ends.
4. Me doing my very, very best doesn't make it better.
5. Profoundly affected the trajectory of our lives.
6. Experienced by many people.  
(i.e. "collective trauma")
7. Still ongoing.

Yes

# Add compounding “vicarious trauma”



## What's Vicarious Trauma?

Trauma experienced by those in medical services or victim assistance professions who are consistently exposed to trauma and/or violence.

# Let's not confuse PTG with "resilience."



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

## Growth after trauma

"PTG is sometimes considered synonymous with resilience because becoming more resilient as a result of struggle with trauma can be an example of PTG—but PTG is different from resilience, says Kanako Taku, PhD, associate professor of psychology at Oakland University, who has both researched PTG and experienced it as a survivor of the 1995 Kobe earthquake in Japan.

"Resiliency is the personal attribute or ability to bounce back," says Taku. PTG, on the other hand, refers to what can happen when someone who has difficulty bouncing back experiences a traumatic event that challenges his or her core beliefs, endures psychological struggle (even a mental illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder), and then ultimately finds a sense of personal growth. It's a process that "takes a lot of time, energy and struggle," Taku says.

Lorna Collier | November 2016, Vol 47, No. 10

# The label isn't what's important.



**Dr Antonis Kousoulis**

@AKousoulis



Although [#mentalhealth](#) diagnostic labels create the illusion of an explanation, they can also be scientifically meaningless & create [#stigma](#). [#Diagnoses](#) often mask the role of [#trauma](#) & adversity and tell us little about an individual & what treatment they need.

12:45 AM · Feb 4, 2022 · Twitter Web App

**Dr Antonis Kousoulis**

@AKousoulis

MD, MSc, DrPH, FRSA. Director for England and Wales [@mentalhealth](#). Leading to impact in [#PublicHealth](#) one day at a time.

# The Goal: Healing & Mental Well-Being



Will anti-depressants & anti-anxiety  
meds **heal** us?



# Watching the trends

Anti-anxiety prescriptions **up 34%** since 2019.

Anti-depressant prescriptions **up 50%** in the same period.



**Michael Fulwiler**  
@MichaelFulwiler



Primary care providers (PCPs) prescribe 80% of antidepressants and see 60% of people being treated for depression in the United States.

The average length of a PCP visit is 18 minutes.

9:54 AM · Feb 8, 2022 · Twitter Web App

# Pharma is not the answer.



**Roger K. McFillin, Psy.D., ABPP** 🌸  
@DrMcFillin\_PsyD



Historically most mental health problems are episodic. Prompted by hardships, loss, relationship difficulties, set backs in life, social problems, response to traumatic experience. Normalize & improve peoples ability to respond to these events.

We are now medicating this.

12:12 PM · Jan 22, 2022 · Twitter Web App

# Pharma is not the answer.



**The Wounded Healer**

@ahmedhankir

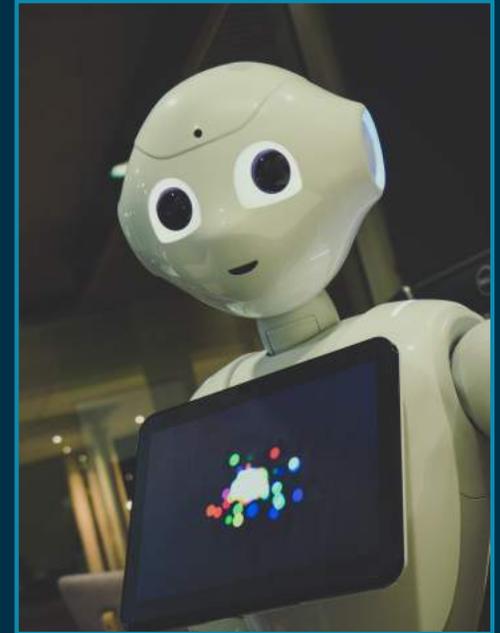


Take this from an NHS Psychiatry Doctor

Psychiatric 🙌 drugs 🙌 do 🙌 not 🙌 repair 🙌 the  
🙌 damages 🙌 on 🙌 our 🙌 mental 🙌 health 🙌  
caused 🙌 by 🙌 structural 🙌 and 🙌 systemic 🙌  
factors 🙌 resulting 🙌 in 🙌 inequalities, 🙌  
injustices, 🙌 disadvantage 🙌 and discrimination 🙌

8:40 AM · Jan 13, 2022 · Twitter for Android

# Is “therapy for all” the solution?



Let's get real.

Therapy may be the gold standard.

But it's not a realistic solution for  
330 million Americans.

# Let's get real.

130 million Americans live in areas designated by the U.S. government as mental health professional shortage areas.

# Let's get real.

By 2025, the U.S. will have a **provider shortage** of:

- 10,470 [marriage and family therapists](#) (40,250 needed; 29,780 available)
- 15,400 [psychiatrists](#) (60,610 needed; 45,210 available)
- 26,930 [mental health counselors](#) (172,630 needed; 145,700 available)
- 48,540 [social workers](#) (157,760 needed; 109,220 available)
- 57,490 [psychologists](#) (246,420 needed; 188,930 available)
- 78,050 [school counselors](#) (321,500 needed; 243,450 available)

# Let's get real.

## **Burnout rates for mental health providers**

- 78%: **self-reported burnout in psychiatrists** from a 2020 study
- 16%: **psychiatrists screening for major depression** in the same 2020 study
- 21-61%: average rate of **mental health practitioner burnout** (pre-COVID)
- 90%: self-reported **burnout in a study of college counseling center practitioners** in 2020

Source: Wheel

# How can we address the clinician situation?

- Raise insurance reimbursement rates
- Subsidize or lower cost of attaining clinical training [[\\$700M White House plan](#)]
- Expedite approval for cross-state licensing, or national licensure
- Tap retirees for a “second career”
- Focus on increasing BIPOC representation

# Let's get real.

APA: 86% of psychologists in the U.S. are white—5% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 4% black (2015)

Established barriers for BIPOC & marginalized communities include:

- Cultural differences around mental health, seeking outside help, and stigma
- Admitted history of racist bias
- Higher likelihood of being uninsured, access barriers, and communication barriers
- General mistrust around medical treatment

# AND... let's re-visit an earlier insight

"Psychiatry has a long history of being criticised for the pathologisation and medicalisation of ordinary experiences...

Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, one of the most prominent schools of contemporary psychotherapy as a case study, I demonstrate that psychotherapy also contributes to medicalising and pathologising bereavement, heartbreak and misfortune."

Sahanika Ratnayake, University of Cambridge

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and The Pathologisation and Medicalisation of Ordinary Experiences (2021)

Are we on our own?



# For national-level, mass-population healing...

We must expand upon  
ridged adherence to  
traditional mental health  
care treatment!

Community  
Services

Alternative  
"Therapies"

Nature  
"Therapy"

Peer  
Support

# Let's define "Peer Support"

Peer support... [is the] **mutual exchange** of emotional and practical support **between people who identify as peers on the basis of shared or similar experiences of mental distress**, with the recent origins of organized forms of peer support often ascribed to the mutual aid movement.

BMC Psychiatry | The effectiveness of one-to-one peer support in mental health services: a systematic review and meta-analysis | November 2020

# Why Peer Support? ...It works!

Evidence-based, backed by 120+ research studies

## **Efficacy of peer support interventions for depression: a meta-analysis**

PN Pfeiffer, M Heisler, JD Piette, MA Rogers, and M Valenstein.

*General Hospital Psychiatry, 2011*

“Peer support interventions for depression resulted in greater improvement in depression symptoms than usual care and may have similar efficacy to group cognitive-behavioural therapy”

## **Peer communication in online mental health forums for young people**

Julie Prescott, PhD; Terry Hanley, PhD; Katalin Ujhelyi, BSc (Hons).

*JMIR Mental Health, 2017*

“Users engage with those with whom they would otherwise not do so in the offline world, and it produces a hyperpersonal interaction... online forums provide them with emotional and informational support, they can decrease isolation and stress, and reduce symptoms such as depression, and self-harm”

## **The future of mental health care: peer-to-peer support**

J. A. Naslund, K. A. Aschbrenner, L. A. Marsch, and S. J. Bartels.

*Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences, 2016*

“Report benefits from interacting with peers online from greater social connectedness... and by sharing personal stories and strategies for coping with day-to-day challenges”

# What feels different about peer support?

“THAT WAS AMAZING FOR THE FIRST TIME I FELT LIKE SOMEONE WAS THERE”

“Calmed me down and listened to me better than my own therapist did!!! Made me feel much better. Loved it.”

“I will NEVER forget how this just changed my life for the better. I am forever grateful for talking to me and actually caring and helping me. I feel better after that talk than I have in probably my whole life”



# Real people, real solutions

*Peer support is a "system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful."*

Mead S, Hilton D, Curtis L. Peer support: a theoretical perspective. *Psychiatr Rehabil J.* 2001;25(2):134-141. doi:10.1037/h0095032

The evidence-based intervention is built upon the following social and behavioral theories:

- Social support,
- Experiential knowledge,
- Helper therapy principle,
- Social learning theory,
- Social comparison theory, and
- Self-determination theory

Fortuna KL, Venegas M, Umucu E, Mois G, Walker R, Brooks JM. The Future of Peer Support in Digital Psychiatry: Promise, Progress, and Opportunities. *Curr Treat Options Psychiatry.* 2019;6(3):221-231. doi:10.1007/s40501-019-00179-7

# Trust Towards Peer Support Among Marginalized Populations

“For black people, we trace our first cultivation of what we call peer support to the time we landed here during our enslavement...

The dimension of psychological and emotional support that had to be necessary for the black folks, African folks who landed here to... support themselves and the people they were with to survive this...

What did it mean for emotional support? ...We had to build up communities of care to get through that.”

The fact that I am here is evidence that somehow something in us learned how to heal, learned how to thrive, learned how to create collective care and peer support. It's about village care.

And that is a radical intervention. The grass at the root, as opposed to focusing on an elite class of individuals who have select knowledge that no one else has access to.

Yolo Akili Robinson, Executive Director of BEAM  
(Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective)

# Real people, real problems

**Black Warrior Child** @KeemHastheDream

clinical therapy is NOT readily accessible or necessarily inviting for Black folk in this country, especially MAGES & hyper marginalized people.

clinical therapy is also HELLA expensive.

rudely dismissing ppl & telling them to go therapy ain't cute.  
i hate to see it.

4:19 PM · Jan 18, 2022 · Twitter Web App

100 Retweets 11 Quote Tweets 364 Likes

Support Tweet your reply Reply

**Araya** @arayabaker · Jan 19  
Replying to @KeemHastheDream  
And structural trauma still awaits us as we exit every session 😞

**Frema Brenyah** @WednesdayyyBorn · Jan 18  
Replying to @KeemHastheDream and @itswalela  
Something has to be done about this.

**WEHEM- MESUT** @datalkinbook · Jan 19  
Replying to @KeemHastheDream  
Like therapy also isn't surveillance. Why can't anyone just talk to each other? Why can't we reach each other and talk each other off a ledge... what's wrong?

# Engaging in Peer Support Give-and-Take Offers **Purpose**

**Journal of Positive Psychology (2013)**

*Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life*

"Happiness was linked to being a taker rather than a giver, whereas meaningfulness went with being a giver rather than a taker."

Researchers from:

- University of Florida
- University of Minnesota
- Stanford University

# Evaluating “Peer Support” Options

- Is it primarily just venting? Or is there a structure or goal to the interaction?
- Volunteer “listeners” vs. peers with shared lived experience?
- What safety measures are in place for trolls and/or crisis escalation?
- What times of day is it available?  
Appointment-based or on-demand?



- Most active hours are 8pm-2am and weekends
- 43% M | 52% F | 5% Non-Binary
- 58% of our professional chat moderators are non-white
- 32% of Supportiv users are non-white
- Average chat is 27 minutes
- 42% of users return



[info@supportiv.com](mailto:info@supportiv.com)



<https://supportiv.com>

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# How Does This Translate To Post-Traumatic Growth?

“ Peer support is a way for people from diverse backgrounds who share experiences in common to come together to build relationships in which they share their strengths and support each other’s healing and growth.”

(Blanch, Filson, & Penney, 2012)  
Credit to: [ReachCounseling.com](https://ReachCounseling.com)

# How Does This Translate To Post-Traumatic Growth?

“ Peer support contradicts many of the negative messages received through traumatic experiences and service systems about who you are and what you are capable of.”

(Blanch, Filson, & Penney, 2012; Davidson et al., 1999)  
Credit to: ReachCounseling.com

# Five Key Aspects of Post-Traumatic Growth

1. Appreciation of life
2. Relationship with others
3. New possibilities in life
4. Personal strength
5. Spiritual change

