

'Leading the way to recovery'

New nonprofit to train people to help peers through mental health issues

Ashley Bailey
Tri-City Weekly

Henry Willey has found — personally and professionally — that working through mental health issues with peers can be healing.

Linda O'Hara Scott agrees.

"It's a very positive model to focus on recovery through peer support," she said. "I do believe that it's a source of compassion and integrity and belief in hope and possibilities for people."

Both Willey and O'Hara Scott were diagnosed as bipolar in the 1980s, facing joblessness, isolation, hospitalization and extreme highs and lows.

They have made leaps and strides to get to where they are now, making the most of their time to help others heal.

Willey, who will be 67 in March, has dedicated his time to being a mental health community organizer — starting dozens of support groups in California and Arizona.

O'Hara Scott took another route and hit the books, recently earning herself a master's degree in social work from Humboldt State University.

Now, both have brought their passions together to help others through a new nonprofit called Health and Wellness Partnerships.

The nonprofit was launched in January to identify local mental health needs and teach classes to help people live more independently.

"There are needs in the community that are never going to be met by the system," Willey said. "This is something fresh and new that needs to be done. I want to be able to make a change on a grassroots level."

Health and Wellness Partnerships wants to address a lack of available services, community awareness and educational resources about mental and emotional health.

Willey is the nonprofit's president; O'Hara Scott is the vice president.

"We want our focus to be not on hospitalization, but recovery — getting better," Willey said. "We want to take away the stigma of mental health so people feel more free to come."

On Thursday at 1 p.m., Willey will teach a free two-hour class on how to facilitate a peer self-help support group at Tri-County Independent

Living in Eureka.

He said he especially is looking forward to helping young people aged 18-25 to organize.

Willey wants to train other people on how to start their own support groups, like women's only groups for postpartum depression or a cross-disabilities support group to talk about common problems like transportation and communication.

Sara Faught, who works in community outreach in Eureka, was one of the first people to contact Willey about the class.

She first learned about the Health and Wellness Partnerships through Craigslist in early January.

Faught said she would like to create and advise a campus-based violence prevention group for college or high school-aged youth.

She was part of a similar organization on her college campus in Kansas, organizing presentations and events to educate people about domestic violence and sexual assault.

"I believe the greatest form of prevention is education," Faught said. "There are a lot of resources in the community that help out victims of violence, but not a lot of prevention in the field."

She said she is interested in taking Willey's class to learn how to facilitate small peer support groups in a safe environment.

"I want to start an organization that has a message," she said. "I want those intimate conversations that happen between people to help each other share their experiences."

Justin Tuttle, a Humboldt State University senior studying psychology, serves as the group's secretary and treasurer.

He was diagnosed as bipolar a year and a half ago and said he is looking forward to sharing holistic healing practices with his peers.

Tuttle said he's talked with therapists at HSU about starting some sort of bipolar support group on the HSU campus and hopes that the Health and Wellness Partnerships training will help make it happen.

"I believe that the therapeutic approach gets downplayed a lot," Tuttle said. "It's not brought to the surface for people who do have disorders and it can help them in a lot more ways than they can know."

Willey isn't new to working with people in Humboldt County.

He recently returned to his home in Eureka after a two-year stint living in Arizona with his daughters.

In Humboldt County, Willey was formerly involved with suicide prevention support groups and served as Chair for the Humboldt County Mental Health Board (appointed by the board of supervisors to advise on mental health issues). Willey was also the Far North Regional Director of the Depression Bipolar Support Alliance, representing 17 counties on a statewide level.

Willey can now be seen wearing a green and gold hat, touting his new organization, handing out flashy new business cards and toting a full appointment book.

Willey didn't just lounge in the sun when he was in Arizona — he was working to build support groups in Prescott, Tucson and Phoenix.

He worked with veterans on goal setting, self image and finding meaning in their lives, despite not being a veteran, himself.

"They looked at me as an equal because I'm bipolar. I didn't go in there as a professional and they related to me."

In 2002, he started a support group called Mind Menders. Willey said he didn't have much training when he started the group. He hopes to pass on his knowledge about organizing so others can start successful groups.

In the future, Willey would also like to teach a peer counseling class and hopes to put on a class at least every three months.

"There are people like me that need help and don't know where to get it," Willey said. "I want to offer people what they can get and that's support. Hope. To look at themselves as having possibilities and purpose and to get a realistic view of what they can be. If you don't expect anything different, a person is never going to change."

Willey said he hopes his group will take off supporting people around the state.

For now, the group has roots in Arizona and in Humboldt County.

For more information, call Willey at 267-6786 or visit www.hwpartners.org.



ASHLEY BAILEY

"I want to offer people what they can get and that's support. Hope. To look at themselves as having possibilities and purpose and to get a realistic view of what they can be. If you don't expect anything different, a person is never going to change."

HENRY WILLEY
PRESIDENT OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS PARTNERSHIPS

If You Go:

What: Class on how to facilitate a peer support group
When: 1 p.m. Thursday
Where: Tri-County Independent Living Center, Eureka
Admission: Free

Weaverville Joss House's lion dance welcomes Year of the Rabbit

Brandi M. Fleeks
Tri-City Weekly

The Chinese New Year is a time to cast off all the things of last year and welcome good fortune and happiness in the coming year. The Year of the Rabbit began last week with the Weaverville Joss House's annual Chinese lion dance to ring in the new year.

The purpose of lion dance is to ward off evil and bring good luck and fortune. Traditional lion costumes are composed of specific colors and adorned with mirrors for just that purpose. Jack Frost, the historic monument guide for the Weaverville Joss House, said that yellow is for wealth, red is for good luck, green represents nature and the mirrors keep evil at bay.

Two people wear one lion costume, one person at the head and the other person in the body, as they dance and parade down the road. This year seven lions composed of an adult male, an adult female and five cubs performed. The lion dance starts at the front of the temple to honor the ancestors, then dancers make their way up and down Main Street, visiting the various stores to bring good fortune and prosperity for the new year.

The town has held lion dances since the 1870s when the



SUBMITTED

Chinese population in Weaverville numbered in the thousands. Although the Chinese population has dwindled to a mere six people today, the lion dance continues to be a tradition for the temple that community members share in and enjoy.

"It connects the people in Weaverville back to their history," Frost said. "Even though it's a different culture it connects people back to their roots."

The Weaverville Joss House is a Chinese Taoist temple. Known as The Temple Among the Forest Beneath the Clouds, it is still used by worshipers as a place to go to honor their ancestors and confer with the gods. Chinese immigrants, who came to stake their claims and make their fortunes during the California gold rush, built the original temple.

Fires consumed the original and subsequent buildings, but the current temple, built in 1874 has been standing for 136 years. It is the oldest Taoist temple in California.

Moon Lee, the last temple caretaker, donated the temple to the California State Parks system in 1956 to preserve the structure and continue Chinese tradition in California. The temple houses religious artifacts brought from China, including one of the most complete Ching Dynasty shrines in existence and weapons used in the Tong War of 1854. It is also the only all-wood temple in North America.

Chinese lore predicts the Year of the Rabbit to be a calm year filled with good fortune and prosperity.

For current park hours, call the park at (530) 623-5284.