

LIBRARIES *for health*

St. David's Foundation

NEWS + UPDATES

ABOUT LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH

MORE THAN JUST BOOKS

Libraries for Health is a collaborative initiative that partners with public libraries to expand access to wellness, peer support, and community connection across Central Texas. Through partnerships, training, outreach, and community-based programming, the initiative helps libraries serve as welcoming spaces where people can find support, resources, and opportunities for healing.

www.austinmhc.org/libraries-for-health/

ANNOUNCING OUR NEW PROJECT COORDINATOR FOR LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH



Austin Mental Health Community is excited to introduce Jason Johnson as the new Project Coordinator for the Libraries for Health initiative. In this role, Jason will help guide and strengthen this innovative effort that partners with local public libraries to expand access to wellness and community support across Central Texas.

Jason brings more than a decade of leadership and lived-experience expertise in peer support and recovery-oriented services. He spent nine years as a Program Director at a local mental health authority and has more than eleven years of experience supervising peer specialists and supporting frontline recovery workers.

He has facilitated trainings statewide in Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Youth Mental Health First Aid, and Peer Specialist Supervision.

A passionate advocate for recovery-oriented systems, Jason is committed to elevating the role of lived experience and strengthening peer support through thoughtful supervision, robust training, and meaningful systems change.

We also want to extend a heartfelt thank you to Takisha Moore for her exceptional commitment and service as the previous Project Coordinator. Over the past four years, Takisha helped shape this initiative and strengthen connections between peer specialists, library partners, and community members.



HEALING CIRCLES LAUNCH ACROSS LIBRARY PARTNERS

Libraries for Health recently launched their Healing Circle series, bringing guided conversations about wellness, resilience, and community connection directly into local libraries. The series is supported through the Libraries for Health partnership with St. David's Foundation.

Healing Circles Continue Across Partner Locations

Following the success of the first gatherings, additional Healing Circles were held at Smithville Public Library, Austin Mental Health Community, and Buda Public Library. Each gathering created space for participants to slow down, reflect, and engage in meaningful conversation with others in their community.

These circles are part of a broader effort through the Libraries for Health initiative to strengthen community wellness by bringing supportive programming into familiar and accessible spaces.

The first Healing Circles were held in Smithville and San Marcos, where community members gathered in welcoming library spaces to share experiences, reflect on stress and healing, and connect with others in meaningful conversation.

The circles are facilitated by Dr. O'dell Johnson, who guides participants through thoughtful discussion and reflective exercises designed to support emotional wellness and community connection.

Participants described the experience as calming, supportive, and meaningful. Many shared that simply having a welcoming space to talk and listen helped reduce feelings of isolation while encouraging new perspectives on wellness and resilience.



Libraries for Health End-of-Year Convening - November 2025

“More Than Just Books”

For generations, libraries have been trusted spaces where people go to learn, explore, and connect with information. Today, libraries are expanding that role in powerful ways. Through the Libraries for Health Initiative, libraries across Texas are demonstrating that they are truly **More Than Just Books**; they are places of connection, support, and community wellness.

The Libraries for Health Initiative brings Peer Support Specialists into library spaces to provide compassionate, non-clinical support for individuals who may be navigating mental health challenges, substance use recovery, housing instability, or other life stressors. Peer Support Specialists are individuals with lived experience who are trained to walk alongside others in their recovery journey, offering understanding, encouragement, and resource navigation.

Libraries are uniquely positioned to offer spaces to provide compassionate, non-clinical support for individuals who may be navigating mental health challenges, substance use recovery, housing instability, or other life stressors. They are welcoming, stigma-free environments where people already come to access services, technology, and community programs. By integrating Peer Support Specialists into library teams, libraries can meet people where they are and connect them to the resources and support they may need.

At our End of Year Convening which took place in November 2025, Library partners, peer specialists, and community leaders gathered to reflect on the initiative's progress and share ideas for sustaining community wellness programming throughout the region.

Convening highlights included shared learning, experiential activities, and cross-site conversations focused on sustainability, collaboration, and long-term community impact.



LIBRARIES *for health*

St. David's Foundation

LIBRARY SPOTLIGHTS

DEL VALLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Del Valle Public Library has been conducting weekly outreach through its Mobile Library program for the past nine months, serving nearly 1,000 community members in 2025. Staff see between 20 and 40 people each week and have built strong relationships with many patrons experiencing housing instability.

Through partnerships with local outreach teams and social workers, several patrons have received help obtaining identification documents, enrolling in health insurance, and connecting with shelter resources.

Libraries for Health funding has also supported outreach through cold-weather gear and warm drinks such as coffee and hot chocolate, helping create welcoming moments of connection during visits.

MARTINDALE COMMUNITY LIBRARY

The Libraries for Health partnership has strengthened Martindale Community Library's role as a welcoming and supportive space for its rural community.

A new television display now highlights upcoming programs and announcements, helping visitors stay connected to library activities.

Support from Libraries for Health has also enhanced the Serenity Garden, creating a peaceful outdoor space for reflection and community programming.

The library's Creative Conversations program continues to bring patrons together through coloring activities that spark meaningful conversation and connection.

ELGIN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Elgin Public Library continues to expand its programming and community partnerships. The library recently opened a St. David's funded makerspace called Creation Station, offering equipment classes and open lab sessions for patrons.

Community programs include weekly Fiber Arts gatherings, Senior Games, and a variety of craft, cooking, and movie programs that bring residents together.

The library's Peer Support Specialist also facilitates wellness groups including meditation sessions, Recovery Matters discussions, and writing workshops focused on emotional wellbeing.

Looking Ahead in 2026

Libraries for Health is continuing to build momentum across partner sites with a stronger focus on sustainability, staff development, and practical support for library-based peer programming.

Upcoming offerings are expected to include guest speakers such as an HR specialist, a program representative from a funding organization, and other presenters who can help library partners strengthen infrastructure, partnerships, and long-term planning.

The initiative is also exploring a condensed Peer Specialist Supervisor training for library directors and other managerial staff to support supervision, role clarity, and successful integration of peer support within library settings.

Across the Network

Several libraries are moving from early implementation into longer-term planning, with more attention being given to staffing pathways, supervision capacity, and local ownership of peer support programming.

Taylor is exploring the possibility of supporting a position through the city budget, signaling encouraging movement toward local sustainability and public-sector investment.

Additional partner highlights, milestones, and community stories will continue to be featured as sites deepen programming and expand their local impact.

