



**St. David's  
FOUNDATION**

## **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](http://www.austinmhc.org/libraries-for-health)

This issue highlights community partnerships, wellness programming, patron voices, and recent media coverage from across the Libraries for Health network.

---

## Libraries for Health in the News



*Laura Skelding for KUT News*

We're excited to share recent media coverage highlighting the Libraries for Health initiative. The story, written by Olivia Aldridge, was featured through KUT, a trusted public media outlet reaching audiences across Central Texas through both radio and digital platforms.

This type of visibility helps elevate the work happening across participating libraries and supports ongoing outreach, partnerships, and sustainability efforts.

Read the full story: <https://www.kut.org/health/2026-03-16/central-tx-rural-libraries-mental-health-smithville-jarrell>

---

## Healing Circles Bring Community Members Together



*Participants gather during a Healing Circle hosted through Libraries for Health.*

Several Libraries for Health sites have recently hosted Healing Circles, creating welcoming spaces where community members can gather, share experiences, and support one another.

***“It was a warm and inviting experience”***

These facilitated conversations encourage reflection listening, and mutual support. Libraries provide trusted environments where people from many backgrounds can connect and discuss life's challenges in a respectful and supportive settings.

## What We're Hearing Across Libraries

Across Libraries for Health locations, patron feedback continues to highlight the important role libraries play in supporting wellness, connection, and community engagement.

From peer support outreach and resource navigation to wellness programming like chair yoga and community classes, patrons described libraries as welcoming spaces where they feel supported, encouraged, and connected to others.

### ***“The community feel is priceless.”***

Many patrons shared that participation helped reduce isolation and strengthen their sense of belonging. One participant described their library as “a great source of information” where they were able to “bounce ideas off others going through the same situation.”

Others emphasized the importance of simply having a welcoming environment where people could gather without fear of judgment.

### ***“No judgment.”***

Feedback from wellness programming reflected strong themes of physical and emotional wellbeing. Patrons reported improved flexibility, increased confidence,

better focus, reduced pain, and greater social connection through participation in classes and activities.

### ***“This class/yoga is amazing. It has helped me in so many ways.”***

Patrons also emphasized the importance of having accessible and affordable wellness opportunities close to home. Transportation barriers, cost, distance, and limited local resources were mentioned repeatedly, reinforcing the value of community-based programming offered through libraries.

Outreach efforts from Libraries for Health peer specialists also reflected ongoing support connecting patrons to housing resources, medical care, benefits assistance, transportation, coordinated assessments, and crisis support services.

### ***“This is a great community. It's fun and gives me energy.”***

Whether through supportive conversations, wellness activities, or practical resource navigation, Libraries for Health continues to demonstrate the power of libraries

as trusted community spaces that foster connection, hope, and wellbeing.

### ***“Please keep it going.”***

---

## Taylor Public Library Wellness Programming

Taylor Public Library continues creating opportunities for connection, wellness, and learning for community members of all ages through a wide range of free programs and activities.

Wellness programming includes chair yoga classes, chair massage sessions, grief support groups, and caregiver support programs designed to support both individuals and families within the community.

The library also offers opportunities for creativity, learning, and social connection through activities such

as the Hook and Needles Group, Senior Technology Classes, Senior Social gatherings, and sensory-friendly programming for children and families.

Programs like sensory storytime, cosmic yoga, and mindfulness activities help create welcoming spaces where patrons can relax, connect, and engage with others in meaningful ways.

Community members are encouraged to visit the library and explore the many programs and activities available throughout the year.

---

## Reflection from the Texas Library Association Conference

Peer Support Specialist, Claudia Dambra, recently attended the Texas Library Association conference with East Travis Gateway Library District, where she gained a deeper appreciation for the many ways libraries support and care for their communities.

Reflecting on the experience, Claudia shared that her understanding of the librarian role expanded significantly throughout the conference. Beyond literary

topics, she learned more about advocacy, legislative engagement, and the importance of professionals coming together to better serve their communities.

One of her biggest takeaways was the opportunity to strengthen connections with her own colleagues and gain a greater understanding of the work they do each day.

***“Knowing what they’re able to do in their role enables me to better fulfill my own.”***

Her reflection highlights the value of collaboration and relationship-building within library environments and the important role libraries continue to play as trusted community spaces.



# Austin Mental Health Community & Libraries for Health Engage at 10th Annual Health Scholar Showcase



*Shannon Carr and Dr. Sandra Smith at the 10th Annual Health Scholar Showcase at Texas State University.*

Austin Mental Health Community (AMHC) and the Libraries for Health (L4H) initiative proudly participated in the 10th Annual Health Scholar Showcase at Texas State University, an inspiring milestone event celebrating a decade of collaboration, innovation, and impact in health research.

Hosted by the Translational Health Research Center, the Health Scholar Showcase is the university's largest research event, bringing together faculty, students, and community partners to share ideas, explore interdisciplinary solutions, and strengthen partnerships that improve health outcomes.

This year's theme, "Foundations & Frontiers: A Decade of Building Research Together," highlighted the importance of collaboration in advancing health initiatives. The keynote encouraged attendees to build networks that strengthen innovation and expand community impact.

Representing AMHC and L4H, Shannon Carr, Executive Director of Austin Mental Health Community, and Dr. Sandra Smith, L4H Consultant, embraced the opportunity to engage with fellow professionals, researchers, and community leaders. The event

provided a dynamic environment to exchange ideas, discover emerging research, and identify opportunities for meaningful collaboration.

As reflected in the event photo, Shannon and Dr. Smith joined Marsha Burney, Director of Community Engagement for the Translational Health Research Center, in celebrating the Showcase's 10-year milestone—an occasion that underscored both progress and future potential. Their participation highlighted AMHC's ongoing commitment to strengthening community partnerships and advancing equitable access to mental health resources through initiatives like Libraries for Health.

The experience reinforced the importance of strong partnerships and connected networks in advancing community mental health and wellness.

## **Looking Ahead**

The connections made and insights gained at the Health Scholar Showcase will help guide AMHC and L4H as they continue building partnerships that support innovation, collaboration, and improved mental health outcomes across Central Texas and beyond.

# L4H Has Gone National!



Registration is now open for the national webinar:

## **SUPPORTING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IN LIBRARIES**

The webinar will feature a panel presentation including representatives from:

- St. David's Foundation
- RAND
- Project Historian
- Melinda Hodges, participating library director and longtime Libraries for Health partner.

This opportunity highlights the growing interest in how libraries can support community mental health and wellness.

To register or learn more, visit:

[Supporting Community Mental Health in Libraries Webinar](#)

Please feel free to share the registration link with your networks.



## Community Partnership Spotlight



James Bailey, Peer Support Specialist with Elgin Public Library, and his wife, Partina Bailey, recently launched **Mark's House of Respite**, a nonprofit organization focused on supporting and mentoring young people through community connection and leadership opportunities.

### Our Mission

Mark's Place of Respite exists to support individuals and families impacted by mental health challenges, caregiver stress, housing instability, and systemic barriers by providing compassionate, community-based services that promote stability, dignity, and hope.

Through trauma-informed support, resource navigation, and strong community partnerships, we work to reduce isolation, strengthen wellbeing, and help people move toward lasting stability and self-sufficiency.

To learn more about their work, visit:

[Mark's House of Respite](#)

Founded in honor of their son, the organization reflects their commitment to creating spaces where young people feel supported, encouraged, and connected to their community.