



**St David's
FOUNDATION**

LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH

NEWS + UPDATES

PEER SUPPORT • WELLNESS • COMMUNITY CONNECTION

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SUPERVISING PEER SPECIALISTS

Training highlights and practical guidance

AT A GLANCE

Peer support across eight communities

BOOKS & BEANS

A welcoming new space in Elgin

NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

Lessons from the featured webinar

LOOKING AHEAD

Partnerships, planning, and sustainability



STAFF WORD SEARCH

This issue highlights supervision, community impact, local innovation, national visibility, and the work underway to strengthen the future of Libraries for Health.

CONNECT

SUPPORT

BELONG

Building Confidence in Supervising Peer Specialists

Training highlights for library directors, managers, and staff

Participants explored how supervisors can offer effective guidance while protecting the integrity of the unique peer-support role.

Understanding the Peer Role

Participants explored how librarians, community navigators, and Peer Specialists may support the same person in different ways. Peer Specialists use lived experience, mutuality, hope, and authentic connection to walk alongside people as they identify their own paths forward.

Participants also discussed role clarity. Peer Specialists build relationships, facilitate groups, offer emotional support, connect people with resources, and encourage recovery and self-direction. They are not therapists, case managers, or general staff expected to fill every organizational need.

KEY CONCEPT

"If everything becomes the peer role, the peer role disappears."

Some flexibility is natural in a library setting. Supervisors can help ensure that additional duties do not gradually overshadow the Peer Specialist's primary purpose.

Using Reflective Supervision

The training introduced reflective supervision as a way to balance accountability with learning and professional growth. Instead of focusing only on whether something was done correctly, supervisors can explore what happened beneath the surface.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION

1. What happened?
2. What peer-support values were present?
3. What support is needed moving forward?

Navigating Ethics and Boundaries

Participants discussed communication, personal phone numbers, shared community spaces, self-disclosure, and maintaining mutuality while remaining professional. Because peer support values authenticity and shared humanity, ethical decisions may not always have immediate black-and-white answers.

Supervisors can help Peer Specialists consider the values, risks, organizational expectations, and possible effects on the person receiving support.

Supervisors as Champions

Library directors do not need to become Peer Specialists to supervise them well. Effective supervisors understand the role, reinforce its purpose, educate other staff, notice role drift, and protect what makes peer support distinctive.

Strong supervision helps Peer Specialists thrive while strengthening the library's ability to offer hope, connection, and meaningful community support.

Supervisors help Peer Specialists thrive by...

CLARIFYING THE ROLE

Keep duties aligned with the Peer Specialist's purpose.

PROTECTING PEER VALUES

Preserve mutuality, hope, choice, and lived experience.

ENCOURAGING GROWTH

Use supervision for reflection, learning, and accountability.



LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH

Peer Support Across the Network

ONE SHARED VISION • EIGHT COMMUNITIES • MANY WAYS TO CONNECT

Across the network, Peer Specialists, library teams, volunteers, and community partners are creating locally responsive approaches to wellness, resource access, and belonging. The work looks different in every community—and together it forms a welcoming, low-stigma pathway to support.

BUDA	DEL VALLE	ELGIN	JARRELL
MARTINDALE	SAN MARCOS	SMITHVILLE	TAYLOR

What We Are Doing Across the Network

Activities and services vary by community based on local needs, partnerships, staffing, and available resources.

PEER SUPPORT + EMOTIONAL WELLBEING One-to-one peer support, check-ins, trauma-informed connection, emotional support, goal-setting, dignity, choice, and personal agency.	RESOURCE NAVIGATION + BASIC NEEDS Housing, employment, benefits, transportation, identification documents, technology assistance, legal resources, re-entry support, and practical next steps.
HEALTH, RECOVERY + CRISIS CONNECTIONS Healthcare and medication access, recovery support, harm reduction, naloxone education, wound-care assistance, crisis de-escalation, and emergency connections.	WELLNESS + CREATIVE PROGRAMMING Chair yoga, chair massage, therapeutic art, breathing and relaxation activities, mobility support, pain reduction, and emotional wellness.
FAMILY, CAREGIVER + OLDER-ADULT CONNECTION Caregiver support, family activities, older-adult gatherings, information sharing, relationship-building, and opportunities to reduce isolation.	OUTREACH, CONNECTION + BELONGING Mobile outreach, follow-up support, newcomer connection, friendship-building, community gatherings, and familiar, low-stigma places to ask for help.

Libraries are familiar places. Peer support makes them powerful places to connect, ask for help, and find a way forward.

CONNECT Welcoming relationships	SUPPORT Peer connection and navigation	BELONG Wellness and community
---	--	---

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Books, Beans, and Belonging

Elgin Public Library opens a cozy new place to connect



Community members gather in Elgin Public Library's new Books & Beans Café.

Elgin Public Library has a warm new place to hang out, get some work done, and enjoy a cup of coffee. With support from a Libraries for Health grant, the library transformed a dark, underused area into the welcoming Books & Beans Café.

The space made its program debut in August with Coffee Talk, a monthly gathering that invites a local business owner to sit down and chat with the community. The first “victim”—we mean volunteer—was Nikki from Things Celtic, who helped launch the series on a lively and welcoming note.

Even when a program is not underway, patrons can stop in for free coffee or tea and settle into a comfortable spot to work, visit, or simply take a break. It did not take long for the café to become a favorite place in the library.

COFFEE TALK • FIRST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH • BOOKS & BEANS CAFÉ

Libraries for Health in the National Spotlight

Supporting Community Mental Health in Libraries

A webinar recap for the Libraries for Health network

WATCH THE FULL WEBINAR: [Supporting Community Mental Health in Libraries](#)

Libraries for Health was featured in a Network of the National Library of Medicine Region 1 webinar. Speakers from St. David's Foundation, RAND, Via Hope, and Buda Public Library shared what the Central Texas pilot taught and how other libraries can adapt the model.

Why Libraries?

Presenters emphasized that public libraries are trusted, free, welcoming, and already serve as community hubs. In areas with provider shortages and persistent stigma, libraries can expand access to support without trying to become clinical settings.

Three Core Components

THE MODEL

1. Trained and supervised Peer Specialists
2. Mental health and wellness programming
3. Strong community partnerships

Peer Specialists at the Heart

Peer Specialists use lived experience, active listening, advocacy, and resource navigation to offer one-to-one support, facilitate groups, build trust, and connect patrons with community resources. They do not provide therapy. When additional care is needed, they can provide a warm handoff - a direct, person-to-person connection to the next source of support.

From Pilot to Practice

The new toolkit encourages libraries to begin with their actual capacity. Leaders can assess staffing, funding, space, partnerships, and community readiness; identify local needs; set measurable goals; and select activities that fit. A library may start by adding wellness themes to an existing program before taking on a more resource-intensive component.

Buda's Experience

Melinda Hodges described Buda's focus on reducing isolation through activity-based connection and wellness education. The library tried varied approaches - self-care Saturdays, yoga, sound baths, support groups, wellness events, and one-to-one peer support - then built on what resonated. Partnerships helped extend both programming and sustainability.

Participants Asked About...

The discussion covered staff confidence, liability and program scope, adapting the model for academic libraries, online peer support, and emerging AI tools. Panelists stressed appropriate training and oversight, careful vetting of digital tools, and caution about privacy, confidentiality, and claims that technology can replace lived human experience.

THE BIG TAKEAWAY

Make the model local. Start with what your library can support, learn from the community, document impact, and strengthen the work through partnerships.

LOOKING AHEAD: BUILDING THE NEXT CHAPTER

To support sustainability and thoughtful growth, Austin Mental Health Community is developing a master planning worksheet and analyzing publicly available county-level data to identify unmet needs, possible service expansions, and alignment with future funding priorities.

Working with Marsha Burney, Director of Community Engagement at Texas State University's Translational Health Research Center, the team is also developing a learning series for prospective funders and community partners. The series will introduce the Libraries for Health model, share lessons and impact, and invite recommendations, collaboration, and potential investment in the initiative's future.

Libraries for Health Word Search

Find the people, places, and values that make our community special!

Words may appear across, down, diagonally, forward, or backward.

Q D R Q W S H Z B L M B D K Z H U D O Q
N M E E R I X N I J W U G H O P E I T W
Q X C L U Q Z B C E A D E Q C T H A A S
T G W A V J R Z Z A N A V U C K T E V M
P S I D R A I D U A L C U K Q S Z C Q I
P G M N R O L Y A T H V D W T X G N H R
S E L I B J G L H M H F M M S J S Z I P
E N E T T R I K E Z T Q P F U Z I J R W
I S G R X H I M K K T X G Q Q H B S O O
K V R A S F V T O E C G X T I D C D L Y
W C O M M U N I T Y O W G H B B E L B L
G A E O O S P M L A N I L I A F E C Y O
X I G A Z E T P F L N Y D T N X A T T F
R I N N J M X D O A E I B W S W D B S A
A E K Q S A N M A R C O S P Q E K Y E W
G E X P A J R N V V T N C T R V R Y O Q
G M B W A P L R Y F I C U X K J X K R U
S B Q I O B Y U E G O D P D X V U N Y I
E G A N O L W E L L N E S S C S U R S R
H L T Y L F Z E Z U L E Y L Q T Q F I A

WORD BANK

- Ailina
- Brittani
- Buda
- Claudia
- Community
- Connection
- Del Valle
- Elgin

- George
- Gina
- Health
- Hope
- James
- Jarrell
- Libraries

- Martindale
- Peer Support
- San Marcos
- Smithville
- St. David's
- Taylor
- Wellness

Print this page or use your device's markup tool to circle each word you find.