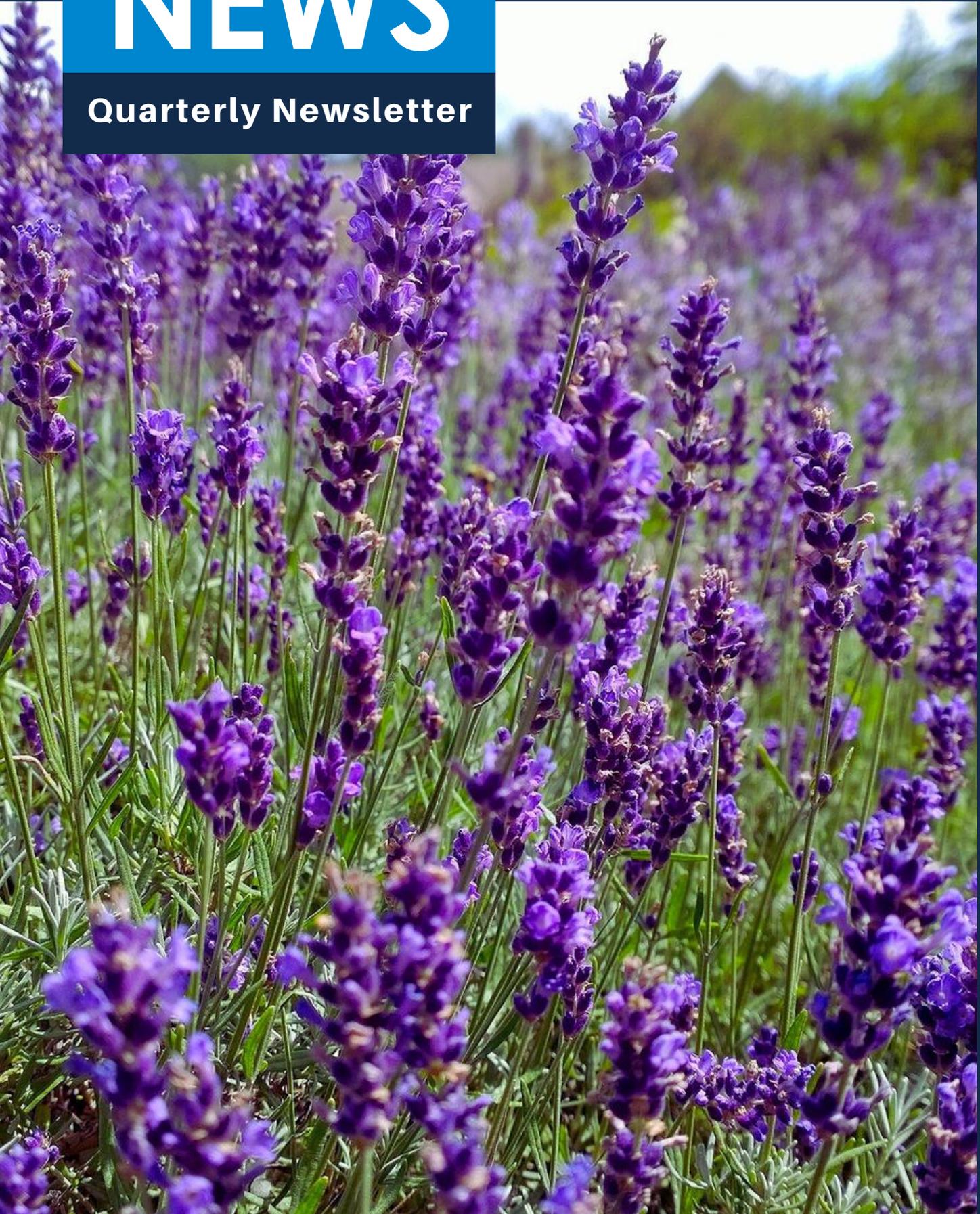


MAINE NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter

A STATEWIDE PUBLICATION FOR
MAINE SOCIAL WORKERS BY



Summer Edition 2025

Caring People Make a Difference

Summer 2025

A publication of the National
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Executive Director's Welcome



Hello!

I heard Chris McLaughlin say he had big shoes to fill when I left my interim position three years ago and he came in as Maine's Executive Director. After being back for a few months, I can honestly say the shoes got really, really big. I am in awe of the work being done by the NASW ME Policy Committee, JEDI Committee, and School Social Worker Committee. They say commitment builds capacity and holy moly there is a ton of both here. Kudos all around.

If you are shaking your head at the state of things, wondering where you can have impact, jump into one of these committees to see what's happening.

One of the fun things I got to do when I was interim (2019 - 2022) was cross-pollinate between Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. This sharing continues today. Ethics forums, social work profession quick connect, peer consultation, supervision for the supervisor, professional development opportunities are just a few of the things offered to the social workers of Northern New England. Of course each state gets their own conference, but I've seen a lot of social workers hopping borders!

Speaking of conference.....I know you don't want to think about summer being over, but the conference is right around the corner. If you have been, you don't need me to tell you how much fun it is. If you haven't been before, words really cannot describe how wonderful it is to be in a huge room filled with social workers. People who get you. People with a shared perspective on the world and know how environments and systems impact individuals. The venue (Samoset Resort) was chosen because we want you to be just a little bit treated. So join us, be treated special, AND get your professional development hours all at the same time.

Finally, remember that NASW is YOUR professional association. We exist to help you be the best social worker you can be and advocate for the profession. Don't be a stranger.

Working together,

Lynn Currier, LICSW

Interim Executive Director

NASW ME Chapter

President's Welcome



Welcome to our New NASW ME Chapter Board President: Lacey Sawyer

We are thrilled to introduce Lacey Sawyer as our new Board President, bringing both deep professional expertise and authentic lived experience to her leadership role. Drawing from her roots in rural Maine and her journey through higher education—earning her BA in Psychology and MSW—Lacey has dedicated her career to rural social work practice, higher education, and policy advocacy. As a dual-licensed clinical social worker and addiction counselor, she brings a powerful combination of clinical expertise and grassroots perspective to our chapter. Lacey's core belief that authentic expertise comes from lived experience, coupled with her commitment to building compassionate communities that promote equity and justice, perfectly aligns with our chapter's mission. When she's not advocating for social and economic justice or teaching, you'll find Lacey homesteading, adventuring outdoors with her family, or tending her garden.

Growing up amidst generational and working-class poverty in rural Aroostook County, within a lineage characterized by a matriarchal, single-parent family structure, Lacey has cultivated a unique yet common perspective on the crucial and missing components necessary and vital for people and their communities to thrive, not just survive.

Lacey pursued her academic journey, earning a BA in Psychology from the University of Maine at Presque Isle and completing her MSW in 2011 from the University of New England. With a significant portion of her career devoted to rural social work, both in generalist and clinical practice, Lacey eventually transitioned into roles within higher education, consulting, and policy advocacy. Lacey believes that authentic expertise at any table arises from those with lived and living experiences in order to address the nuances of what does and does not support social and economic justice from the very people who have survived or are trying to survive oppressive systems. The fundamental lesson she imparts is the necessity of creating compassionate communities that nurture equity and access, build on social connectedness and inclusivity, and reduce the power and punishment bureaucracies that drive disconnection.

Beyond her professional credentials as a dual-licensed clinical social worker, alcohol and drug counselor, and clinical supervisor, Lacey is deeply engaged and invested in her communities as an educator, policy advocate and activist. Alongside her teaching positions, she volunteers with Maine Equal Justice as a member of the ASPIRE Leadership Team and serves on the State of Maine TANF Advisory Council. Lacey's pursuits extend beyond her professional realm; she is a homesteader, devoted Mother and Nana, enthusiastic outdoor adventurer, gardener, and avid reader.

To learn more about Lacey's perspective on systemic reform, read her thought-provoking article on the abolition of the child welfare system and the influential work of Dr. Dorothy Roberts on [page X].



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-*including optional 4-hour pre-conference ethics workshop
- CONNECT WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS**
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- LEARN IMMEDIATELY APPLICABLE SKILLS**
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OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Dr. Dorothy Roberts



Charlotte Warren

CE Information

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NASW ME Committees

The Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI), School Social Work, and Policy Committees are welcoming new members for their monthly Zoom calls.



About the Committees

The JEDI Committee meets to advocate for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The School Social Work Committee meets to advocate on behalf of school social workers trying to lessen students' barriers.

The Policy Committee reviews and sets priorities for legislative sessions and provides testimony around public policy issues.

To Sign up

Scan the QR code to the right
or email
kbeaupain.naswme@socialworkers.org

JEDI Committee



School Social Work Committee



Policy Committee



COMMITTEES



Policy Committee

Happy Summer! After a busy legislative session this spring, the Policy Committee took a short pause to reflect before gearing up for the fall's short legislative session. We reviewed lessons learned, assessed our advocacy strategies, and began planning for a session where only emergency bills can be introduced. We know the Maine Legislature will face significant challenges as the impact of federal cuts in the "Big Beautiful Bill" begins to take hold.

Julie Schirmer wrapped up her time as committee Co-Chair in July. We cannot thank her enough for the hours she has dedicated to advocating for Maine social workers. She will still be around and shaking things up in Augusta though! Melanie Tompkins has stepped up to co-chair with Kate Marble as the work continues.

Session Wrap-Up (See the NASW-ME website for more details.) With strong advocacy from Policy Committee members, we represented the best interests of social workers and their clients through a visible presence in Augusta, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, calling legislators, and sharing action alerts. While no new behavioral health legislation received funding this session, the relationships built, testimony provided, and partnerships forged have strengthened the foundation for future progress in Maine social work.

Key Successes

- **Civil Rights Protection:** None of the bills attempting to roll back civil rights for transgender Mainers passed. These included efforts to restrict transgender girls' participation on sports teams, limit access to school

facilities, roll back anti-discrimination protections in the Maine Human Rights Act, and limit access to gender-affirming hormone therapy for minors.

- **Paid Family & Medical Leave:** Existing protections were preserved despite efforts to weaken them.
- **Support for Families:** Bills supporting childcare, Maine Family Planning, and respite for caregivers all passed with funding.

Looking Ahead We are strategizing next steps for what was formerly LD 1298, which proposed an alternative pathway to licensing. While the bill did not pass in Maine, the national conversation around eliminating the licensing exam is gaining momentum. We'll be working with partners and legislative leaders and will keep you updated.

We are also reviewing other behavioral health priorities and mapping out our advocacy roadmap at upcoming Policy Committee meetings.

The second Tuesday of each month from 12-1 p.m. via Zoom link.

We encourage you to join us in shaping the future of social work in Maine.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kate Marble & Melanie Tompkins

JEDI Committee

This summer, the JEDI Committee was proud to celebrate and connect at both Central Maine Pride in Hallowell and Bangor Pride, sharing resources, sparking conversations, and strengthening community ties.

As we look toward fall, we're preparing for our next Fireside Chat, "**Supporting Maine's Immigrant Communities,**" on **Tuesday, September 30, 6:00-7:15 PM** (CEUs provided). This panel discussion, in collaboration with the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition (MIRC), will explore the impact of the recent federal budget on immigrant communities in our state, as well as the formal and informal networks that provide critical support. Panelists will help deepen our understanding of how social workers and allies can collaborate, engage, and stand in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors.

We're also gearing up for the NASW Maine Annual Conference in October, where JEDI programming will continue to center conversations around justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our work and our profession. The months ahead promise meaningful dialogue, community connection, and opportunities to learn together—we hope to see you at these events!

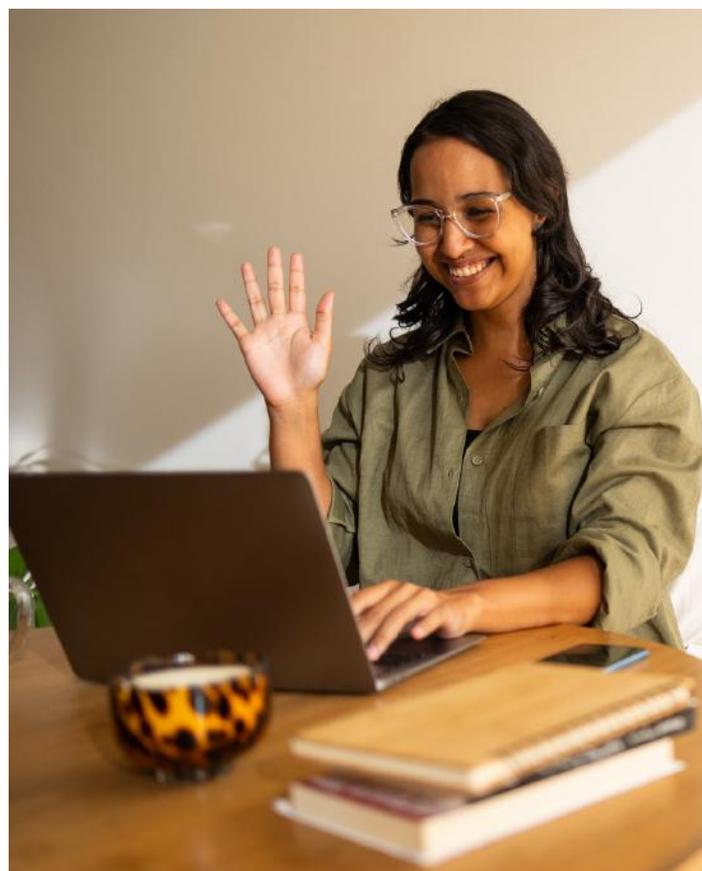
-Omm Stillwell

School Social Work Committee

Hello school social workers, and happy back to school!

We hope everyone had a wonderful summer filled with rest, relaxation, and a chance to recharge. Our monthly SSW meetings will resume in September—mark your calendars for the 4th Wednesday of each month!

And don't forget: our Annual Conference is coming up October 6-7, featuring the return of the School Social Work Track by popular demand. We look forward to seeing you there and creating space to connect, collaborate, and celebrate the work we do.



To sign up for a committee, please contact KC at kbeaupain.naswme@socialworkers.org.



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NEWS FROM HOPE WOODS: SELF-FORGIVENESS



Written by Dr. Robin Barstow

It can be difficult to admit when we feel shame. We all know that feeling. We have familiarity with it from childhood when we might have broken something or hit our siblings or anything else that we wish we hadn't done and then felt confused about.

I used to be ashamed of my shame, and I had no idea what to do about it. I believed that I shouldn't have shame, and then when I did have shame, I would try to hide from it, avoid it, bury it. And we all know how well that works.

Then I found cognitive behavioral therapy. Now I use this meaningful method both professionally and personally. With the practice of CBT we can become aware of feeling shame, and instead of being ashamed of our shame, we can grow in self-forgiveness and love.

CBT is very welcoming because it is simple and you feel better almost immediately. It can be practiced with children and teenagers and adults. It starts in the here and now, but can be used to look at the past also of course. In other words, CBT works on many different levels and so you can go as deep as you are ready to go.

CBT can be generalized with my hack of remembering "2-2-2". In general, there are two parts of our minds, two types of thoughts, and two things we can do with these thoughts. We have the subconscious (also called the unconscious) and the conscious part of our mind. We have stressful and not-stressful thoughts. We can either believe or question a thought.

Suffering is caused by unconsciously believing a stressful thought, and healing occurs when we consciously question it. So when we practice CBT, we identify a stressful thought in the subconscious, bring it up to conscious awareness, and then we question it.



The first question in CBT is simply, "Is it true?" When we ask this question, we are practicing metacognition. We are thinking about a thought, we are wondering about a thought, and when we do this, it feels good.

Neuroscientists have found that we are actually forming a new neural pathway when we engage in metacognition. They have also found that children as young as 3 years old have the metacognitive ability to think about a thought and wonder if its true. Albert Einstein famously stated that a problem can not be solved with the same thinking that caused it in the first place. So when we engage in metacognition we are literally creating new thinking. This gives us choices we didn't see before and that feels good.

As an example, I was once at an event where I felt ashamed of my age. Everyone seemed to know more than I did. My stressful thought was: "I should know more by now." I was ashamed of how much I didn't know and I was ashamed that this might be discovered. So I acted like I knew things that I didn't. Then I felt ashamed of being ashamed.

When I was believing my cognitive distortion, I was imagining that I would be rejected if anyone found out that I only knew what I knew and not more. When we imagine scary scenarios and believe them, then we feel anxious. I was very anxious at this event trying to act knowledgeable and hoping not to be found out. Of course that meant I closed up. When instead I could have been open, and in so being, learned more, increased my knowledge. Later I felt ashamed of being fake, trying to hide. So I was rejecting myself essentially before anyone else could reject me.

Fortunately there is CBT, and I practiced my "2-2-2" method to remind me to use it. I remembered there are two parts of my mind. I remembered there are two kinds of thoughts. I remembered there are only two things I can do with a thought. So, I fished the stressful thought out of my subconscious up into my conscious awareness and I questioned it.

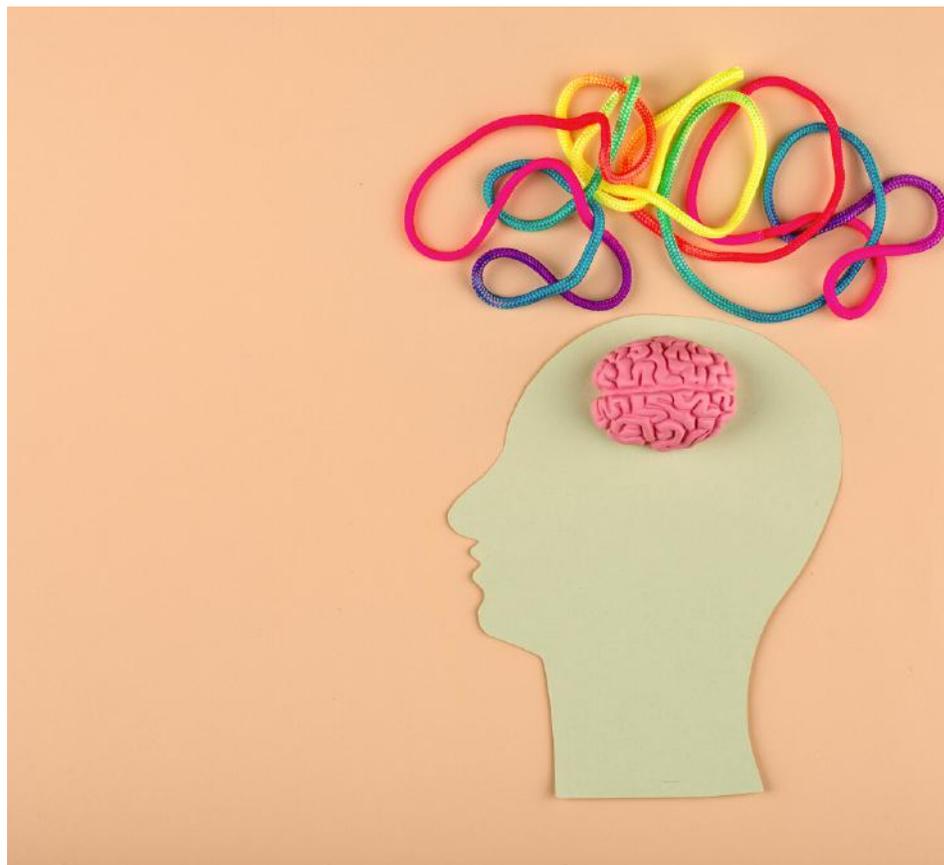
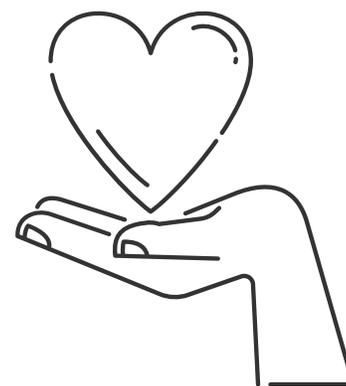
Is it true that at this event I should have known more? No, its not true. Its not even possible. I knew what I knew. Is it true that I would be rejected if I was honest about what I didn't know? Maybe. But maybe not. And with that metacognitive realization, I feel my shame dissolve. Suddenly I saw choices. Is it true that I wish I knew more? Yes, that is true and there is no shame in that. I can do many things to increase my knowledge, but only once I admit that it is lacking in certain areas.

I used my "2-2-2" method to remember to practice CBT and something shifted. If you sometimes feel ashamed this "2-2-2" method could help. Try it for yourself and see. Another wise thing that Albert Einstein said was that, "Few are those who see with their own eyes, and feel with their own hearts."

In other words, until we learn how our minds work, we don't necessarily know how to trust ourselves. Yet no one does this on purpose. So there is no shame in that. We can all learn how to forgive ourselves and begin to see with our own hearts.

Wen X, Gou M, Chen H, Kishimoto T, Qian M, Margraf J, Berger T (2024). The Efficacy of Web-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy With a Shame-Specific Intervention for Social Anxiety Disorder: Randomized Controlled Trial. *JMIR Ment Health* 2024;11:e50535. URL: <https://mental.jmir.org/2024/1/e50535>. DOI: 10.2196/50535

Onwuka, C. P., Ajaelu, C. C., & Ucheagwu, V. (2024). "The Mirror Has Its Disease": Examining the Relationship Between Body Image Shame And Mental Health Problems Among Young Adults. *Social Science Research*, 10(1). Retrieved from <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SSR/article/view/2509>





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S.T.A.T.S.

A Check-In Tool for the Workplace



Sparks

What energized or inspired us at work this week?

Identify moments of motivation, creativity, or success and share what, or who, helped you to feel more connected to your work or team.



Thanks

What do we want to acknowledge or appreciate?

Highlight strengths, recognize efforts, and validate contributions that made a difference.



Areas for Growth

What could be improved – individually, as a team, or in our operations?

Share opportunities for development and clarify expectations.



Things Ahead

What is coming up that we should plan for or prioritize?

Discuss deadlines, projects, or potential stressors. What needs attention, and where should we direct energies and resources?



Support

What support is needed – from one another or from others on the team?

Explore what would help in feeling more connected, appreciated, or successful. What tools, clarity, flexibility, or encouragement is needed at this time?

Supervision is one of the most powerful tools in social work leadership. When done well, it provides a space for growth, accountability, reflection, and support. These benefits support not just for the individual practitioner but for the organization as a whole as well. Yet too often, supervision meetings can become inconsistent, rushed, or reactive, missing the opportunity to truly strengthen relationships and practice. I've been guilty of this myself. We can fall into routines and inadvertently get complicit with our supervisions, defaulting to case reviews, client updates, or surface-level check ins or yes, even more social small talk and chit-chat.

That's where **STATS** comes in.

I built the STATS framework to re-energize my supervision sessions with my interns and supervisees and to provide predictability and a sense of formality for those I'm supervising. STATS is a simple but effective framework designed to bring structure, consistency, and balance to one-on-one supervision sessions. Each letter in the STATS acronym represents a conversation anchor point:

- **Sparks** – *What has energized or inspired you in your recent work?*
 - This is an opportunity to identify moments of motivation, creativity, or success and to share what, or who, helped in making you feel more connected to your work or team members.
- **Thanks** – *What do we want to recognize or appreciate?*
 - Here, we highlight strengths, recognize efforts, and validate contributions that made a difference in the work. This “Thanks” is offered both ways, from the supervisor to the supervisee and vice versa.
- **Areas for Growth** – *What could be improved upon individually or within the team or our operations?*

BRINGING STRUCTURE AND CANDOR TO SUPERVISION:

The Inspired Consulting Group's STATS Approach

By: Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW

- Here is where honest reflection on challenges and opportunities for development is provided. Both supervisor and supervisee are encouraged to be candid, direct, and specific with feedback and to listen with curiosity and clarify any expectations or misunderstandings if needed. I encourage folks to not move on from the A step if there are potentially any assumptions being made or important pieces of information left unsaid.
- **Things Ahead** – *What is coming up that we should plan for or prioritize?*
 - This is a short-term look forward at priorities, tasks, and upcoming goals for the days or weeks ahead. Here are where discussions of deadlines, project updates, and anticipated barriers, challenges, or frustrations are laid out and addressed. Name any resources that may be needed to achieve successful results and brainstorm ways to mitigate barriers together.
- **Support Needed** – *What help, resources, or guidance will make success possible?*
 - Explore what would help in feeling

more connected, appreciated, or successful and identify any tools, clarifications, or support (such as some flexibility or additional encouragement) that are needed to feel more successful in the work.

Why STATS Matters

Consistency Creates Trust

When my staff or supervisees know that supervision will follow a reliable structure, it reduces uncertainty and fosters psychological safety. Instead of wondering what will come up, they can prepare, reflect, and engage more openly. This structure also helps students or early career practitioners learn how to prepare for their supervisions and what things can be held for our planned 1:1 meetings and what needs a more urgent, in the moment response from me.

Structure Drives Depth

By using STATS, supervisors and staff avoid getting stuck in the routine of mere “status updates.” Each category ensures the conversation touches on both the human and professional dimensions of practice including celebrating successes, naming challenges, and looking ahead. Yes, there absolutely comes a time when case reviews are important and necessary in social work practice, especially when processing through ethical challenges, working on getting “unstuck” with our clients, or brainstorming resources that may be needed to support those in our care. With practice, the STATS framework becomes more efficient over time and may only require the first few minutes of the planned supervision time together, leaving more time to work through those other important elements of good social work supervision and practice. By starting with STATS, though, a solution-focused and strengths-based tone is

established early on in the supervisory sessions and any additional conversations can then follow accordingly in this same spirit.

Radical Candor Strengthens Relationships

STATS builds in space for direct, honest feedback, what Kim Scott calls Radical Candor. I’ve been a huge Kim Scott fan for years, and I’ve come to deeply appreciate the Radical Candor model, one where leaders must care personally while challenging directly. The “Areas for Growth” and “Support Needed” sections of the STATS framework encourage supervisors and staff to be candid with each other, creating opportunities for mutual accountability rather than top-down critiques or open and non-specific “venting” sessions.

Give and Take Builds Leadership

Supervision should never be a one-way street. By including “Thanks” and “Support Needed,” STATS reinforces the idea that both supervisors and staff contribute to the relationship. Leaders model vulnerability, humility, and collaboration when they ask for feedback and commit to providing the support their team needs.

More Than a Checklist

At its core, STATS was developed to be more than just a meeting template for 1:1 supervision with staff members. It’s a culture-building tool. When supervisors consistently use STATS, they set a tone of respect, openness, and growth. Staff feel seen not only for their work but for their ideas, efforts, and aspirations. Leaders stay connected to the realities of frontline practice while modeling the values of social work: empowerment, reflection, and partnership.

In a profession where burnout is real and demands are high, intentional structures like STATS help anchor supervision in what matters most: relationships, learning, and support. And, fun fact, this model works really well in those less professional relationships too. My husband, Derek, and I do our relationship STATS every Sunday night, and it's completely opened up our communication, teamwork, and shared ownership of the day-to-day stuff that all couples must navigate together. This structure has given us the opportunity to intentionally connect, share, encourage, and ask for support when needed, and it's a game changer, my friends! I promise you!

Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW is the owner and lead consultant of Inspired Consulting Group, LLC, specializing in providing tailored, high-quality professional services to a diverse range of industries. Chris's offerings include DEI&B consulting, behavioral health and wellness education, professional development and training courses, clinical social work services, and leadership coaching, and he uniquely emphasizes affirming LGBTQIA+ service delivery to all his partners and clients.



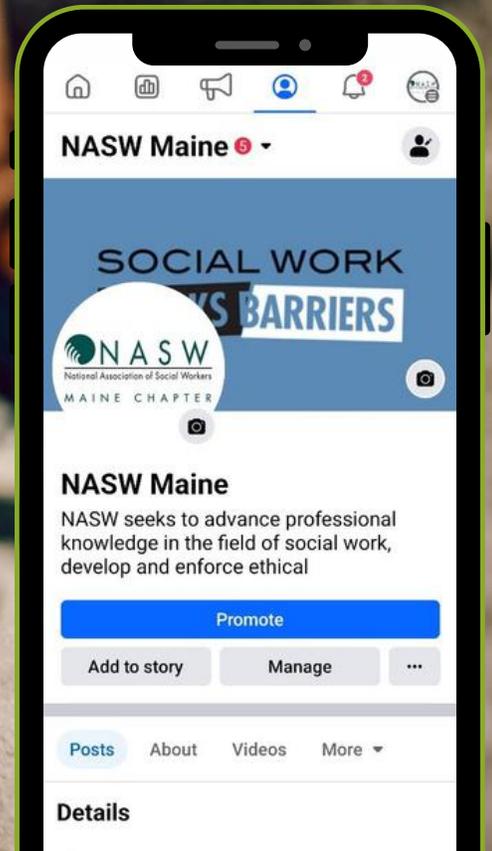


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WHEN WILL WE LEARN THAT PUNISHMENT IS NOT THE SOLUTION?

BY: LACEY SAWYER

When I suggested inviting [Dr. Dorothy Roberts](#) as our Keynote Speaker for the NASW Maine conference this October 6&7, it was sort a long shot, a pipe dream, like getting Bessel or Gabor, or someone of that caliber. So, one can imagine my nerdy fan girl elation when she accepted our invitation! Dr. Roberts couldn't be coming to Maine at a better time to impart her wisdom and show us how we can DO BETTER to support our children, families, neighbors and communities - without resorting carceral logic.

As a native and current resident of Aroostook County, I can attest to the fact that we are isolated and underserved. We are a "healthcare desert." We are economically depressed, we lack jobs with livable wages, transportation, housing, education and childcare infrastructure. The social determinants of health in rural Northern Maine are piecemeal at best and result in kids being removed from their parents and sent away at higher rates than the rest of the state. Nationally, children are left languishing in emergency departments for days and weeks on end and on service provider waiting lists for months on end. [Maine was embarrassing called out](#) as one of the states with "as many as 25% of mental health visits leading to kids boarding at emergency

departments for 3-7 days" (Chatterjee, 2025). Without the infrastructure for children and families to thrive, we default to reactive, carceral logic, punishment, shaming and blaming of families for individual failure - instead of considering how the communities across our state are failing our families.

[The State of Maine has not differentiated between poverty and neglect in their child welfare statutes.](#) Our rural, impoverished communities in Aroostook County result in higher rates of child welfare involvement and higher rates of youth incarceration in comparison to the rest of the state. The [American Journal of Managed Care](#) highlights the financial return on investment in social determinants of health, citing "Although the US spends the most on health care as a portion of gross domestic product and per capita, in comparison with other high-income nations, **it spends the least on social services that would address SDOH.**" (2023). Why are we resorting to family and community policing, child imprisonment and traumatizing families with incarceration and separation instead of investing in the infrastructure that would prevent these harms in the first place?

[The Child Welfare Data Dashboard](#), for example,

highlights 18.2 per 1000 kids in custody in Aroostook County – **one of the least populated counties in Maine** - in comparison to 5.5 per 1000 in the Cumberland County - **the most populated county in Maine**. Aroostook County is rural, underserved and impoverished resulting in extreme measures when there are little to no prevention and intervention resources to meet the increasing needs of youth and their families. This begs the question, why are needs increasing and where should we be investing?

What's more, is the same pattern was highlighted in the juvenile legal system. More kids from Aroostook County are referred to and detained in cages than any other county in the state. The New York Times article highlighted "Between 2017 and 2023, there were 20 commitments to Long Creek Youth Development Center from Aroostook — **nearly double the number from York County, which has more than three times as many residents at the other end of the state**" (2024). York County rarely imposed sentences to juvenile detention and youth were far less likely to end up with a felony record. In the last year alone, there have been multiple elopements from Long Creek, which only results in another Class C felony on the juvenile's legal record and continuing the game of cat and mouse rather than investments in evidence-based interventions that foster safety and wellbeing.

In January 2024, the Prison Policy Initiative highlighted what they call "Force Multipliers." Force multipliers are the "doubled harm" caused by the child welfare system and the criminal legal system's combined forces. This is when families are funneled into both bureaucratic punishment systems, resulting in what has been coined "crossover youth." We know that a main driving force in child welfare and criminal legal system involvement is poverty. The carceral logic behind both systems of harm do not empower, restore, rehabilitate or prevent. In fact,

the data shows the outcomes are **worse** for children and families wrapped up in these systems and, have the **opposite effect** of the stated intended purposes with words like "protecting," "restoring," "supporting," "empowering," and "stabilizing" as outlined in the mission statements of both Maine Department of Corrections and Child Protective Services.

Are we fulfilling these missions? Has Maine ever looked at the outcomes of children involved in one or both punishment systems while guiding policy decisions to ensure that "Maine children and families are safe, stable, happy and healthy"? And compared the outcomes of their carceral default mechanisms toward the outcomes of restorative, community-based interventions aligned with their vision, mission and values?

Prison Policy Initiative outlines the systemic harms for us. The author of a 2023 study states there is "overwhelming evidence showing that incarceration is an **ineffective strategy** for steering youth away from law breaking behavior and that high rates of youth incarceration do not improve public safety. Incarceration harms young people's physical and mental health; impedes their educational and career success and often exposes them to abuse. The use of confinement is plagued by severe racial and ethnic disparities (Mendel, 2023). In addition, the research into the long-term outcomes in child welfare involvement is overwhelmingly clear. Child removal uproots their family and community ties, breaks attachment bonds, funnels kids into sometimes abusive foster homes, group homes, institutional residential facilities, funnels into the juvenile legal system, increases runaway risk, increases human trafficking risk, homelessness, adult poverty, mental and physical illness, and increases the risk of later involvement in the adult legal system while resulting in early death (Roberts, 2022). Simply

put, removing children from their families causes more harm not only children and families, but to everyone in our society. We add more harm with the child welfare and juvenile legal systems. If we want to curb the child welfare to prison pipeline, it is essential to support a strong sense of prosocial identity in our youth. Hoteling them with strangers, leaving them to languish on long wait lists and in emergency departments, and caging them in kid prisons does the opposite.

The US Department of Justice sued Maine last year for violating children's rights (2024). Maine has since settled the suit, and it's not because things are better. We are in a statewide housing, food, poverty, and social service worker/service shortage crisis. The Office of The Inspector General shows us that Maine is continuously out of compliance and there's no accountability for the suffering being caused (2024). As such, our solution continues in the direction of carceral logic, punishing and separating families, investing in more policing, investing in increased wages for a broken child welfare system. We choose this thereby choosing more harm. Putting kids in hotels with strangers and locking them in cages instead of resourcing families so they can thrive is the preferred solution?

How much does it cost to fund the family policing (child welfare) and juvenile legal industrial complexes? How much does it cost to pay commissioners, administrators, supervisors, case workers, guardians ad litem, court appointed attorneys, judges, social workers, therapists, alcohol and drug counselors, foster homes, emergency departments, crisis workers, police forces, residential treatment facilities, group homes, probation officers, electronic monitors, detention facilities, corrections officers, hotels and on and on? What if...just what if we took those millions perhaps and perhaps billions

of dollars and resourced families and communities instead of the carceral industries? What if we cut out the punishment bureaucracy and gave families a chance to survive and thrive instead of reporting, surveilling, traumatizing, punishing and destroying them?

In a May 2025 publication, the Maine Monitor shared exactly how bad it's become in Maine, stating, "Nationally, the foster care population fell 15 percent between 2018 and 2022. In Maine, it rose nearly 40 percent during that time, reaching a two-decade peak last year." (Keefe, 2025).

Children are dying in the family policing system and in the juvenile legal system's custody. Children are being traumatized by adverse childhood experiences because of the lack of essential social (political) determinants of health. Watchdog groups continue to investigate and expose how Maine is failing by turning out endless reports. Lawsuits have been filed. And the power is never given back to the people by investing in children, families and communities. We instead invest in systems of harm, power and control tactics that have no evidence behind them. Punishment is not the answer. Supporting families with **essential determinants of health** is.

Dr. Roberts, we are thrilled to have you join is in October and are honored to have you share your message with Maine social workers.



OPINION

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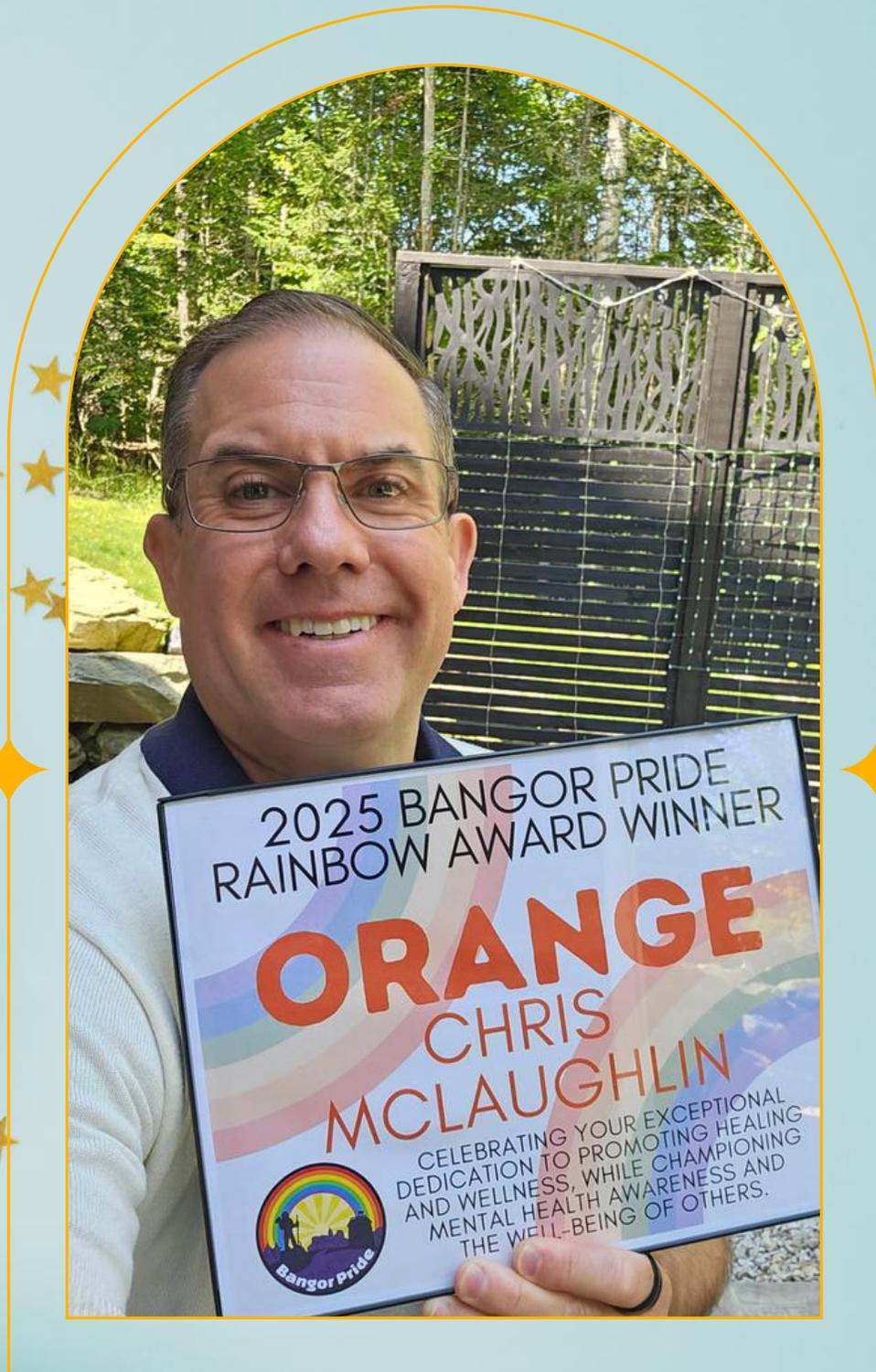
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**SOCIAL WORKER
SPOTLIGHTS**



Chris McLaughlin

Chris McLaughlin has been honored as the recipient of the 2025 Bangor Pride ORANGE Rainbow Pride Award for his outstanding commitment to promoting healing and wellness, as well as advocating for mental health awareness and the well-being of others.

Dr. Brandy Brown



Please join us in congratulating Dr. Brandy Brown, DSW, LCSW, LICSW, who now serves as Chair of the NASW National Committee on LGBTQ+ Issues. A lifelong advocate for LGBTQ+ communities, Dr. Brown brings deep expertise and unwavering dedication to advancing inclusive practices across diverse systems of care—including psychiatric, correctional, and residential settings. We're honored to have their leadership guiding this vital work at the national level.



Bangor Pride



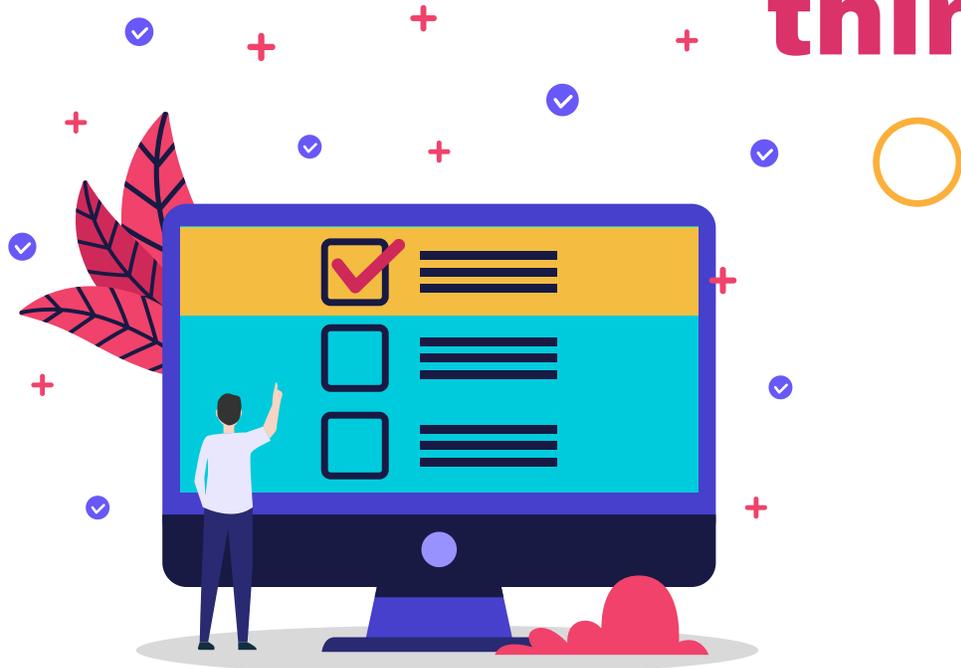
celebrates **Pride** month



Hallowell Pride

Two, small but mighty, groups of staff and friends of NASW ME came together at the Bangor and Hallowell Pride celebrations. Although rain accompanied both events, it didn't dampen our spirits. We arrived, shared joy (and candy), and teamed up with our Pride Sponsor, Inspired Consulting Group, LLC, to distribute some co-branded stickers!

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— *Opinion*

What We Leave Behind: Reflections on 25 Years Outside the Closet:

An Inspired Reflection by Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW

I “officially” came out to my parents at the ripe old age of 25—ancient in gay years, or so it felt—just as I was entering my graduate school Era at the University of Maine. Unofficially, though, I had been coming out in fits and starts for years. There were so many times where it felt like simply opening my mouth or moving my body was an unintentional act of outing myself to anyone within earshot or eyesight.

Like so many in the LGBTQIA+ community, I had peeked out from behind that well-worn, clichéd closet door long before I finally kicked it open. Coming out is often framed as a singular event: a bold declaration of truth, a courageous unveiling of self, a crossing of an invisible—but impenetrable—threshold. But in reality, coming out is rarely just one moment. It’s an unfolding. A nonlinear process. A high-stakes game of Chutes and Ladders.

Some of us come out, only to be pushed back in by rejection, shame, or fear. Others make our courageous stand on the other side of that door and never look back. I was incredibly fortunate. My own coming out was met with a blend of the “no shit” and the “we love you no matter what” responses. My heart breaks for those who do not receive the same affirmation I was so blessed to be swaddled in.



As I reflect on my own journey (and hold space for the personal stories of so many I’ve connected with, both personally and professionally) I’ve been thinking less lately about the freedom that can come with coming out, but more about what we leave behind us when we walk forth from the closet. What did we pack away in those dark, confined spaces we once called “home”? Did we leave our closet doors cracked to let the air in, or did we bolt them shut forever in our rear-view mirror, hoping (praying!) never to confront what may still be lingering inside?

For many of us in the queer community, our closet was a place of shame, secrecy, silence, and survival. Once we find the strength to finally step out into the light, we may leave behind younger versions of ourselves—those who shrank, who rehearsed every word, who tried to mimic the stylings of the “cool” boys and their perfect, effortless straightness. Some of us have buried early relationships, documented only in the tear stained pages of private angst-filled journals. Others abandon entire versions of themselves. The versions that were too loud, too queer, too tender to survive in the world we found ourselves in.

As Taylor Swift confesses in Sweet Nothing from the *Midnights* album: "To you, I can admit that I'm just too soft for all of it." And the heavens know that back then, I indeed was just too soft for it all...

As we break out of these cages, some of us lock that door tight, grateful to be out but still fearful of what remains inside. Maybe we've "forgotten" the code or thrown away the key, all to convince ourselves that once we're out, we never have to go back. But here's what I've been sitting with lately:

What if going back is a part of our journey towards healing and self-acceptance?

These are some of the questions I've been exploring in my own therapy work with an incredible LGBTQIA+ affirming clinical social worker. Yes, my friends, even us seasoned clinicians need therapy too, and I'm so thankful that I've got a great one! Together, we've been working through the book *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World* by Dr. Alan Downs. The book dives deep into the psychological and cultural challenges faced by gay men growing up in a heteronormative world. Each week, we dissect a new chapter, tracing the connections between our adult lives and the shame so many queer folks still carry like invisible anchors that have been weighing us down since childhood. Our conversations have touched on internalized homophobia, the search for validation, and the lifelong journey toward emotional authenticity, intimacy, and self-acceptance.

And through these conversations, I've come to believe that we maybe we actually need to give ourselves permission to leave our closet doors open, just a crack. Let the sunlight in. Let the air circulate. Let the shadows shrink. Keep the mold from growing, you know? These intentional breaches ensure we don't forget what's still in there. They allow us to revisit when we're ready, to retrieve what was buried, to reclaim and rewrite our stories, to tell our younger selves, "You were never wrong to feel what you felt. You were not broken."

Because those closets didn't just hold our shame. They held our creativity.
Our resilience.
Our survival skills.
Our private joy.
Even our love.

So, I ask my LGBTQIA+ siblings this: What's still in your closet? What might be worth revisiting? What needs to be grieved, forgiven, or even celebrated?

Friends, our closets aren't just metaphors. They are sacred sites of memory. Of meaning. Of possibility. They offer us an opportunity to practice self-compassion. An invitation for reflection, for gratitude, and for celebration of what was.

Liberation doesn't come from leaving the closet. It comes from going back in—not to hide, but to heal. To reclaim what we leave behind.

To gently say to those abandoned parts of ourselves: **"You belong with me, too."**

"Commit to loving yourself completely. It's the most radical thing you will do in your lifetime."

– Andrea Gibson (08.13.1975 - 07.14.2025)

Rest in Power, Andrea. Thank you for holding space for both my heart and my hurt.

In community,

Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW

Owner & Lead Consultant

Inspired Consulting Group, LLC



The Berry Pickers

by Amanda Peters

Review by Cynthia Cushing

Amanda Peters's fictional work, *The Berry Pickers*, portrays a profound family tragedy that takes place in Maine, and is made all the more reverberating because of the systemic racism and the inherent entitlement of white privilege that not only allows the tragedy to happen, but also encourages the larger community to do little to help the family affected.

Four-year-old Ruthie goes missing in July of 1962; she is last seen by her brother, who will spend the next 50 years guilt-ridden and haunted by her disappearance. The police and the community do little to try to find Ruthie, stating that they don't have the resources. The farm owner, where the incident takes place, is more worried about when the family will return to work; the time being used to try and find the missing child is cutting into the profit margin.

Ruthie is one of five children born into a Mi'kmaq family from Nova Scotia. The family had traveled to northern Maine, as they did every season, to work picking blueberries for wealthy white farm owners, for income and sustenance. The work was hard, the treatment cruel, and the living conditions abysmal, but it was what the family knew they could rely on. Because of their Nativeness, options for employment weren't plentiful. Ruthie and her family were one of many who came each year to work the blueberry fields.

The Berry Pickers details how individual lives are irrevocably shaped and altered by societal forces, highlighting the limited pathways to justice often available to marginalized communities. Norma, another young girl the same age as Ruthie, who lives in the southern part of the state, is shared with us through this book as well. Norma is the daughter of a wealthy white family; she grows up attending white schools, going to church, and learning to ignore her haunting dreams about a corn husk doll and the smell of potatoes being cooked over an open fire. Her father is not emotionally available to her, and her mother smothers Norma with an overprotectiveness that is, Norma is told, the result of numerous miscarriages before Norma's arrival.

As the book unfolds, we learn more about the differences between Ruthie and Norma, as well as the similarities. We also see the ferocity of love, both in its healthy, and its unhealthy forms. Actions taken within this storyline are despicable, yet offered to the reader on a spoon that elicits tasting, leaving us with the sickly sweet aftertaste of how and why people reach these depths of desperate choices. Peters also masterfully shows us the long term trauma that results from fierce love, unabashed loyalty, and feeling at fault for events that we cannot control.

Ultimately, this novel serves as a compelling call to acknowledge the enduring harms inflicted upon Native tribes through colonialism and shows us, through an unfiltered lens, not just historical injustices, but the systemic inequities that continue to disenfranchise Indigenous communities today. The need for concerted efforts toward reparative efforts is served as a final dish, urging the reader to consider the varied roles we play in past, present, and future callings.

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Presented By:
Jennifer Wolfe, LICSW

Jennifer Wolfe, BS Edu, MSW, LICSW (she/they) is a creative leader, trainer, clinician, supervisor, artist, and change-maker. They provide LGBTQIA+ and NeuroDivergent Affirming clinical psychotherapy, clinical supervision, professional training, and creative expression workshops for helpers and healers. Committed to inspiring self-advocacy for clients and colleagues, Jennifer strives to walk the walk, not just talk the talk and believes that "Role Model" is one of her most important titles. Across multiple mediums Jennifer inspires folx to break cycles of pain and live free, authentic, and joy-filled lives! Jennifer is based in Southern New Hampshire with their kiddo, animals, family (bio & chosen), and friends. Connect with them at [KindnessCornerTherapy.com](https://www.kindnesscornertherapy.com) & [KindnessCornerStudio.com](https://www.kindnesscornerstudio.com)!



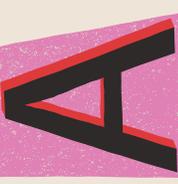
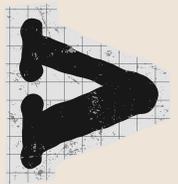
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Dr. Dorothy Roberts



Charlotte Warren

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Presented By:



Linda K. Riddell is an epidemiologist and population health scientist specializing in poverty, social economic status, and health policy and management. She holds a master's degree, a bachelor's degree and keeps abreast of developments with courses at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Michigan.

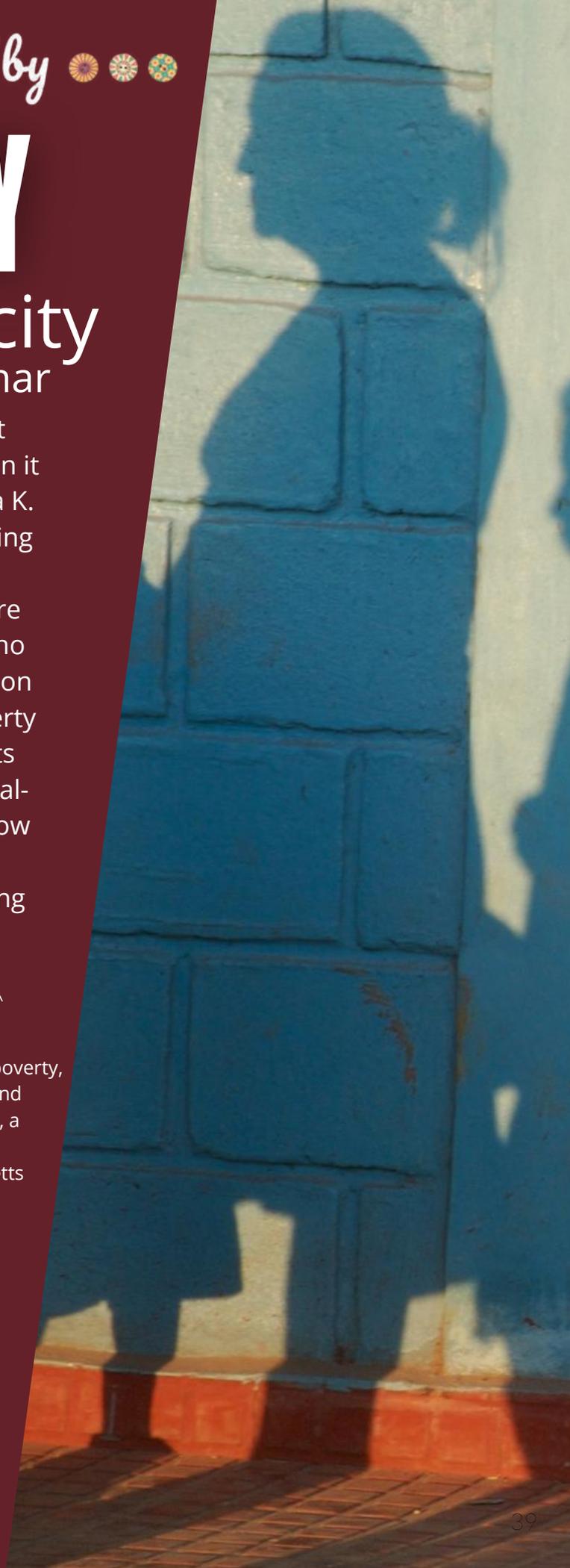
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