



The **WE RISE** Program

Although there is still much work to be done, amazing progress has been made in bringing resilience and restorative opportunities to empower and support disadvantaged women and children. Some programs have worked to level the playing field by bringing palliative efforts to these vulnerable individuals but, without addressing the internal need and desire for resilience and rebuilding.

While many programs simply provide basic necessities to vulnerable individuals, the psychological wellbeing of the individual is not addressed. In fact, many women and children must still cope with the difficulties presented by discrimination, trauma, abuse, limited resources, unemployment, poor nutritional knowledge and wellness, a paucity of skills enabling them to attempt to rebuild, rehabilitate and restore, and other factors known to adversely affect psychological health. Research clearly indicates that these types of challenges can ultimately hinder the effectiveness of program that just provide necessities and subsequently lead to additional social and mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, and substance use with the most severe cases resulting in violence and/or suicide.

Clearly, we must move to develop our social service and rehabilitation programs to meet these mental health challenges, but do so in a manner that fits with the settings in which they are to be utilized. This means moving away from mental health programs that are developed and tested in research environments far removed from the real world, without much input from those who will administer and receive the programs.

As part of our *Lab-to-Living Room (LTR) Initiative* and to address this issue, we have developed the program “Women Evolving Resiliency Initiative Strength Empowerment” (**WE RISE**). The **WE RISE** program is modeled after an evidence-based and empirically-supported treatment technique and was derived from a wealth of psychological data which show that our actions on a daily basis positively impact our thoughts and feelings, while leading to greater self-esteem and reduced feelings of powerlessness. Moreover, **WE RISE** was developed in conjunction with academic program staff and aftercare and direct service providers and practitioners who are the most aware of and familiar with the needs of their program. Thus, **WE RISE** was designed to move away from the sterile confines of the research laboratory and to move toward building a program that was designed in the real world to work in the real world. Moreover, **WE RISE** is a prevention and protection program aimed at a proactive approach to build strength before addressable issues become more severe while also working to rebuild a life once vulnerabilities have intervened to bring trauma and crisis and difficulty.

This allows for more efficient and manageable efforts that make mental health a seamless part of the culture of various social service organizations and facilities instead of a separate entity that often can become a drain on these already woefully underfunded programs.



Core Features of WE RISE

- Establish individualized values that will guide life choices
- Identify actions that fit with values – Valued Life Actions
- Utilize structure, support, & planning to complete Valued Life Actions on a daily basis
- WE RISE requires one 30 minute period in a group format at the start of each week and about 5-10 minutes of individual time the other days of the week.
- WE RISE requires 30-45 minutes once weekly in a group format to review nutritional value, content and items and preparation of heart healthy snacks or meals

The Current Project and Future Opportunities

- WE RISE was piloted in a Washington DC women’s homeless shelter that serves low-income female populations struggling with abuse, trauma, homelessness, joblessness, substance use, chronic health conditions
- The pilot included a 12-weeks program for between 15-20 women and at program completion program participants found jobs, housing and were making changes to their diet and increasing their nutritional awareness. Program evaluation data suggested success.
- Funding is sought for the expansion of the program into full time, year round use in other women’s shelters, as well as in other facilities and locations where girls and women are at risk for exploitation or who have already survived it and who need rehabilitation and restoration.



For further Information about and opportunities to support

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