GIANFORTE
Family Foundation

CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH OASIS:

6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR MONTANA CHURCHES TO CHANGE MONTANA'S LANDSCAPE

Did you know that Montana ranks #5 in mental health deserts? While this presents many problems, it's also a tremendous opportunity for local churches to offer care to their neighbors.

That's why the Gianforte Family Foundation created this Church Mental Health Toolkit!

From making referrals to respected local therapists to offering peer support for those facing mental health challenges, **opportunities abound for Christian Churches** to effectively, compassionately, and biblically invest in the mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual lives of congregation and community members in ways that will provide an oasis of care to those living in our mental health desert.

OPPORTUNITY #1: FOSTER COLLABORATION FOR WHOLE-PERSON CARE

In Montana's mental health desert, which covers 48 of its 56 counties, **community collaboration is vital**. Even in areas without shortages, individuals often struggle to access care due to cost, lack of referrals, or the erroneous belief that they can take care of "it" by themselves.

No matter where you live in the state, you can help those with mental health challenges by:

- creating a list of vetted local mental health providers in your area,
- building a mental-health benevolence fund for low-income members of your congregation, and
- talking regularly about our need for community care (i.e., no one can take care of "it" by themselves).

People facing a mental health challenge don't only need counseling or medical interventions; they need community, spiritual encouragement, and guidance on what it means to flourish as humans made in the image of God. Because of this, **you can collaborate with local mental health professionals in additional ways.**

- Ask clinicians to provide insight into your communities' most common non-medical factors contributing to mental health challenges. (Marriage/parenting/job-related stress, addiction, etc.)
- Ask a trusted local clinician to recommend or provide insight into tools your church, school, or non-profit could utilize to provide friendship, encouragement, or support to those with mental health challenges.
- Reach out to area Christian churches to learn about the ways they care for community members to improve your referral strategies. (eldercare, addiction recovery groups, marriage support, etc.)

NOTE: The Gianforte Family Foundation does not officially endorse any of the products, methods, or approaches in the Mental Health Toolkit. Friends of the Foundation have utilized these materials and shared them with us. Please make sure the program you select aligns with your doctrine, views on mental health challenges, and community needs. This toolkit is not meant to be exhaustive; the suggested resources have been limited to those that are low-cost and can be implemented relatively quickly.

OPPORTUNITY #2: OFFER TOOLS AND WISDOM FOR A FLOURISHING LIFE

Not only do mental health challenges negatively impact family dynamics, but family dynamics can negatively impact an individual's mental health.

Christian churches, schools, and nonprofits are natural places for whole families to receive care, learn healthy relational rhythms, and begin flourishing. Christian communities throughout Montana have used the following strategies to improve relational flourishing.

- **Relational Wisdom 360**: Create a culture of relational wisdom at home and work. Train up to 2-6 staff or lay leaders and create an in-house Peace Sower Team to help families in your congregation and community navigate difficult situations. Once trained, the Peace Sower Team can meet with individuals experiencing relational crises or transfer relational wisdom and

knowledge by leading small group studies. A $2,600 grant for training and materials is available to Christian churches and schools in Montana.

- **Relational Attachment Model**: Offer a healthy relationship series to all ages. This six-week, church-wide campaign helps individuals understand the components of a healthy relationship and provides the tools needed to live it. This program has been used successfully in churches throughout Montana, in schools, and at nonprofits, from addiction recovery to pregnancy centers. Communio offers free consulting services to help interested Montana churches successfully launch a RAM Series campaign for your congregation and the greater community. A $1,500 grant for resources and implementation is available to Christian churches and schools in Montana.

OPPORTUNITY#3: IDENTIFY NEEDS, WISELY REFER, AND PROVIDE ONGOING FRIENDSHIP

Sometimes the best first step is to **internally train** staff, volunteers, and congregants on how **to identify and respond to mental health challenges** while maintaining a supportive friend vs. "therapist" role. The following materials are designed to do just that.

- **Spiritual First Aid**: Gain the know-how and skills to quickly triage and provide rapid care for unmet needs and trauma using the proven step-by-step BLESS CPR framework. Providing this support helps people positively engage their faith, feel more connected, cultivate healthy coping practices, and improve resilience. You'll learn how to prevent spiritual and emotional injuries from worsening, provide critical immediate care, and connect others with resources for long-term healing. Spiritual First Aid was developed by Jamie Aten, PhD (Trauma Psychologist), and Kent Annan, M.Div. (Humanitarian Leader). Jamie and Kent are also co-directors of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute at Wheaton College and *The Better Samaritan* podcast. Read this course overview for more information.

- **REBOOT Recovery:** offers Overcome Academy, an online or in-person mental health training workshop for churches and communities of faith to learn how to respond with confidence to those who are struggling with trauma.

- **Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries**: Developed in consultation with mental health professionals, theologians, and people with lived experience, this eight-session entry-level study guide explores key mental health topics and examines meaningful ways to offer companionship, support recovery, and promote well-being. This ecumenical curriculum is ***free***.

- **Matchstick Ministry:** A Montana-based consulting and educational service for churches interested in responding Biblically to the mental health crisis by equipping people within their own local congregation to C.A.R.E. for those experiencing mental health challenges. Four workshops are available for churches, starting with Safe Sacred Spaces. Matchstick Ministry's founder, Tony Cloud, is a certified mental health coach, Certified Peer Counselor, ordained minister, adoptive father of twins who faced multiple mental health challenges, and has professional experience in correctional settings. Honorarium and/or free will offerings appreciated.

OPPORTUNITY #4: PROVIDE NEEDED PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

People need other people to heal; it's how God created us. That's why peer-to-peer support groups can be tremendously helpful. All of the following support groups have proven and effective track records. Some individuals may need more specialized support. Knowing when and how to refer an individual to clinical care is important (See Opportunity #3).

- **REBOOT Recovery**: REBOOT Recovery helps people overcome trauma so they can embrace a brighter future. Through faith-based, outcomes-driven trauma healing courses, REBOOT provides clinical insight and Christian faith-based support. REBOOT courses are safe, private, and peer-led. The program teaches participants to engage in a balanced, three-dimensional approach to trauma healing, addressing physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. Participants learn to apply Biblical principles that address the causes and symptoms of

post-traumatic stress and other mental health conditions resulting from trauma. A $1,500 grant for training and materials is available to Christian churches in Montana.

- **GriefShare:** GriefShare helps churches start a safe, welcoming support group where people can navigate the difficult emotions of grief. Through this 13-week group, participants will discover what to expect in the "normal" grieving process. Since there is no "right" way to grieve and no neat, orderly stages, they'll learn helpful ways of coping with grief, in all its unpredictability — and gain solid support each step of the way. A $1,500 grant for materials and hosting is available to Christian churches in Montana.

- **The Genesis Process**: Genesis integrates Biblical principles for personal change, proven relapse prevention techniques, cognitive therapy, and the latest neurochemistry research to comprehensively address, heal, and transform people damaged by self-destructive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. A $1,600 grant for training and implementation is available to Christian churches in Montana.

- **Trauma Healing Institute**: Created by the American Bible Society, THI has been used by trained missionaries, pastors, and lay leaders in more than 150 countries over the past 20 years. This model has helped more than 400,000 participants engage deeply with themselves, God, and each other. Group lessons use art, stories, activities, and discussion questions. ***This curriculum is free***, easy to use, and available in multiple languages. Learn how to lead a group.

- **Grace Alliance**: A Christ-centered approach that combines Scripture and practical tools to help individuals, couples, and families achieve mental well-being and healthy lives. Grace Alliance Groups have been proven to: aid in mental health recovery, offer significant trauma recovery and healing, and renew faith and spiritual life (even among war-torn refugees). ***Free resources*** for couples, families, or individuals, in English and Spanish, are designed to complement and promote professional therapy and treatment rather than replace these tools.

- **Addiction Recovery Groups**: Addiction can be a symptom or cause of mental health challenges. While some may benefit from a peer-support group, others will find it is only part of their

needed "treatment plan." Churches can come beside church or community members who are ready to address areas of addiction by adding Celebrate Recovery or Pure Desire. Grants are available to Christian Churches in Montana.

OPPORTUNITY #5: BUILD INTERNAL COACHING AND NON-CLINICAL COUNSELING CAPACITY

Some churches, schools, or nonprofit organizations may want to **help on deeper levels**. This requires additional education and training. Not all organizations will have direct access to state-licensed therapists (which is always a great option). However, there are other ways of training staff or committed volunteers to provide care.

- **Mental Health Coaching**: A certificate in Mental Health Coaching (with dozens of additional continuing education opportunities) is available through Light University in collaboration with the American Association of Christian Counselors. Mental Health Coaching is a form of strengths-based support for persons living with serious mental illness as a supplement to clinical support. Coaches help clients obtain and maintain stability, manage difficult symptoms, rebuild relationships, and find a purpose for living. Coaches also help clients find resources for professional care and treatment, family support, and education. The MHC training is ***currently free***.

- **Relapse Prevention Coaching:** Genesis Process Relapse Prevention Training for coaches and counselors, a 40-hour program, is offered as an on-demand video course and as a weeklong live class led by an official Genesis trainer. Those who complete this training will be able to effectively help clients find inner healing for what drives their addictive behaviors, identify and challenge faulty belief systems, and create an individualized relapse prevention plan for recovery. Some state boards will assign CEUs for licensed and certified counselors who complete the course. Completion of this course is the first step to becoming a Certified Genesis Counselor.

- **Biblical Counseling**: There are several Biblical Counseling approaches that Gianforte Foundation partner organizations have utilized. The following are the two most common. Please research both to determine which fits your church's philosophy on mental health challenges best.
    - Grace Bible Church's Annual Biblical Counseling: This program prepares students for the Association of Certified Biblical Counseling (ACBC) Certification test. ACBC training, through Grace Bible, requires students to attend Track One - Part A and B. Parts A and B are offered in opposite years, but do not need to be taken in order. Once training is finalized, students need to complete supervised counseling hours. For those who would like to become a Biblical Counselor but are not able to travel to Bozeman, ACBC offers training and supervised hours online.

    - Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation: This program's goal is to restore Christ to Christian Counseling and counseling to the Church. CCEF courses are designed to help you grow in confidence to offer Christlike counsel to those in need. Through CCEF's biblical counseling training, you will grow in your understanding of people's problems, how God changes us, and how we model the care of Christ to saints, sufferers, and sinners.

OPPORTUNITY #6: INCREASE KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO RESPOND TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

There will be times when your church, school, or nonprofit needs to engage with Law Enforcement. However, often before Law Enforcement arrives, de-escalation is required, or a survivor of violence needs to be listened to and cared for. Doing both of these well has been proven to be part of the healing process for all involved and may impact future mental health challenges.

- **Domestic or Sexual Abuse:** Church Cares offers ***a free 12-lesson video course*** called "*Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused.*" The series was created in collaboration with evangelical pastors, law enforcement, attorneys, social workers, therapists, and biblical counselors with the

intent to help train and equip church (or non-profit) leaders to recognize, respond to, and provide support for victims of domestic or sexual abuse.

For those churches interested in providing long-term relational care for women and children who have experienced domestic abuse, a $2,500 grant is available for hosting a support group called **The Refuge**.

- **Security Team De-escalation Training:** Many churches already have well-trained security teams. No matter how well-trained your teams are, they will occasionally need a refresher on how to intentionally use verbal and non-verbal techniques to calm a situation, reduce agitation, and prevent violence. There are many online and in-person training opportunities for your team. Here is an introductory article and guide we found helpful.