

Victoria Ross, WNY Peace Center - Buffalo

As board chair of the WNY Peace Center, a QCSW (Qualified Clinical Social Worker) and LMSW, I urge you to use a normative and culturally oriented framework to adequately respond to the community mental health needs. The “broken alert systems” afflicting people in our community, caused by trauma (including historical), shame (the subtle trauma), and stress, are pervasive. The community needs non-clinical communal and culturally attuned services that don’t pathologize nor separate individuals from their families and communities (though we do need those too).

Healing communal experiences using the arts, traditions, nature and shared experiences, offered by community members with relevant skills and experiences are an absolute must - especially in this racially segregated, impoverished city whose black and brown communities have bled through both extractive practices, neglect, and violence. We must address the very real effects of these policies and practices through groups, validation, experiential learning, and transformation.

We and our partners and allies need the FUNDING, FUNDING, FUNDING, to provide these services vital to individuals families, neighborhoods, groups and communities in Buffalo and WNY.

Also healing facilitators are far from limited to people with clinical qualifications and/or experience. Healers come with all kinds of backgrounds and experiences. Certainly, medication and the medical model can be counterproductive and missing the vital elements of what has happened and what needs to happen for healthy outcomes. Healers are needed from within the community and the related traditions and cultures.

We thank you AG James, for attending our Women’s March for Solidarity, Victory, and Healing the day after the 5/14 Massacre. We and our partners and allies urge you to find a way to help us facilitate health and healing in our communities through such events, campaigns, and efforts.