Celebration is an activity best shared with your community.

Bob Nees Jr., p1.

In this Issue

Chairman's Perspective .......... 1,2
Science of Celebration .......... 3,4
Missionary Spotlight .......... 5
OHI Scholarship Fund .......... 6
Get to Know Evie & Karen .......... 7,8
OHI Guest, Extraordinary Things .......... 9
Our Winter Offer .......... 10
Celebrating a Community of Love, Acceptance and Healing

A warm and hearty winter greeting to our OHI community. This wonderful verse reminds us that the end of the year is a time for reflection. A time to consider our challenges as well as our accomplishments. As we read further into the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, we learn in verse 3:4 that reflection should be balanced by celebration: ‘a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.’

While reflection works best as a solitary activity, celebration is an activity best shared with your community.

You may recall that in our Spring newsletter, I mentioned that the OHI Community is the one place I’ve experienced where people truly work to love their neighbors as themselves. In the Summer newsletter, I touched on the idea that community is so important to human beings because it satisfies needs such as acceptance, feeling supported and understood, as well as how we develop relationships and friendships. Then in the Fall newsletter, I wrote about the powerful need to belong, and how our community at OHI works in fulfilling that need.

It is the celebration of community at OHI, and how we observe it together, that is the theme of my thoughts for this season.

Celebration is an Age-Old Tradition of Community

There is a spiritual discipline of celebration that dates back thousands of years and crosses all cultures. People come together in community to honor and rejoice in their beliefs. Celebration is about strengthening and developing our own personal relationship with God, the universe, or your higher self. Celebration allows us to release the past, have faith in the future, and live in the present. When we get caught up in our day-to-day routines, it is a path back to spiritual growth, and guides us to remember and return to our faith. In its most basic form, celebration is an expression of joy that enables us to look forward to tomorrow with courage and hope.

In the Christian tradition we celebrate the key moments in the life of Jesus, his birth and the resurrection. Each holiday serves as a reminder of the teachings of Jesus; how we should love and forgive one another. I’ll never forget the feeling I would get as a boy attending candle-light Christmas Eve services. Surrounded by hundreds of tiny flames flickering in the dark, and the resonance of happy voices singing ‘Joy to the World,’ I felt an enormous sensation of elation. I can still recall the feeling of chills running up my spine and down my arms as I reveled in my faith along with my entire church community. Even the simple ceremonies of communion or baptism heighten our faith when we celebrate as a spiritual community. When we gather as a community and worship together we sustain our affinity.

‘The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.’ Psalm 118:24

Celebration is About Gratitude and Healing

When our lives are in alignment and everything seems to be going well, it’s natural for us to celebrate. We are grateful about that which we’ve accomplished or appreciate that something good has happened. A celebration can be as simple as a high five between two friends who just watched their favorite team win, or it could be two large families joining in a formal wedding party.

There is a healing quality to celebrations. They are occasions that allow us to take a break from work and obligations. Celebrating makes

Bob Nees, Jr., Senior Pastor & Chairman

‘There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens’ Ecclesiastes 3:1

Chairman’s Perspective
us happy and helps us forget our fears, anxiety, and other discomforts. We are able to relax, release stress, and have fun. Singing, dancing, cheering, laughing, and hugging are all activities that trigger the release of endorphins and serotonin, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well being and can even temporarily relieve pain, while serotonin is a neurotransmitter that will elevate your mood. And, because these activities can decrease stress hormones, they in turn help to boost the immune system.

**Daily Celebration is a Big Part of Our Program at OHI**

Throughout each week here at OHI, we find many opportunities to celebrate. A good example is our You Validation class, where we celebrate each other's intrinsic human value. Every accomplishment, no matter what, is worthy of celebration. Someone will say, "I saw you smile this morning and it warmed my heart." Another says, "You were tired, yet you still showed up for class, and I was encouraged and inspired by your strength to carry on." These are verbal high fives that honor our moments of achievement. And, they all add up to keep us motivated. This reminds me of something Tom Peters, the co-author of the book In Search of Excellence, once said, "Celebrate what you want to see more of." At OHI, we want to see more people thriving and healing, and we do that by coming together as a community and celebrating.

Another example of how we celebrate together is during Friday Morning Testimonials. It is so heartwarming to see our guests get up in front of everyone and share their personal revelations, and often their personal miracles, that they experienced over the course of the week. Then there are our Prayer Circles where we celebrate fellowship. And, our Word of the Day which enables to set our intentions. Plus, lots of hugs - which have more benefits than I can list - but as a celebration they allow us to relax, be in the moment, and feel amazing! Our most lively celebration is our Friday Night Live, where we perform and proclaim having made it through the week with hilarious singing, dancing and skits - it's a glorious time of raucous revelry, laughter, and fun.

'So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' 1 Corinthians 10:31

**Celebrate OHI by Sharing the Love**

As we approach the holiday season and in the spirit of celebrating and sharing, please consider contributing to the OHI Scholarship Fund to help those in need experience the benefits of the OHI program. As many of you know, over the course of our 42 years, OHI has provided scholarships to many individuals who needed the same benefits you experienced – but could not afford to otherwise attend. In most years, we have been able to fulfill all requests for assistance through the generosity of our community. The results have been heartwarming, to say the least.

Join with us in celebrating our healing mission with a tax-deductible year-end gift.

Your contribution will help to make our community stronger, healthier, and more vibrant. Thank you so much for your help.

Yours in prayer,

Robert P. Nees, Jr.,
Senior Pastor and Chairman
Optimum Health Institute of San Diego and Austin

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**Stay Connected with your OHI cohort, share contact info before you leave:**

Join OHI Facebook pages for San Diego and Austin.

- Start a Facebook Group Page for your cohort.
- Share food videos.
- Keep writing “Daily Gratitudes.”
- Pledge to support your “Buddies.”

As your transformation grows arrange to return to OHI with your friends from your cohort.
Celebrating “firsts” — a baby’s first steps or a child’s first day of kindergarten. We celebrate “milestones” — a high school graduation or a wedding anniversary. We celebrate “achievements” — a teenager earning their driver’s license or a spouse’s job promotion.

Celebrations are usually joyful, happy events. So why don’t we bring “celebration” into our daily life? Would there be any genuine benefit to celebrating EVERYTHING?

Absolutely! A celebration, no matter how small, is a formal invitation to take a break from the daily grind, and feel positive about the moment you’re in. That positive thinking brings an immediate reduction in stress. The scientific benefits of stress reduction are well-documented, and include improved cognitive performance, better physical health, and reduced burnout. Research has shown that a positive attitude and a genuine feeling of gratitude can improve overall well-being, increase resilience, strengthen social relationships, and reduce stress and depression. (1, 2)

So how exactly do celebrations impact the brain? When you feel happy, the parts of the brain that are activated are the ones responsible for personality expression, decision making, moderating social behavior, and abstract reasoning. They “light up” with feelings of reward (the reward when stress is removed), interpersonal bonding, and positive social interactions. The happiness you feel with celebration also causes an increase in important neurochemicals. There is a surge of feel-good chemicals including dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins. Dopamine is your own personal motivation machine. It is the secret to getting pumped and hitting goals. Serotonin regulates mood. Healthy levels of serotonin keep you feeling happy. Low levels of serotonin are linked to depression. Endorphins are the chemicals searing through your body when you finish a run, giving you the feeling of being on top of the world. Dopamine can be triggered by reward, serotonin by community, and endorphins by laughter. Celebrations are a medley of all three triggers, and all three neurotransmitters combined contribute to the feelings of closeness, connection, and happiness that come with celebrations large and small. (3,4)

Research shows the brain changes with experience, so the more that daily celebrations are practiced, the more the brain learns to tune in to the positives in the world. Humans have a negativity bias to notice threats in the environment. That has kept human beings alive as a species, but hasn’t done much to foster happiness. Our brains will always notice dangers in an effort to keep us safe, but we also need to make sure our brains notice positive things to nurture our overall happiness and emotional well-being. To do that, you need to teach your brain to notice positives and celebrate them. (4)

Holding (focusing on) an experience for 20 seconds is long enough to create positive structural changes in the brain. The “Three Good Things” practice, developed in a 2005 study led by Martin Seligman, founder of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, found that those who spent 5-10 minutes at the end of each day writing in detail about three things to celebrate, large or small, and also reflecting on WHY they were worth celebrating, reported increased levels of happiness that persisted for six months. This practice is effective because it not only helps you remember and appreciate moments worth celebrating, but it also helps you savor the moment and remember it more vividly later on. By reflecting on the sources of these celebratory moments, the idea is that you start to see a broader ecosystem of goodness around you rather than assuming that the universe is conspiring against you. (5)

But daily celebrations don’t all have to be about what you
accomplish. A special moment to celebrate is when you take the time to give back. Many studies have demonstrated that helping others kindles happiness, just as celebrations do. When researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness in a large group of American adults, they found the more people volunteered, the happier they were, according to a study in Social Science and Medicine. Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being “very happy” rose 7% among those who volunteered monthly and 12% for people who volunteered every 2-4 weeks. Among weekly volunteers, 16% felt “very happy,” and that happiness was long lasting. (6)

Volunteering not only makes you feel happier, but also healthier. Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety. Working with animals has also been shown to improve mood, and reduce stress and anxiety. Volunteering increases self-confidence, provides a sense of purpose and helps you stay physically healthy. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease. (6)

Being generous can also have the same healthy benefits as volunteering. According to a 2010 study, it was found that the less money people gave away the higher their cortisol levels. (6) Studies demonstrate elevated cortisol levels can impact the immune system, fertility, and bone health. It can also lead to insulin resistance, Type 2 Diabetes, abdominal weight gain, and loss of verbal declarative memory (words, names, and numbers). (7)

“People who engage in kind acts become happier over time,” said Sonja Lyubomirsky, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside. Lyubomirsky, who has studied happiness for over 20 years, found that performing positive acts once a week led to the most happiness. (8)

So to come full circle on the topic of celebrations, should you incorporate daily celebrations into your life? Unequivocally! Anything that lowers our stress levels, triggers endorphins, and teaches our brain to notice the positives in life is worth the effort. Should you work volunteering into your schedule? Sure! It’s a win-win when you can feel happier and healthier while your community benefits from your generosity. And if volunteering isn’t an easy fit into your life right now, would performing a few random acts of kindness or donating money to a worthy cause make a difference? Completely! So pass it on, and celebrate the good in the world every day!

(5) Greater Good Magazine, greatergood.berkeley.edu, “Four Great Gratitude Strategies” by Juliana Breines, Ph.D., June 30, 2015
(7) Diagnose-me.com, “Elevated Cortisol Levels”
(8) Goodnet.org, “7 Scientific Facts About the Benefit of Doing Good”
Missionary Spotlight

Missionary’s Transformation Helps Her Beat the Odds

When Natalia Eric was diagnosed with Stage 4 Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma in 2010, it was not her first experience with cancer. Two years earlier, she had been diagnosed with thyroid cancer, and her thyroid was removed. This time, the health opportunity was even more aggressive. Doctors removed her spleen, which had swollen to seven pounds, and started her on chemotherapy. They also gave her only five years to live.

Natalia was not one to passively surrender. She had been born in Russia, and navigated challenging situations before. Now a resident of Toronto, Natalia realized if she wanted to take charge of her health, she was going to have to change things dramatically.

While scouring the internet for information, she came across YouTube videos of people sharing their transformational experience at Optimum Health Institute (OHI) San Diego. Natalia booked a three-week stay.

“Those first three days, I got so sick,” Natalia said. She realized her body was purging toxins she accumulated during her chemo treatments, but that didn’t make the process any easier. She was ready to quit the program right then and there. Compassionate OHI team members and fellow guests convinced her to stay.

“Just three days later,” Natalia said, “Everything changed for me. The sun was shining, the grass was green, the birds were singing -- it was wonderful. I was so happy to be there!” Natalia celebrated every day of the rest of that first stay, relishing the instant closeness of the OHI community. She felt fantastic, and shed 17 pounds those three weeks.

When she returned to Toronto after that first visit, her oncologist was amazed at the dramatic changes in her body. Her bloodwork was fantastic, no lymph nodes were swollen, and her bone marrow looked good.

“I started thinking,” she said. “If three weeks at OHI could do this for me, what could three months do? I applied to become a missionary.”

Since then, Natalia has been a proud part of the missionary program five separate times. With each visit, she continues to learn more about herself while she’s also meeting new guests, and making new friends. “I find I can help people by sharing my own stories. I tell them how I incorporate the OHI teachings into my life.”

Russian guests in particular immediately connect with Natalia. Many time their return visits to coincide with hers. Some of the older Russian guests don’t speak English, and Natalia is happy to translate for them, and help them reap the benefits of learning new ways to eat, think, meditate and move.

Natalia said that with each new missionary assignment, she’s able to go deeper into the heart of OHI’s healing program. Her biggest personal transformation is emotional healing. For the first time in her life, Natalia said, she is truly loving herself. “We’re told that to think of ourselves first is selfish,” Natalia said. “But until you can love yourself enough to make time for yourself, you can never really love anyone else. I know that everything about OHI is to make sure the body, mind and spirit are all taken care of. You can’t heal the body if the mind and spirit are still doing the same old stuff. To heal your emotions, you have to make changes.”

Those changes don’t just happen during a stay at an OHI mission -- they continue to transform lives when people take the program home with them.

“My grown children will ask me about the food I eat now, and I help them understand emotionally how important it is. They start to eat more raw foods, and have salads at every meal. And that means my grandchildren are getting healthier, and learning healthy habits at such a young age. It makes me so happy.”
Seattle resident Rhonda Yeoman knows drastic change takes drastic measures. A decade ago, when she had a major thyroid problem, a skilled naturopath got her on the right path. When Rhonda’s naturopath relocated to Texas, Rhonda reverted to her old habits. Her health gradually declined as both her diet and exercise habits deteriorated.

When Rhonda received a cancer diagnosis last October, she immediately flew to Texas to again seek her naturopath’s sage advice. At that point her scales registered over 300 pounds, and she realized she was sabotaging her health and her life. The naturopath himself had previously been diagnosed with prostate cancer, and shared with her how multiple visits to OHI helped him. She wasn’t sure yet if she wanted to try OHI, but she did drastically change her food plan. Rhonda kicked her meat-at-every-meal routine in favor of a plant-based diet. By August of this year she had shed 80 pounds but was still struggling with health opportunities. A friend of Rhonda’s felt so strongly that she could benefit from OHI’s holistic healing program that he offered to sponsor a week-long visit. Since crushing medical debt made it impossible for her to afford completing the entire three-week holistic healing program, Rhonda says she’s eternally grateful for the OHI Scholarship she received. “Each week is a different feeling,” Rhonda said, “And it gives you a new sense of awareness. The classes and activities are mapped out so smartly -- the whole experience is so intelligently designed with every single layer of the human spirit in mind.” She shed additional pounds during her 3-week stay as her body, mind and spirit came into balance.

“OHI is not just a place you go to juice and cleanse,” said Rhonda. “It’s so much more, and truly healing on so many levels. I am a different person -- I’m an improved version of my old self -- but I was never the person I am today. I feel a lightness now that I never did before. OHI helped me tune out to tune in.”

Today, Rhonda is living her life more fully and joyfully than she ever imaged possible, thanks to generous donations to the OHI Scholarship Fund.

Three Ways to Give

1. MAIL newsletter donation envelope
2. ONLINE www.OptimumHealth.org
3. PHONE (800) 993-4325

Share the Love, Share the Feeling, Share the Gift of Healing

As you remember the spirit of peace, love, and camaraderie that you felt here at OHI, please remember those who have life threatening health opportunities and need financial assistance. The OHI community relies on acts of kindness and generosity from people like you to support those in need. Last year your donations made it possible for OHI to provide 94 scholarships. Our goal for 2018 is to raise $500,000.

Please provide the Gift of Healing today by supporting the OHI Scholarship Fund with a tax-deductible:
• One-Time Donation, or
• Sustainable Monthly Contribution

Optimum Health Institute is a non-profit, religious organization. Your donation is tax deductible.
Get to Know Evie & Karen, OHI Austin's Amazing Mother-Daughter Duo

We sat down and chatted with Evie Edington and Karen Labat, an amazing Mother-Daughter duo, who have worked at OHI Austin, teaching almost every class over the years. Here are Evie & Karen’s thoughts on the wonders of witnessing healing daily and what Community means.

Q. What do you like most about working at OHI?
The most rewarding part of the work we do is that it is not just a job to us; it is a calling. Witnessing the impact that this program has on the body-mind-spirit, and to be a part of that impact is a blessing that we gratefully acknowledge every day. We love being able to inspire others to live healthier lives. We are very passionate about food-as-medicine, so when we teach Elimination I and II, this is the message we convey. Guests become empowered to change their lives and take back control of their health. This is why we love OHI. We aren't trying to sell people magic pills. We are providing them with real tools that can boost their wellness quotient. All of it can be done at home after re-entry!

Q. What is the biggest change you’ve noticed in yourself since you started working here?
The funny thing about being a part of transformation is that it pulls you along with it. We have been challenged over and over to grow beyond our small thinking. Since working at OHI, we have added more fresh foods, more fermented foods, more wheatgrass shots, and more veggie.

“The most rewarding part of the work we do is that it is not just a job to us; it is a calling.”
juice to our own daily diets when not at the OHI campus. This has taken our brains to a whole new level! Working on this team, we are joined together to be a transformative and healing force in the world.

Q. What OHI class has had the most impact on you?
For Karen, who has had the privilege of teaching every class in the OHI curriculum, she has had the benefit of seeing the way all of the classes build on each other to create a beautiful, healing outcome. She is very partial to the Alpha Classes, especially Alpha I, Emotional Detox and Mental Detox.

For Evie, the classes that she loves most are Elimination I and II. She is constantly learning more about the impact of nutrition on the body, and it never ceases to inspire her. She recently taught the Mind-Body Connection class, and the content blew her mind. She was so excited to talk about the power of the mind to influence messages to our body. We live in a world where daily news program messages can be quite negative, but we don't realize how these messages impact our health. Having this class on our schedule is wonderful because we help people understand that unique aspect of wellness.

Q. What are the pros & cons of working together as mother-daughter?
One positive of working together is the way that we support one another in both our private and work lives. We love bouncing new ideas for classes off of each other. We sub for each other when one is on vacation, sick, or has an emergency. Working together has brought us closer and deepened our friendship. The only downside of working together is that we give each other very honest feedback, which isn’t necessarily what you always want to hear. But we get to see each other’s talents and contributions to the program, and that is very bonding.

Q. What does community mean to you?
For us, community starts with the OHI team. They are our friends as well as co-workers, and we have a deep, abiding respect for all of them. That respect radiates out to the guests that join us at OHI, and then beams out to the broader world. “Community” has come to mean a great deal to us. There is no greater feeling than being part of a community that we can trust and depend on.

Q. What’s OHI Heartbeat?
We are passionate about empowering people to live healthful lives. Being part of the wellness community as a whole is very life-affirming. There is also a giant self-confidence boost that comes with all the appreciation and acknowledgement for simply being a teacher and counselor. But the bottom line is, our job here is a calling to do God’s work on Earth. And we are honored to do God’s bidding.

Q. What inspires you?
Healing inspires us. Living a healthy, active life that is full of the little things we love is also very inspiring. We only get one life, and helping others as we make our way on our journey lifts everyone up.
OHI Guest Doing Extraordinary Things

Pat Ramsay

Introducing OHI guest, Patricia Ramsay. She has led an extraordinary life, and at 75 years old is still striving for a deeper connection with God every day. Her spiritual journey has taken her around the world — from Jamaica to London to the United States and India — even to the doorstep of OHI. We are so grateful to be a repeat stop on her travels.

Q. How did you hear about OHI?
In October 2017, I felt there was a cloud between myself and the mentee I was working with, so I asked God for guidance. The phone rang, and it was my girlfriend calling to tell me about OHI. Clearly, this was the answer God was sending me. When I have meditated on something, I listen to what the voice inside me says, and I never question it.

Q. What was your first visit like?
It was simply amazing! I felt like it got my body-mind-spirit back into alignment. I was a vegetarian when I went there, but after completing the 3-day juice cleanse, I said to myself that this is how I want to feel all of the time. So I became a vegan, and I’ve never felt better in my life.

Q. In 2014, you were accepted as a Distinguished Fellow at Harvard University in their Advanced Leadership Initiative. Tell us about that experience.
The former CEO of the International Women’s Forum (IWF) recommended me for the Harvard program. I was just approaching turning 70, and thought I was a bit too old to be going back to college, but Harvard invited me to interview, so I went. I met with the Deans of three schools — Business, Law, and Education. I was accepted into the program, and Harvard awarded me a full scholarship. It was God’s plan, and He most definitely provided! I spent a lovely year sharing ideas with the most amazing minds. God has given me the courage and support to do his work. I am just a vessel and cannot do otherwise.

Q. You make time for prayer and meditation every morning. Are there any spiritual experiences you would like to share?
About 6 months ago, a voice came to me clear as a bell, and told me to go to Bali. I knew in my heart this would be a spiritual retreat that would further develop my being. I booked passage to Ubud but didn’t schedule too much. I feel that you always have to leave space for grace. Too much structure shows a lack of faith, and ego managing everything. I want room in my life to let the Divine enter. I met with a sacred healer, and when he laid his hands on me he told me that I harness a tremendous amount of energy. I am only able to balance it all because my faith is so strong, and I listen to God without ever second guessing. He told me I needed to share my spirituality with others more freely instead of holding back so that my energy can flow. That conversation marked a quantum leap in my faith. I felt a complete shift in my consciousness. I realized that I need to share my story with the world, because in that way I share God with the world.

Q. Have you come back to OHI since you first visited last October?
Yes! I returned in August 2018, this time for 3 weeks. I felt like my body was out of alignment again, but after completing the 21-day program and juice fasting each week, I felt my body was where it needed to be, linked with my mind and spirit.

Q. What classes spoke the most to you in this visit?
Each Vocal Toning Class was magnificent. I could feel the trees and the energy of the ground. Wednesday’s Release Ceremony was also quite moving for me. God always puts me in the right place for the nourishment my body, mind, and soul, and OHI will always be a place that nurtures me back into alignment.

Q. Looking back on your life, what advice do you have for others?
At 75 years old, I feel like life is a total adventure. Every day is better than the last. Yes, I’ve had bad times, but they all brought me to exactly where I needed to be. The mantra I use most often in my meditation is “Be still and know that I am God.”
Celebrate Community at OHI this Holiday Season

Take time to Celebrate and Save!

**Early Bird Special: Book Now to Save $100**

Receive $100 off any best-available, single-occupancy room for your 1st week when you book your retreat 3 weeks in advance.*

**Extended Stay Savings: Take up to 10% Off**

Receive 10% off your entire 3-week stay or 5% off our entire 2-week stay. That's a savings up to $634.*

**Enjoy a Bonus Discount of up to $680 Off Your 4th Week**

You'll pay just $175 for your room (plus tuition) during your 4th week stay when all four stays occur within a 12-month period. Savings up to $680 on any room.*

**CALL (800) 993-4325 for this Winter Offer**

End 2018 on a high note - visit OHI San Diego or OHI Austin for the Holidays!

*Some restrictions may apply*
VISIT WITH US: SUNDAY OPEN HOUSE
Visit our weekly Open House every Sunday starting at 4:00 p.m. in San Diego and Austin. The OHI Program offers visitors, guests and adherents a personal tour of the facility, lecture, prayer circle and an all raw vegan meal. A $3 donation is appreciated, but not required.

CONTACT US: (800) 993-4325
We'd love to hear from you. To receive special offers and updates, email us at newsletter@optimumhealth.org or call us at (800) 993-4325. For more information about the OHI Program, please visit our website at www.optimumhealth.org

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End 2018 on a high note – visit OHI San Diego or Austin
See inside on Page 10 for details,
Or call (800) 993-4325

Our Mission
We serve as a change agent for holistic healing by creating a safe and sacred space.

Core Values
Holism, Generosity, Relationship, Life-Long Learning, Stewardship and Service.

Guiding Principles
Trustworthiness, Respect, Empowerment and Alignment.