

Vicki B. Stocking

From: Appalshop <info@appalshop.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 6, 2025 10:18 AM
To: Vicki B. Stocking
Subject: Aiding Appalachian Mental Health



Dear Vicki,

In late fall 2024, Appalachia Media Institute Program Manager Tommy Anderson led a series of Mental Health First Aid training courses for Appalshop staff and community partners. [Mental Health First Aid](#) (MHFA) is a national program designed “to teach the skills to respond to the signs of mental illness and substance use.”

In 2023, Tommy and Appalshop Executive Director Tiffany Sturdivant received certification to teach MHFA through a grant funded by the [Kentucky Foundation For Women](#). The same grant allowed for two Appalshop employees (one being Tommy) to receive Intimacy Coordination training for theatrical performances as well. These trainings were valuable as Appalshop continues to prioritize inclusive, thoughtful practices in our artmaking and community engagement programs.

“There’s a lot of stigma around mental health, substance abuse disorders, and challenges,” Tommy said. “People don’t know how to talk about these challenges, they’re afraid of them. They’re afraid of people who are going through them. They don’t know how to talk to their friends, family members, or community about it, and this training helps to take some of the fear and stigma away, and allows us to start having conversations about mental health.”

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

Appalshop's experience

The trainings are typically a day long, with roughly two hours of pre-course work required of participants. The course covers a broad range of topics, including identifying signs of a mental health challenge, offering means of nonjudgmental support, and understanding ways economic factors can exacerbate challenges.

Rachel Rosolina, Appalshop's Senior Director of Connection & Communication, expressed that she wished she'd received MHFA training much earlier in her career. "Having guidelines for what to do in an interaction that could be scary or unsettling makes it less so. I feel more prepared and better able to assess situations in order to offer appropriate help."

Appalshop Filmmaker Oakley Fugate feels more comfort and security when supporting others as they navigate mental health challenges. "I was surprised by how important language choices are in de-escalating situations," Oakley said. He also expressed the importance of responding to moments of crisis in a timely manner.

Madison Buchanan, an Appalshop Filmmaker who works with youth interns through the Appalachian Media Institute, is thankful to have the skillset to handle mental health challenges in a sensitive and productive manner. "The most surprising content," Madison stated, "was the idea that it is okay to be forward when asking someone if they are dealing with a mental health crisis. There is a stigma [around mental health], and it's nice to know steps are being taken to break down that stigma and have more open conversation about mental health."

Some attendees expressed feeling a deeper community connection through the training, knowing they were all working together to support mental health.

As an instructor, Tommy believes the most important takeaway from Mental Health First Aid training is knowing recovery is possible. “Someone’s mental health challenge does not define them as a person, while it may affect their life and the lives of those around them, it does not need to be the defining factor of their life.” Tommy expressed the importance of celebrating the accomplishments of those working through mental health challenges, and maintaining a nonjudgmental attitude as you support them.

With this certification, Tommy is qualified and willing to lead MHFA courses for organizations, collectives, and other community groups interested in receiving their own Mental Health First Aid training. To learn more, you can contact info@appalshop.org with the subject line “Mental Health First Aid.”



Appalshop’s Community Media Initiative is proud to present the release of [*Bridging the Gap: Kentucky’s Community Health Workers*](#), a brief documentary released in conjunction with the Kentucky Department for Public Health. *Bridging the Gap* looks at community health workers—who are not doctors, but specially trained and certified community members—in six Kentucky cities (Harlan, Hazard, Beattyville, Lexington, Louisville, and Hopkinsville), and shows their distinct role in closing the divide between medical services and social services of underserved and often marginalized communities.

“We interviewed community health workers in eastern, central, and western Kentucky, and all of them were so impressive, so full of empathy and concern,” says filmmaker Mimi Pickering, who shot and co-edited *Bridging the Gap*, alongside director and co-editor Parker Hobson. “They were each dealing with different types of clients, but all offered a holistic approach to care that went beyond the typical health care provider-patient relationship. It was truly inspiring.”

The film showcases the variety of services offered by community health workers—from setting up doctors' appointments and transportation, to fitting diabetic shoes and obtaining eye glasses, to locating food, clothing and housing. It also shows the joys and challenges of this vital community role. The film is now available for viewing on the Kentucky Department for Public Health's [YouTube page](#).

In Solidarity,

Appalshop Staff

Appalshop in the News

- Executive Director Tiffany Sturdivant wrote an opinion piece for the *Lexington Herald-Leader*: "[Resilience is not something to celebrate when a 1000-year flood becomes a 1000-day flood](#)"
- Jack Walker of West Virginia Public Broadcasting spoke with Director of Artistic Programs Roger May: "[After Devastating Floods, Appalshop Archival Recovery Makes Steady Progress](#)"
- Film Program Manager Aaron Asbury and Communications Manager Hannah Adams Asbury spoke with *Queer KY*: "[Appalshop Preserves LGBTQ+ Stories in Appalachia Through Film and Media](#)"
- Danielle King and Attica Scott shared news of the Forward Justice Action Network partnership with Appalshop: "[In Kentucky, a clean slate is out of reach for too many people who've served their time](#)"



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