IN FULL BLOOM
by Oryx Cohen, Chief Executive Officer

All around us plants and trees are reaching their full potential at the peak of summer. Young animals are becoming adults. And flowers are in full bloom.

On a personal note, it's been one year since I have had the honor and privilege to become the CEO of the National Empowerment Center. I am so grateful for an organization that was there for me during my darkest hours, supporting me, mentoring me, and allowing me to reach my full potential.

A lot has happened during this past year. We have become more diverse and equitable as an organization, bringing on staff and consultants from a variety of different backgrounds, doing trainings and work with (not for) diverse communities, and we are about to launch research on Emotional CPR with exclusively BIPOC trainers and participants. Emotional CPR (eCPR) is now officially considered to be an evidenced-based practice, and organizations and state governments are starting to take notice, signing on to large contracts and sharing our vision that eCPR is for EVERYONE. We continue to live on the cutting edge of innovation.

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IN FULL BLOOM
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We will be launching our Neurodiversity Gifts training featuring Joshua Roberts very soon, and our educational webinars, including webinars on Occupational Resiliency, LGBTQ+ Youth, and "A Taste of Wonderland," have impacted thousands of lives. The National Empowerment Center is in full bloom.

When I was first hospitalized and diagnosed, it was a struggle for me to view my experience as a gift. I had a lot of shame around my experience and didn't want people to know about my past or how sensitive I can be or how I can go into altered states of consciousness. Shifting to a paradigm of my experience, my nature, as a gift, has been life changing for me. Being sensitive to others is actually a super power. Being able to connect to everything on a spiritual level has become a gift rather than something scary after years of navigating how to control the experience and not let it overwhelm me—I have learned how to surf the waves.

I am not alone and I encourage you to celebrate your gifts with me and the NEC team. I hope you enjoy reading about Shira Collings, who has been with us for years and is now our Grant Coordinator. I met Shira when they were very young at a screening of my film Healing Voices in Los Angeles. I am so grateful for our years of working together and I've been able to witness them mature into a wonderful person who is now married, a therapist, and a very proud parent to lots of kitties. I hope you enjoy learning even more about Shira and their many gifts, including their Core Gift!

I'm so excited that our leadership spotlight features Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, who has been delivering eCPR trainings in Spanish for years. Joana Arcangel writes about honoring and lifting up gifts on a team. Joana led NEC staff through Core Gift interviews and we are also excited to share our NEC Signature Statement for the first time. Lastly, in the theme of celebration, we have a page dedicated to our new Neurodiversity Gifts training. We hope you celebrate your gifts with us; the world needs you now more than ever. It's time to shine!

WHAT ARE CORE GIFTS? THE GIFTS WITHIN A TEAM
by Joana Arcangel, Consultant

I became a Master Facilitator of Core Gift Discovery™ in 2021 through the Core Gift Institute. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to interview each of the NEC staff members and consultants for their Core Gift Discovery: a process that involved getting to know more about each of them individually.

What I enjoy most about facilitating Core Gift Interviews is what each individual unearths about themselves: often reminding them and getting clearer about what they value most and why. Over the past several years, I have been deeply reflecting about the journey we all have as human beings in finding our gifts, navigating the shadow sides of our gifts, and the synergy and magic that comes from our gifts as we work within a team.

After everyone had their Core Gift Statement, I facilitated the Signature Gift process with the NEC team: what makes NEC different from any other group that operates similarly or has similar missions and visions? One thing I know for certain is that connection, authenticity, and empowerment were some of the common themes that were present in each of the conversations, all of which are at the heart of the work that NEC is doing.

We share NEC’s Signature Gift on the following page and in the next pages, an interview I had with Shira Collings, NEC Grant Coordinator. In the next few newsletters, we'll be taking more time to highlight the Core Gifts of the NEC team.
NEC’S SIGNATURE GIFT

Our Signature Gift is including and honoring the voices of people we work with.

We bring it by...

- Truly embodying the idea of "nothing about us without us,"
- fostering the healing power of heart-to-heart connection within the community,
- uplifting & celebrating people's stories of recovery & healing,
  and
- defending our right to self-determination, the right to determine our paths as people with lived experience.

"Groups have a Core Gift—a specific purpose that unifies and energizes. Called their Signature Gift, [the Core Gift Institute] developed a simple facilitated process any group can use to discover their own gift. Groups love the active participation and how it uncovers their unique operating style and powerful intentions."

-from the Core Gift Institute

To learn more about the Core Gift Institute: www.coregift.org
AN INTERVIEW WITH NEC’S SHIRA COLLINGS
by Joana Arcangel, Consultant

Q: HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH NEC AND HOW DID YOU GET CONNECTED?
A: I became connected with NEC after having some negative experiences with mental health treatment, in which I felt pathologized and labeled as having a broken brain for having a natural reaction to traumatic circumstances. This led me to look for organizations promoting alternative models of care focused on viewing distress as a response to trauma rather than solely from a medical perspective. Through this research I found NEC and came to admire all the work they do. I started working at NEC in 2017 as a parttime consultant. I helped with leading and coordinating eCPR trainings and planning the Alternatives Conference. Then I became the youth coordinator in 2019 or 2020. I started taking a bigger role in development of Youth eCPR and other youth programming, youth webinars, youth leadership series, youth Finding Our Voice, and bringing more of a youth voice to the organization. Soon I will be transitioning into the role of Grant Coordinator.

Q: WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO NEC?
A: I felt drawn to NEC because the organization advocates for alternatives to traditional mental health care, in which people are treated as the experts of their experience rather than individuals that need to be “fixed.” The approaches we advocate for focus on fostering human connection by helping people feel heard, seen, and validated, rather than pathologized.

They’re about asking, “What happened to you?” rather than “What’s wrong with you?” and viewing people as doing the best they can to cope with difficult circumstances rather than as having broken brains. I also love that NEC advocates for “Nothing about us without us” - the right for people with lived experience to have self-determination and a voice in mental health policy decisions.

Q: WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT?
A: To me, what’s most exciting about our growth and development is our increasing focus on diversity. We’re making a greater effort to center voices of people who have historically been marginalized and haven’t gotten the chance to take up space or have their voice heard within mental health spaces or the peer movement, such as BIPOC, youth, and LGBTQ people. We’re also doing some programming around neurodiversity. I’m thrilled about all of the new perspectives that are being included and new conversations we’re starting.

Q: YOU’RE ALSO A THERAPIST. WITH BOTH YOUR LIVED AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES, WHAT THEMES, AS FAR AS YOUR CORE GIFT, SHOW UP?
A: My approach to therapy is about listening to people, making them feel heard, and recognizing that each person’s story is important and each person’s voice needs to be heard. My specialization is eating disorders, disordered eating, and body image. So many people with eating disorders have received the message that it is not okay to take up space or have needs, and that they need to shrink their bodies in order to be accepted and loved, or to deserve care and connection. I view my role as a therapist to be about building a relationship that challenges those messages and recognizes the unconditional and inherent worth of each individual. In my therapeutic work, I bring in a lot of (Continued on next page)
AN INTERVIEW WITH NEC'S SHIRA COLLINGS

(Continued from page 3)

of social justice theories and perspectives, including fat liberation, disability justice, queer and trans liberation, and feminism. I want to support people in understanding the systems of oppression that have shaped their belief that they need to shrink themselves, literally and figuratively. My core gift supports me in providing the space for my clients to question social norms and begin to liberate themselves from oppressive ideologies.

I also try to bring my Core Gift into my life as someone who fosters cats and is involved with animal rescue, as I believe not only all humans but all animals deserve love and connection too! Also, that gift shows up for me in something that I'm just starting down the road of. I got accepted in a training program to be a lifecycle officiant/ceremonialist within Secular Humanistic Judaism. I want to specialize in officiating ceremonies for milestones that we don't always celebrate as a society, for instance, pet adoption, gender transition, coming out, decisions to be childfree, recovering from mental health challenges or trauma, embracing or discovering one's neurodivergent identity, and more. I believe this is another way I can make people feel valued for who they are.

"My Core Gift is helping others feel that they deserve to be loved for their authentic selves.

I give it by helping them to have the space to breathe, have the agency to challenge social norms, have the willingness to fight for something that's important to them, and feel like what they have to say & their unique life experience are important."

Q: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT YOU'VE LOOKED AT OCCUPATIONAL RESILIENCY THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR GROWTH?

A: Working within mental health and peer spaces can be quite emotionally taxing. One thing that's really helped with my personal occupational resiliency is that I have a good balance of admin work, planning, organizing, as well as direct clinical work and trainings where I get to interact with people and hear their stories. This work can be heavy and emotional, but having a combination of different types of responsibilities helps me to not become flooded by it.

I also believe occupational resiliency is tied to work life balance. I grew up hearing the narrative that you really only deserve work life balance if you have what's considered a family by heteronormative societal standards - i.e., a spouse and children. I've worked to unlearn that narrative and instead have a strong belief that all of our personal time is valuable, regardless of what our lives outside of work look like.

My occupational resilience has also been enhanced by having so much support from my fellow NEC team members. I feel that there is a sense of psychological safety within our team. I know I can always turn to team members and supervisors when things are challenging. It’s a safe environment to be vulnerable and authentic. That has been a major contributor to my growth as well as my passion for the work we do.
LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT: Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia
by Juan Vélez Court

Check out Juan’s interview with Erica Ruvalcaba-Heredia, eCPR Trainer trainer, Patricia Pineda, Nuevo Amanecer Mujer Integral, and Hermana Trinidad Lopez, Nuevo Amanecer Mujer Integral.

We’ve all gone through situations in life we’d love to heal from, but how can we do it? In this video, we highlight a Latino organization in California known as Nuevo Amanecer, Mujer Integral. We hear from three inspiring voices who share with us their experiences with eCPR and how it’s impacted their community.

Todos hemos pasado por situaciones en la vida de las que nos encantaría sanar, pero ¿cómo podemos hacerlo? En este vídeo, resaltamos una organización latina en California conocida como Nuevo Amanecer, Mujer Integral. Escuchamos a tres voces inspiradoras que comparten con nosotros sus experiencias con eCPR y cómo ha impactado a su comunidad.

Click here to view video

Click here for organization’s website

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AT KIM’S COFFEE HOUSE

In our last issue, Kim, Joana, and Juan shared their responses to the question "What Does Mental Health Mean to You and Your Community?"

Here, they continue their dialogue during BIPOC Mental Health Month in July about how we can reduce racial bias.

Many know what it’s like to feel uncomfortable at a meeting or work where we feel excluded or discriminated against. How can we as communities be a part of the change that’s needed to reduce racial bias and create a healing environment for everyone?

Join us as we share recent experiences that have made us both smile and be concerned on this road many of us travel daily.

Click here to view video

Click here for organization’s website
What if we had it all backwards?

What if our diverse wiring, our Neurodiverse experiences with mental health, were one of our greatest treasures? A gift.

Zooming out enriches our perspective as we learn from different cultures and time periods. In South Africa, for example, the shamanic Sangomas are called to their sacred healing profession through what in the West would be called “psychosis.” What new roles could those with mental health diagnoses step into in our world? Turning back the clock, the ancient Greeks spoke of “Divine Madness” and that Joan of Arc said, “Whatever I have done that was good, I have done at the bidding of my voices.” What if the mental health field could be the epicenter of a fresh spiritual awakening?

Watch the Invitation Trailer here

The National Empowerment Center is taking a pioneering role in empowering people with fresh ways of seeing themselves and the world, and we’re inviting you to begin the journey of unpacking your Neurodiversity Gifts!

Through a 7-part video workshop, we explore rich territory and see how quantum physics speaks to the interconnection of our minds, and how depth psychology once more informs “the study of the soul.” You are cordially invited to the party! Express your interest now:

Tell us you’re interested and get a free PDF here

And take advantage of our limited time 20% off Earlybird special before the training is released here
UPCOMING WEBINAR

Creating Sustainable Community Partnerships
Thursday, September 7, 2023, 2–3:15 p.m. ET / 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. PT
Follow this link for Time Zone Converter: www.thetimezoneconverter.com

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

PRESENTER: ALISHA ROJAS HARRISON
MODERATED BY: SHIRA COLLINGS

Effective community partnerships help to support youth and teens, especially those that have adverse living experiences. Partnerships should be based on mutual respect and strengths based relationships. Relationships establish continuity between programs and community agencies with a firm footing in equity and sustainability. When you build and maintain a good partnership, your work is made not only easier but also more transparent, representative of community interests and needs, effective, and impactful.

Objectives:

1. Participants will learn ways to connect with their community, create community relationships & partnerships, foster community engagement through partnerships, and why building equitable and sustainable partnerships is important.

2. Participants will be able to draft an individual and/or organizational values proposition to align values with partnership and engagement.

3. Participants will identify partners, resources, activities, and beneficiaries utilizing a mission model canvas.

PAST WEBINARS

A Taste of Wonderland – Birthing a New Story of ‘Best Life’ for All
PRESENTERS: Hilary Van Welter and Bret Warshawsky

WEBINAR RESOURCES

- Recorded live webinar
- Online workbook
- PowerPoint presentation
- PDF of blank workbook
- Workbook w/Jamboard notes from webinar

SUPPORTED EDUCATION

PRESENTERS: Nev Jones and Shira Collings

WEBINAR RESOURCES

- PowerPoint presentation
- Recorded live webinar
THANKING & CELEBRATING TANYA RYDER:
WE’LL MISS YOU!
by Joana Arcangel, Consultant

"My Core Gift is helping people line up the musicians to create a symphony. I give it by helping others be authentic without having to feel they have to prove themselves, find the sweet spot of creativity for relational synergy, stop to make time for the things that truly matter, and own up to their actions as a source of empowerment."

-Tanya Ryder

Later this month, NEC’s Chief Operating Officer and Project Director Tanya Ryder will be moving forward from her position to one outside of NEC. There are not enough words to describe what she has contributed throughout the time she has been with us.

At NEC, we’ve come to expect and love Tanya’s endless analogies (her words of wisdom and love). She has always described herself as a conductor and is quick to hear the musicians play (recognize, acknowledge, and uplift others’ strengths) in the team. Gathering people to create something together is at the heart of her Core Gift. I think that those of us who are fortunate enough to witness it and be a part of it are better for it.

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Tanya has been the editor of this newsletter since its conception, one of the many things she helped make happen at NEC. The impact of the work and connections she’s made will far outlive her last day as COO and Project Director at NEC. Tanya, I cannot thank you enough for having blessed my life the way you have with your presence. Congratulations on your next steps and thank you for all you’ve done and who you are!

Click here to hear from Tanya

"We at NEC were blessed to have the shining light, the force of nature, the tsunami of creativity, quality, and innovation that is Tanya Ryder.

In the time she was here, Tanya was able to establish policies, practices and procedures, and attract diverse partners that sets up NEC for success well into the future. I will miss you immensely but take solace knowing you will remain my friend and someone who will still be there, just in a different capacity."

-Oryx Cohen