

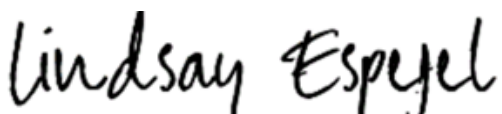
## Oh, the places healing circles can go!

Healing circles offer more than just a framework— they are a catalyst for connection, compassion, and cultivating healing. As more people engage in this work, we're witnessing how the training sparks innovation, inspiring individuals to adapt healing circles to meet the unique needs of their communities.

In this issue, you'll learn about healing circles inspired by Healing Circles training and brought to life in diverse settings. For example, Ang Coxen brings healing circles into schools, while Geo Errante brings them into prisons. Beth Light offers them at nursing retreats, and Jaune Evans carries them to the heart of the Commonwealth Cancer Help Program. Diana Lindsay turned the building that housed her communications company into a center that hosts hundreds of in-person circles each year.

We often describe healing circles as a secular sanctuary—a safe, supportive space that isn't tied to a religion but offers the same sense of sacred belonging. We hope you're as inspired as we are by the way some of our circle hosts have brought secular sanctuary to meet the unique needs of their community.

Now, where will you take healing circles?



Lindsay Espejel  
Co-director  
Healing Circles Global

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# Circles for teachers and their students

Angela (Ang) Coxen is a retired educator who first learned about circle work at an Art of Hosting training offered through her union. There, she was exposed to a number of hosting methods, but The Circle Way stood out.

"This one lands for me," she says, and she "dug in" to learn more about hosting circles after she retired. The pandemic left her with time on her hands, and Googling led her to Healing Circles Global, where she participated in circles, and then began co-mentoring trainings. At the time, all trainings and circles were conducted online due to lockdowns and quarantines.

Do you know what else was taking place online at that time? School, and things weren't going so well. The [\*Annie E. Casey Foundation\*](#) summarized the impact of the pandemic on students this way: "Many students experienced significant mental health struggles after the shift to remote learning. Students were increasingly isolated, spending more time on devices and getting very little physical activity – all of which contributed to increased stress, anxiety and depression."

But the impact was even greater than that. Ang says, "Some of these young people's safe place was school, their safe persons were school staff. But during the pandemic, students were confined to a home that had 'extra activities' they may not necessarily have wanted to participate in or see 24 hours a day."

Teachers also struggled during the pandemic.

"At first, I found myself offering spaces to educators who needed the emotional relief that is often offered through circle practice," says Ang. After educators got comfortable with healing circles, they asked her to hold circles with their classes.

"My immediate thought was 'They're not going to participate,'" says Ang. But when she asked the middle schoolers to turn their cameras on, they did. They muted and unmuted, used a virtual talking piece, and relied on the help of a technical guardian.



Ang with husband Nate, her favorite guardian

"It got to the point where teachers were saying, 'Can we do this next week?'" says Ang.

Although Ang began hosting circles online, she now works with the same teachers in person. They've since turned the role of host and guardian over to young people. "We've got young people being guardians, doing grounding work, doing affirmations. We've got young people from marginalized communities stepping up and holding space for each other.

"We're still in the room," she says. "We're still making sure protocols are in place. We still chime in occasionally and remind them of the agreements." But circles are a peer-led movement, and with the support of respected adults, students are hosting them for one another.

Ang has learned that hosting healing circles isn't a good fit for some people. "Not everyone has the gift," she says. "I tell some teachers, 'This is not for you.' I have to remind them to have a caring spirit, not a nosy spirit, not a probing-around spirit. I have to remind them to keep their mouth shut, not comment, and dang it, not to fix things!"

Ang can host only one or two circles a week. "Once you hold circle, you need to go somewhere and sit down," she says. "I held two yesterday, came home, and napped." Those were emotional healing circles, though. Ang was moved to go to a specific school at a specific time and unwittingly arrived at a classroom shortly after the children learned that their classmate

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# Re-entry circles with incarcerated men

by John "Geo" Errante

In 2001, my son was sentenced to 2.5 years in the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Facility. Let's just say it was God's way to open my heart to the flock that He was calling me to shepherd. For more than two decades, I've been teaching, mentoring, and supporting incarcerated men, women, and juveniles.

My son's incarceration also prompted me to get my PhD in educational leadership, with a focus on e-learning curriculum and content design. My dissertation, however, focused on the impact of restorative practices on empathy, forgiveness, and moral disengagement, and I administered several assessments to 240 incarcerated juveniles to collect data to test my thesis.

Reentering society for anyone who has been incarcerated is a struggle, even for those with support and resources. This is part of what brought me to Healing Circles Global. I continue to invest in people, systems, and processes that feed my soul.

Over the summer of 2024, I facilitated restorative reentry circles for men in our county treatment center. Many of them had criminal records, and this six-month dependence rehabilitation program was part of their release criteria. After they completed the program, many of them were required to transition to an Oxford House for six to twelve months before they could secure other housing, including returning to their families. (Oxford House Kansas sponsors self-run, self-supported recovery houses located in various neighborhoods throughout the state.)

The format of the circle I hosted was that of Healing Circles Global, and the prompts included topics such as:

- The concepts of "real men" vs "good men"
- Preparing for the long journey back to regaining a seat at the family table, much less the head of that table



John "Geo" Errante

- Removing masks and discovering true and desired character
- The importance of making small deposits in the emotional bank account of others
- Granting and requesting forgiveness of self and others

Many of these men discovered the fictional characters they'd been conditioned to emulate, and some recognized how failure to live up to these expectations drove them to unhealthy dependencies.

These men were grateful to realize that the circle offered a completely different opportunity than some of the other, more clinical sessions they attended. During the final two weeks of the circle, I passed out index cards on which they could provide feedback.

Here are some of their comments:

- "It took me time to realize that the same people would not be present for each circle. But I realized, each offered its own unique benefit."
- "I look forward to entering a space without judgment (rare for men!) and a place where I feel affirmed that I am capable of being restored."
- "Most other 'treatment services' seem to want to focus on fixing me from the outside-in, but the circles allow me to be transformed inside-out. This experience helps me recognize that I do have the capacity within myself to heal."

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# Circles at nursing retreats

Harmony Hill, once a brick-and-mortar retreat center in Union, Washington, has merged with CancerLifeline and brings to that nonprofit its beloved in-person retreats for cancer patients and their loved ones. It also brings its “Harmony Retreats” for healthcare professionals

Healing Circles Global volunteer Beth Light helps facilitate these healthcare retreats. A board-certified nurse practitioner and holistic nurse coach, she has more than 50 years of nursing experience across clinical, educational, and leadership roles. She also has decades of experience in hosting circles, which she first learned from HCG foremother Christina Baldwin, author of *Calling the Circle*.

“Harmony Hill’s nurse retreats gave me an opportunity to work with my fellow nurses,” Beth says. “The nurses who come bring with them a depth of experience, strength, and compassion. But they’ve given a lot to others, and the retreat offers them an opportunity to nourish themselves. There, they have the time and space to breathe, to reconnect with their purpose, to learn some self-care techniques, and to remember that they’re not alone.”

Harmony Retreats offer more than rest—they offer renewal. “They give nurses a pause from the constant giving, a chance to connect with others who understand, and an opportunity to explore practices that support their well-being,” Beth explains. “Mindfulness becomes an anchor—not just to manage stress, but to return to themselves.”

The heart of the experience lies in healing circles. “In times of quiet, through deep listening and honest sharing in a safe and supportive environment, nurses tap into their own inner knowing,” Beth says. “They rediscover what nourishes them and gain strength through the presence of others who care deeply. It’s a gentle, powerful space that reminds them of who they are—and the importance of caring for themselves as they care for others.”



Beth Light

The retreats are deeply meaningful. In post-retreat evaluations, one participant wrote, “Listening to each other share stories in a safe place provided me with so much peace, comfort, and empowerment to continue what I do.”

Beth says, “It’s such an honor to sit in circle with these amazing nurses. Through stillness, shared stories, connection, and simple mindful practices, they get a chance to catch their breath, remember why they became nurses, and reconnect with the importance of self-care and self-compassion. It’s beautiful to witness that kind of renewal.”

The retreat offers a sampler of practices, like a buffet of appetizers that invites participants to explore different ways of reconnecting with themselves.

“We focus on helping them tune in to their bodies and recognize how stress manifests and affects them. Through this process, they rediscover their inner grounding, which leaves them nourished and more connected to who they truly are.”

“Supporting these nurses is a profound privilege. Witnessing their courage, compassion, and unwavering dedication to caring for others is both humbling and inspiring. They carry the weight of healing, not just for their patients, but for all of us.”



# Circles at cancer retreats

by Lisa Peacock

When illness enters our life experience, a spiritual change can occur. We can feel alone—outsiders to the vital flow of energy that sustains us when we're in community. One antidote for feelings of isolation is to belong, to find kindred spirits. Healing Circles Global offers that sense of belonging to many who experience cancer. It offers an online or in-person opportunity to gather around the ceremonial fire of healing to share stories of pain and resilience, suffering and stamina, life and hope.

Jaune Evans has been involved with Commonweal, the nonprofit to which Healing Circles Global belongs, for more than 15 years. She is on the Commonweal board, co-hosts an online HCG Living with Cancer circle, and is on the staff of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program.

Jaune attended her first in-person training for healing circles in 2019 and again in 2020 to deepen the practice of circle facilitation. But then the pandemic changed the landscape of our world and birthed online circles.

Online circles, Jaune explains, “developed out of a need, not intention.” Initially, online Living with Cancer circles were structured on a drop-in basis, but circles didn't thrive under that format because participants couldn't develop trust in one another. Now, most online Living with Cancer circles meet weekly—with many members having attended the same circle for years.

Jaune has facilitated both in-person and online circles. “Being together is healing,” she says, but there's a difference between the two circle types. She's a Soto Zen priest in the Branching Streams lineage of Shunryu Suzuki and learned about the art of healing at an early age by caring for her parents, who had long-term illnesses.



Jaune Evans

Zen places great emphasis on embodied realization, and Jaune speaks about the deeper knowledge that can come from the temple of the body—when a shared space and energy flows among circle members.

She says that, in circle, we receive and transmit subtle information, and she points out the deepened capacity offered by the in-person experience. She says that the story we tell is often how we re-member events—as we experience and re-experience them in the body. When people are in a shared space, this adds to the mixture of awareness.

Jaune points out that while Richard Willhelm and Carl Jung translated the Tao de Ching, they learned that the Chinese character for mind and heart are the same. This suggests that knowing and wisdom are shared sensory experiences—experiences that are enhanced when people are together.

Jaune has hosted healing circles online and, more recently, in person as a staff member at Commonweal Cancer Help Program retreats. She also offers creative arts exploration and loving kindness meditation at the retreats.

All that Jaune touches comes alive in new and vital ways, and I feel blessed to have her in my life and circle.



# Circles in centers

by Diana Lindsay  
Co-founder of Healing Circles Global

When we opened the doors at Healing Circles Langley in 2015, we were so moved by the number of people who walked in wanting to be of service. What little training we had to offer at the time was for how to host healing circles of eight to 10 people with volunteers as a host and guardian. We developed agreements between us for how to keep circles safe, warm, and meaningful for all.

Hosts were wary but willing. We weren't asking them to be wise, just welcoming. They didn't have to teach, but listen—and, after all, there would be two of them in every circle if a challenge arose. But we also wanted to offer circles of two, an invitation to people in our community to be listened to one-on-one when they most needed it. People could show up at our door for any reason—typically when they were holding curiosity, loneliness, illness, grief, overwhelm, or depression. But with such an open-ended invitation, volunteers were afraid that no amount of training could possibly prepare them. They worried that they would say the wrong thing, wouldn't be enough, or wouldn't know what to do if someone violent or suicidal walked in the door.

One Saturday afternoon, I experienced that fear myself when I answered a call from a woman who was despondent over a recent cancer diagnosis. As a cancer survivor, I had been speaking with cancer patients for nine years, but there was something in the way she spoke about her despair that deeply concerned me. I was afraid she would commit suicide before her doctor's appointment on Monday, and that I wouldn't be able to stop her.

A week later, I met my hero, Rachel Naomi Remen, and her first question to me was not "How are you?" but "What's the most difficult thing you've faced since you started Healing Circles?" I told her about the call and how fearful and inadequate I felt before finally being able to calm the caller down and ask what she needed.



Rachel Naomi Remen and Diana Lindsay

"Diana, in that moment, she didn't call her doctor, or her son, or her friend down the hall," Rachel said. "She called you. In that moment, you were only asked to be you, to be the best version of who you are."

During the afternoon panel, after asking my permission to share the story, she elaborated, "Diana, you are a karmic yogi. You want to be of service."

Turning to the audience, she continued, "I've thought about this for a long time. How would you prevent a group of karmic yogis from moving forward on their deepest impulse? How would you stop them? You probably couldn't tempt them with wealth or fame, but there's something that would stop every single one of them, and that's the fear of doing harm to someone else."

Returning to me and my story, she said, "When you said to yourself 'I don't want to harm this person' what you feared silenced you somewhat and got between you and why you were born. You have a karmic connection with this person. You are exactly, in the most mysterious way that you can never know, the perfect one to help. You don't feel like the perfect person, you think you don't know enough to be the perfect person, you can think of eight people you could refer this person to who would be better than you, but somehow or other, the universe has put her on your doorstep. So the question is: Do you trust the universe or not?"

The story had a happy ending. I did know how to calm the caller down and provide what she was asking for.

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## Re-entry circles with incarcerated men cont'd.

Recently, the Lansing Correctional Facility opened a new [career campus](#) to give incarcerated people access to education and to provide training for careers that are in high demand. The mentor coordinator there told me that the men had nothing to do in the evening, so since December 2024, I've facilitated a class based on Stephen Covey's book titled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Week by week, we go through the book and share what we found most impactful.

After each class, I facilitate a restorative healing circle using the HCG format and agreements. I've been amazed at the response and the changes in attitude that the consistent attendees have made. Many have shared that they've been inspired to reorient their goals and behavior as a result. The circle allowed them to share and process feelings and emotions, and be vulnerable, in trusted space.

It's been a blessing to be involved in this effort. It has taught me that it sometimes takes decades to see positive results that radically impact people's lives. Several months ago, my wife suggested that we use a talking piece during difficult conversations with our now 40-year old son and his own 16-year-old son. Our grandson has been in our son's custody 90 percent of the time for the past 18 months. The two of them now recognize that the healing circles process promotes an environment that encourages vulnerable sharing of emotions and provides deeper understanding that supports interdependence, recognizes the feelings of others, and nurtures relationships. I'm so glad to pass this technique on to two more generations!



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## Circles for teachers and their students cont'd.

had been killed in an accident. The teacher turned her first two classes over to Ang, who hosted a circle in each one.

Ang has also hosted circles for staff when teachers died during the pandemic. She strives to end each circle on a note of hope—even when the circle focuses on the loss of a student or teacher. In those circles, she ends with: "Share a funny story about this person." And "How can this person live on?"

## Are you a karmic yogi? cont'd.

She did not commit suicide. Months later, she came in person to let me know she had made it through her treatment. She returned years later to talk about a recurrence and again after her treatment succeeded a second time to let me know she was OK.

Today, Healing Circles Langley has more than 20 volunteers willing to give time each week to listen to their neighbors. Over the ten years of offering circles of two, there have been only a handful of times when hosts felt like they might not be up to the task. Yet each time, the right person with the right training and the right heart was there. The connection was made and the circle continued.

## Please note

At Healing Circles, the foundation of our circles is built on the authenticity of those who host them—with each host bringing their unique voice, personal perspective, and lived experience to the space. Healing Circles hosts and guardians are independent circle organizers. Their statements, opinions, and impressions are their own and do not represent the views of Healing Circles Global or Commonweal.