

# Finding Balance

## Understanding and Optimizing Your Stress System After Deployment

Former title: Resilience 101



## Suggestions for Facilitators

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# Finding Balance

## Suggestions for Facilitators

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**Cover Photo:** National Guard SSG Joel Dalton cradles his seven-week old daughter Camden before boarding a plane to deploy to Iraq from Pope Air Force Base, N.C., on Oct. 6, 2004. Dalton serves with the 105th Military Police Battalion, North Carolina National Guard. DoD photo by TSgt. Brian Christiansen, U.S. Air Force. (Released)

## Finding Balance

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# What is *Finding Balance*?

*Finding Balance: Understanding and Optimizing Your Stress System After Deployment* is a series that includes three psychoeducational and skill-training tools:

- Workbook for service members and veterans
- Workbook for military families
- Quick guide for service members and veterans

The *Finding Balance* series (formerly called *Resilience 101*) has been developed to combat some of the biggest challenges that service members and veterans face if they have mild, moderate, or severe combat/operational or post-deployment stress effects:

- A powerful sense of shame and self-stigma concerning deployment stress effects, injuries, and illnesses, based on a belief that these effects mean they're "crazy," weak, cowardly, etc.
- Difficulty understanding their reactions—particularly physiological reactions and ways in which memory is affected—leading them to interpret these effects in severe and frightening ways
- Fear that any deployment stress effects must mean they'll lose their usefulness or their military careers
- An often paralyzing lack of hope for their own recovery, mixed with a lack of confidence in the prospect of undergoing therapy or treatment

**Many courageous, intelligent, resourceful men and women have died because they needed more help in overcoming these challenges.**

*Finding Balance* takes a very small slice of the deployment stress experience—the shame, confusion, and fear of deployment stress effects—explores possible solutions, and provides resources and an invitation to learn more. It's a series of materials designed to help returning service members, veterans, and their families:

- Understand the physical "engine" that drives post-deployment stress effects, so their thoughts and feelings will make sense to them and they can stop feeling "crazy"
- De-stigmatize those effects, to reduce their sense of shame and make it easier to seek and accept help
- Learn skills that will help them increase their sense of psychological safety and improve their ability to regulate their stress systems
- Increase their sense of hope and confidence about the processes of recovery and re-balancing
- Become more comfortable with the idea of seeking help, and more knowledgeable about the kinds of help that are available

## Materials in this Series

At the center of *Finding Balance* is a 72-page workbook designed to serve two main purposes:

- As a workbook that service members and veterans can use alone (as a self-study guide), with other service members or veterans, or as a tool in individual or group therapy or treatment
- As a content study guide for therapists, trainers, and peer mentors who plan to teach service members and veterans about: 1) their stress systems and 2) concepts and skills of balance and resilience (in individual or group therapy, classroom settings, or mentoring sessions)

The workbook begins and ends with a brief (7-question) survey, to measure the effects and acceptability of these materials.

The *Finding Balance: Quick Guide for Service Members and Veterans* is a 16-page pocket-sized booklet that touches briefly on the concepts addressed in the workbook. It also includes two brief portraits of individuals who experienced post-deployment stress effects, one with mild and temporary effects and one who successfully transcended posttraumatic stress disorder with the help of appropriate treatment.

The *Finding Balance* workbook for Military Families is a 72-page workbook whose structure and content parallel those of the service members' and veterans' workbook, with information customized for families. It addresses:

- Concepts of resilience, stress, and threat; the aftereffects of these experiences; and resilience skills as they apply to service members and veterans, **and** to members of military families
- In the "Relationships" section, suggestions for navigating long-distance relationships, dealing with expectations in the homecoming process, and communicating with loved ones after their return from deployment

## What *Finding Balance* is Not

When it comes to conditions as serious as deployment stress effects can be, any potentially helpful resource can become unhelpful—or harmful—if it is misinterpreted. The author has taken care to qualify statements and provide clarification and distinction statements.

Even so, people in general—and people under great stress in particular—tend to skim, gloss things over, and miss important words and phrases when they read. So if you're guiding service members, veterans, or family members through the use of these materials, one of your most important tasks will be to head off misunderstanding before it has any chance to misdirect people.

*Finding Balance* does not pretend to be, and should not be represented or interpreted as, a complete explanation of deployment stress effects or a substitute for therapy or treatment:

- The two workbooks make it clear that their focus on the physiological reactions that fuel deployment stress effects is **not** meant to imply that these effects are purely physical, or that their physical aspects are their most important facets.
- The final section of each workbook (“Training, Help, and Support”) is devoted to a brief exploration of some of the types of treatment and skill-training services that are available, complete with a checklist that people can bring to their service providers’ offices to learn more about what to expect.

The first section of the *Finding Balance* workbook for service members and veterans includes a detailed discussion of some things that the workbook is **not**. That discussion is reprinted here:

| What This Guide is <u>not</u>   | Why?  |
|---|---|
| A complete explanation of deployment stress effects—or even the most important aspect of deployment stress effects. | These effects take place on many levels of the human being—including the body, the brain, thought and belief systems, emotions, relationships, and spirituality. This workbook puts its main focus on the physical stress system, rooted in the central nervous system and the brain, but affecting many areas of the body, mind, emotions, etc. You might think of the stress system as the “engine” that drives the intensity of many reactions to (or after) intense stress or threat. But it’s definitely not the whole picture. It’s just a good place to start. |
| Just about PTSD   | There’s a wide range of deployment stress effects. PTSD is one of them—one of the most troubling—but it’s not the only thing this workbook is about. So even if you just have some mild effects, or very different effects, your stress system is probably involved. <i>Finding Balance</i> can help you understand and regulate your stress system, which can help you deal with those effects.  |
| Therapy or medical help   | <i>Finding Balance</i> combines some basic education about resilience and the stress system with some training in a selection of resilience skills—skills in balancing your stress system. Although it’s a very useful tool for a therapeutic process—and is being used in some support and treatment programs for service members and veterans—it’s not therapy or medicine. It doesn’t have to be led by a therapist. You can use the workbook by yourself or with someone else you know and trust.   |

| What This Guide is <u>not</u>  | Why?  |
|--|---|
| A substitute for therapy or medical help   | Since these stress effects reach into so much of the human experience, a workbook like this can't address all the challenges that all service members and veterans face. If you're not sure if you need professional help, <i>Finding Balance</i> can be a good step in finding out and preparing for help. You can also find out about the different kinds of help that are available, and which ones fit your goals and where you are right now. <b>If you're in crisis or in danger of hurting yourself or someone else, please get medical or mental health care.</b> |
| Another bunch of checklists you'll have to fill out  | Service members and veterans have way too many checklists to fill out as it is. If you're on "checklist overload," you can just read the text, use any of the tools you want to, and ignore the rest or save them for later.  |
| A "cure" for flashbacks, nightmares, night terrors, and memories or feelings that crash in on you out of nowhere | For many people, these challenges are rooted in the way the brain naturally records and "plays back" memories of heavy stress and threat. Learning to regulate your stress system won't change that, but it can put you in a better place to deal with these challenges when they come up. And if you decide to get professional help for the memory effects of PTSD, knowing how to regulate your stress system can make that process easier and more effective.   |

By helping people keep these distinctions clear, you'll be adding to their safety and helping them consider the whole spectrum of help and resources they might need.

# Finding Balance

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# What does it include?

There are two workbooks in this series: the *Finding Balance: Understanding and Optimizing Your Stress System After Deployment* workbook for service members and veterans, and the *Finding Balance* workbook for military families. Though their contents are tailored to the needs and perspectives of their respective audiences, both workbooks have the same basic structure:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Quick Survey Before You Start .....      | ii  |
| A Tool to Start Off With: Grounding..... | iii |

### Sections:

|  |      |
|--|------|
| 1. This Workbook .....                   | 1-1  |
| 2. Resilience .....                      | 2-1  |
| 3. The Body Under Stress.....            | 3-1  |
| 4. Overwatch and the Survival Brain..... | 4-1  |
| 5. The Human Chemistry Set.....          | 5-1  |
| 6. What Happens to Memories?.....        | 6-1  |
| 7. Deployment Stress Effects.....        | 7-1  |
| 8. The Underlying Power .....            | 8-1  |
| 9. Thoughts and Feelings .....           | 9-1  |
| 10. Relationships .....                  | 10-1 |
| 11. Mission and Purpose .....            | 11-1 |
| 12. Training, Help, and Support .....    | 12-1 |
| One More Survey .....                    | X    |

### Appendices:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| A. Acknowledgments.....                                | A-1 |
| B. Tips for Getting Better Sleep .....                 | B-1 |
| C. More About the Brain .....                          | C-1 |
| D. Web Sites With Information, Help, and Support ..... | D-1 |

There's also a pocket-sized 16-page "quick guide" for service members and veterans, with six short chapters:

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| The Body .....   | 3  |
| The Impact ..... | 5  |
| Survival .....   | 7  |
| Balance .....    | 9  |
| Training .....   | 11 |

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# Ways of Using *Finding Balance*

The *Finding Balance* series was designed to be flexible enough to use in a number of ways, and in a number of settings. Most of the suggestions presented below are directed toward service providers and skill trainers, but some are also relevant to peer mentors:

### In Assessment or Treatment Priming

There's strong anecdotal evidence that stigma and shame tempt many service members and veterans to minimize their symptoms in assessment processes and reject or postpone treatment for their post-deployment stress effects.

- What if they received a one-hour general orientation to the stress system and the skills of resilience **before** assessment? With a better understanding of the physical nature of these effects, and a stronger sense of hope and empowerment, might they be more likely to answer assessment questions honestly?
- What if service members and veterans who chose not to engage in treatment were given the option of enrolling in resilience training—for example, a four-or-five-session classroom-based course, with each session covering some key skills and concepts from *Finding Balance*? Might this training raise their awareness that they aren't the only ones experiencing these effects, make the prospect of treatment less intimidating, and give them some skills to prevent negative consequences while they're in the decision-making process?
- What if those who had no interest in classes or therapy were offered the pocket-sized *Finding Balance Quick Guide* and/or the *Finding Balance* self-study workbook, which they could use (alone or with peers) if and when they were ready?
- What if family members were offered the *Finding Balance* workbook for Military Families, to help them understand what their loved ones were experiencing and understand and manage their own reactions to stress? Might that prepare them, not only to manage their own stress more effectively, but also to be more effective catalysts of intervention into the progression of their loved ones' responses to deployment-related stress?

Experts on the needs and preferences of service members and veterans have noted that many are reluctant to engage in treatment, fearing both a long time commitment and the possible intensity of the therapeutic process. These experts believe that a training and performance-optimization format may be more acceptable to many veterans and service members—at least in the early stages—and more compatible with the military culture. *Finding Balance* takes this kind of approach. It also provides information about the major trauma-focused therapeutic approaches and encouragement to consider seeking appropriate help.

Many at the highest levels of the military are making significant headway in countering stigma toward people with combat and operational stress effects within the military culture. However, changing a culture as old, as large, and as deeply entrenched as this one is somewhat akin to changing the course of a large battleship: It takes time. Meanwhile, *Finding Balance* offers one set of tools that might help that cultural shift, and some options for people who are still unwilling to participate in anything called “therapy” or “treatment.”

### For People Awaiting Treatment Services

Even when services are readily available, there can still be the often-lengthy lengthy process of scheduling tests, refining diagnoses, determining exactly which services are needed, and navigating referrals to specialists. A classroom training or resilience discussion group might be a cost-effective way of providing some immediate help and fostering camaraderie and mutual support among peers.

### For People Whose Only Treatment is Medication

If medication is the only treatment available in a particularly remote area, it is essential to provide some sort of skill-based assistance. If no individual therapy is available, a classroom training might be cost-effective. If classroom training is out of the question, provision of the workbooks and quick guide would at least be one way of introducing the skill-building and self-help process.

### As a Psychoeducation Tool Within Treatment or Therapy

These materials offer a framework, general information about the stress system and resilience, and more information and guidance on skills that service members and veterans can develop and use—both in the therapeutic process and on their own. They might be used in individual or service-member-or-veteran-specific group sessions, or in psychoeducation classes. Questions in the workbook exercises could be used to foster discussion.

There are 12 sections, each one four pages long. The first section prepares the reader for use of the workbook, and the remainder focus on specific topics, with each topic including information about the way the human body and mind stay resilient and respond to moderate stress; the way the body rallies to handle extreme stress and threat; and the effects that can set in later, particularly when the immediate threat has subsided.

The length of time required to use these materials will depend on the length of time available to devote to them. For example, in a training or psychoeducation program they might be used for:

- A one-session general overview, with each participant taking home a copy of the materials
- Several sessions that include training in all the skills described in the workbook
- A psychoeducational series addressing one or more topics in each session, perhaps focusing on specific topics that participants would like to learn about or address

- A self-study program, in which individual participants choose the sections and topics they want to learn about, in the order in which they want to learn them

Although the *Finding Balance* workbook is an educational document rather than a form of therapy, these materials can also be used in traditional therapeutic processes. Many of the concepts and tools it contains or suggests (e.g., grounding, mindfulness, responses to triggers) are used in a number of therapeutic approaches. Explanations and exercises in the workbook might be used in individual or group therapy sessions or taken home to be used as “homework” or to cement gains made during sessions.

### As a Tool for Peer Mentors or Peer-Led Rap or Recovery Groups

Since these materials are presented in an informational rather than a therapeutic format, they wouldn't require the presence of a therapist. What the use of these materials might accomplish in a peer-led group or mentorship is:

- Steer the discussion away from an exclusive focus on war memories and traumatic material
- Introduce an understanding of the stress system and provide motivation to learn and practice the skills of resilience
- Provide concrete examples of things people can do right away.

And as mentioned before, the materials also put in several subtle “plugs” for the idea of receiving appropriate professional help.

### Two Requests for Providers and Mentors Who Use *Finding Balance*

Because these products were developed without funding, no printed copies are available. However, all these documents can be downloaded for free from:

**<https://sites.google.com/site/humanprioritiesorg/home/resilience-101>**

Volunteers and professionals who use these materials to work with service members, veterans, or family members are encouraged to:

- Contact the author, Pamela Woll, MA, CADP at [pamelawoll@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pamelawoll@sbcglobal.net), to let her know how you're using these materials, with whom, and in what kinds of settings
- Use the “quick survey” pages at the beginning and end of the workbooks to measure the effects and acceptability of these materials and processes, and share the results (but not the identities of those filling out the surveys) with the author

For these resources to have their best effects, the author needs to learn as much as possible about how they're being used, who seems to respond well to them, what's working and what's not, what can be improved, and what types of materials are needed beyond what's already available. The more information you can provide, the more helpful it will be.

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# Preparation for Civilian Providers

For the civilian preparing to work with service members or veterans challenged by post-deployment stress effects, or with the families of service members or veterans, one of the central things to remember is that you're preparing to work with a very different and clearly defined culture, one of which many civilians have little or no knowledge or experience.

Only someone who has lived in the presence of war can truly understand the experience of war. But each of us has had difficult and intense life experiences that can inform and deepen our understanding of stress, trauma, and healing and our ability to respond effectively. So although there will be many times when only someone who has "been there" can fill the need, there is still a significant role for well prepared civilian clinicians in this effort.

The first prerequisite for effective work with this or any other population is humility: a willingness to accept the limits of our own knowledge and experience and to learn from the people who seek our help. Any civilian who wants to provide therapy or skill training for service members, veterans, and their families first needs solid training in, and study of:

- The nature of resilience and the nature of trauma
- The variety of deployment and post-deployment effects, injuries, and illnesses
- The military culture
- The experience of war, particularly our current wars
- The demographics and common characteristics of service members, veterans, and family members
- Common reasons for enlisting, and for wanting to return to the war zone later
- Attitudes toward deployment stress effects, and toward the treatment of these effects, within the military culture
- Implications of all these factors for the therapeutic process and relationship
- The variety of options that are available for treatment of trauma, and the evidence of their effectiveness with service members, veterans, and their families
- Skills of self-care that will make the process of providing help safer and more effective

Without that knowledge and those skills, even the most skillful and compassionate helper can:

- At best, scare the service member, veteran, or family member away (and leave him/her less likely to seek help in the future)
- At worst, inflict unintended psychological harm

It's important to be open and curious about the individual service member, veteran, or family member and his or her experiences and realities, abandoning any stereotypes and assumptions. Service members and veterans in particular are awash in stereotypes within the civilian culture. Though some of these stereotypes are flattering, they all increase the sense of isolation that makes connection, reintegration, wellness, and healing so difficult.

Also essential is an understanding of your own experience of trauma, and a record of progress and stability in the conscious process of addressing and resolving any issues attached to that realm of experience. Having these issues consciously and effectively addressed might help you:

- Connect with the service member, veteran, or family member on the level of the common and universal human experience of stress and trauma
- Stay away from assumptions that your experiences are equivalent, or even similar, especially if you've never been to war
- Remember that the resources that have helped you overcome your challenges will not necessarily work for the service member, veteran, or family member sitting before you

Many excellent books, articles, and training programs exist that can give you an introduction to the body of information you'll need to absorb to work most effectively with these populations. As a start—though only a small piece of the study that's needed—the author offers her own manual, *Finding Balance After the War Zone: Considerations in the Treatment of Post-Deployment Stress Effects*. That manual is available for free download at:

<https://sites.google.com/site/humanprioritiesorg/home/finding-balance-after-the-war-zone-2>

### Study Multiple Resources and Approaches

Whatever resources you choose to consult, it's important to remember that no single book or manual provides all the information you'll need to provide the most effective services. There is no single approach that works best for everyone, with every collection of post-deployment effects, at every stage problem development, and at every stage of the healing process. It's important to:

- **Take a strength-based approach**, beginning with a thorough resilience inventory, and looking for and identifying strengths throughout the entire process.
- **Take a safety-based approach**, giving the individual as much control as possible and identifying and addressing any hazards to physical or psychological safety—in the approaches used, in the environment in which the process takes place, and in the community or home environment.
- **Listen to the individual**, including and especially his or her own goals, wishes, priorities, fears, and beliefs about the effectiveness of various approaches. People tend to make the best progress with approaches that aim them toward their own goals, and with approaches they believe will be effective for them.
- **Look for evidence of safety and effectiveness with these populations**, when you explore or consider a particular approach.
- **Give people options and choices**, presenting the range of approaches you think might work for them, explaining the potential benefits and drawbacks of each one, laying out the evidence for each one's effectiveness, and giving them the power to choose—and to change course if a particular approach isn't working or is doing harm.

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# A Few Notes on Terminology

The *Finding Balance* workbooks and quick guide are written in a casual, colloquial style, but they've been developed very carefully and deliberately. The author is an unabashed fan of the many experts who write and speak in the field of trauma and the realm of the service member and veteran—including the service members and veterans themselves.

Just about everything in *Finding Balance* has come from the writings and the lectures of these people, who have given their time, efforts, and expertise with great dedication. These experts have expressed—and have shown amazing consensus concerning—a number of major considerations for providing safe and effective information and assistance to people returning from the war zone. These considerations have guided the terminology used in *Finding Balance*:

- Service members and veterans may be wary of therapeutic processes. Their perceptions of these processes include the assumption that they'll be asked to do many things that are frightening, painful, and frowned upon within the military culture (like talking about their feelings—or having feelings at all—and dwelling on painful memories). But they are interested in training, and a “performance optimization” model is compatible with the military culture. So the education and skill training in this model have been presented in these terms, with special attention to preparation for other levels of help, for those who need those services.
- Service members and veterans are smart people, with far higher percentages of high school graduates than in the general population. They are also acutely aware of the civilian stereotypes that often dismiss them as uneducated and unintelligent. So, though the *Finding Balance* workbook and quick guide have been written in a casual and colloquial style, and the workbook can serve as a sort of primer on the stress system and the concept of resilience, these materials have not been “dumbed down.” They assume intelligence on the part of the reader.
- Service members and veterans with challenging deployment-related stress effects are often afraid that their symptoms mean they are “crazy,” weak, or cowardly. They need language that is absolutely value-neutral, non-stigmatizing, and non-pathologizing. So, for example, *Finding Balance* often uses the terms “threat” or “intense experiences” instead of “trauma.” The major focus is on the stress system, with frequent attention to the fact that this system is the physical “engine” that drives the intensity of most deployment stress effects. Rather than the term “recovery” or “healing,” the author tends to use terms such as “getting your stress system back in balance.” There is also no hint of the term “victim,” or even of the term “survivor.”

- There is a dangerous tendency to label all post-deployment stress effects in terms of PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) and to set up a paradigm in which people either have PTSD or don't need any help at all. This denies the entire continuum on which post-deployment stress effects fall, and the wide variety of types of effects that we see. People may choose to deny the existence of challenges because they fear finding out that their challenges are extreme and "incurable." So in *Finding Balance*, the author uses the more inclusive terms "combat/operational stress effects" and "deployment stress effects," makes it clear that there is a wide range of types and intensity of effects, and gives examples of the range of effects.
- Terms such as "warrior" or "hero" are often better left to the discretion and interpretation of people who have been there and the people who have waited at home. In most cases, more neutral terms such as "service members," "veterans," and "buddies" are used in these materials.

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## About the Author

Pamela Woll, MA, CADP is a Chicago-based consultant in writing, training, and instructional development. She is Director of Human Priorities and a partner and consultant to the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC). Many of her materials can be downloaded for free from the Human Priorities web site:

[www.humanpriorities.com](http://www.humanpriorities.com) or <http://xrl.us/humanpriorities>

Pam has been writing books and manuals in addiction treatment, prevention, mental health, and other human service fields since 1989, on topics including stigma reduction, strength-based treatment, resilience, trauma, depression, cultural competence, addicted families, violence, and disaster human services.

Since 2002, Pam has been developing and increasing her focus on trauma, and since 2007 her strongest concentration has been on the needs of service members and veterans. In this realm, she is the author of:

- The *Finding Balance* series, published by Human Priorities
- *Finding Balance: Considerations in the Treatment of Post-deployment Stress Effects*, a manual for clinicians co-published by Human Priorities and the Great Lakes ATTC
- *The Power and Price of Survival: Understanding Resilience, Stress, and Trauma*, a workbook for general audiences published by Human Priorities

She is also the primary author of the “America’s Best” series created for and published by Give an Hour™ and the National Organization on Disability, which includes the following resources for employers and educators:

- *Teaching America’s Best: Preparing Your Classrooms to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members*
- *Hiring America’s Best: Preparing Your Workplace to Welcome Returning Veterans and Service Members*
- *Preparing America’s Best: Twelve Leaders Offer Suggestions for Educating, Training, and Employing Returning Veterans and Service Members*
- *Learning About America’s Best: Resources on Educating, Training, and Hiring Returning Veterans and Service Members*
- *Tools for America’s Best: Resources for Educators, Trainers, and Employers on Returning Veterans and Service Members.*

Pam is also the author of many manuals, curricula, and booklets written for a variety of organizations, including *Healing the Stigma of Addiction: A Guide for Treatment Professionals*, published by the Great Lakes ATTC; *Healing the Stigma of Depression: A Guide for Helping Professionals*, published by the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center and the Great Lakes ATTC; and the self-help booklet, *How to Get the Piranhas Out of Your Head* and the accompanying *Piranha Workbook* and *Piranha Leader's Guide*, published by Human Priorities.

Her other works include two books:

- *Worth Protecting: Women, Men and Freedom from Sexual Aggression* (with second author Terence T. Gorski), published by Herald House/Independence Press
- *The Call to Write: An Invitation to Aspiring Writers* (with first author William L. White), published by Lighthouse Institute, Chestnut Health Systems

One of her current and most intriguing projects is a web-based tool for service members, veterans, and their family members, bringing some of the *Finding Balance* concepts to life. She is creating this tool for the Postgraduate Medical Education program at Massachusetts General Hospital. Check the Human Priorities web site (<http://xrl.us/humanpriorities>) for more information on the availability of this resource.

Pam is fascinated with everything about resilience, the brain, the effects of stress and trauma, and the healing/recovery process. She is also determined to do whatever she can to affirm the strength, dignity, courage, and viability of people who live with and overcome the effects of trauma, substance use disorders, and mental illness. Attitudes of shame and blame toward people with these conditions are destructive, irrational, and unnecessary. If we work together, we can replace these attitudes with clear understanding, acceptance, and respect.