

Ready, Set, **Re-Set**

An Important Letter from the NPI Board

To our valued NPI members:

We, the current board of NPI, are reaching out today with a letter of recommitment to our mission and purpose as an organization. In particular, we are committed to better aligning our actions and priorities with our values, including explicit commitment to being an organization that is actively opposed to racism and all other forms of oppression as well as actively striving to cultivate and foster communities of equity, diversity, and compassion (what Dr. Martin Luther King referred to as “the Beloved Community.”) To speak plainly: we commit to being an organization that is anti-racist and anti-oppression.

“The first problem for all of us... is not to learn, but to unlearn.” - Gloria Steinem

The purposes of the Nashville Psychotherapy Institute, as written on our website are:

1. The promotion and sponsorship of post-graduate continuing education programs for practicing psychotherapists who are licensed or certified in one of the following professions: Marriage and Family Therapy, Pastoral Counseling and Psychotherapy, Professional Counseling, Psychiatric Counseling, Psychiatry, Psychology, Social Work and Substance Abuse Counseling.
2. The promotion of interdisciplinary dialogue and support among the various psychotherapeutic professions.
3. Cooperation in sponsoring and promoting continuing education activities in psychotherapy.

How has NPI performed in attending to these purposes? In our observation, we have performed these purposes well over the years since our founding in 1985. However, the Board feels we have been falling short with regard to the second purpose.

In a world where we can attend any number of quality continuing education offerings via our computer screens, we may miss the human connection. The true purpose of coming together is to *come together*. Connection. Belonging. NPI was created by therapists, for the care of therapists. This organization’s purpose is ultimately about caring for one another and our shared community. And this is where we’ve inadequately fulfilled our purpose.

We have, essentially, promoted dialogue and support among the various psychotherapy (and adjacent) professionals... *in private practice*. In many ways, we have become the *Nashville Primarily White/Straight/Upper-Middle Class Psychotherapists In Private Practice Institute*. And let us be clear— it is not wrong to want our members to do well for themselves. It is not wrong to be compensated well for this challenging (and at times downright weird) work. But it was never

our goal to become exclusive.

With intermittent and limited exceptions (and despite concerted and recurrent efforts), we remain on the whole, an organization of privilege. While this fact is not surprising (considered historically and situationally), it inevitably should prompt a follow-up question: how are we effectively leveraging this preponderance of privilege to the safety and benefit of therapists in marginalized communities?

Recently, the entire board was involved in a training with Ashley Hampton, Executive Director of Healing in the Margins (and Co-Founder + Clinical Director of Hampton House Counseling) to examine our functioning, begin to have hard conversations, and— in the language of ACT— take committed action that is consistent with our values. In the language of technology, we are pressing restart.

Ten years ago Roy Hutton, PhD (one of NPI's founders), in concert with Renee Burwell LCSW, MPA, CST, wrote the following statement of our core values. It reads as follows:

We are:

Licensed Mental Health professionals trained in the science and practice of psychotherapy. We are knowledgeable of internal and external causes of emotional suffering and the best tools for reducing that suffering. We collaborate with physicians, clergy, educators and other professionals who are trained and committed to reducing the emotional suffering and trauma of our patients, clients, congregations, or students.

We believe:

Emotional suffering is most prevalent and most damaging to those with the fewest resources to cope. The circumstances of poverty, racial, sexual or age discrimination and injustice are traumatizing and impact the safety and health of society. Poverty limits the ability to move from toxic and degraded environments. Psychotherapy is a professional tool for reducing individual, family, and community stress. We have skills that are the result of extensive training. Those must be joined to the common experiential knowledge of those we serve.

Expertise in the psychological dimensions of life must include an understanding of public issues that create, support, or worsen our psychological well-being. We have an ethical duty to learn and teach about the social causes of mental illness and the victimization of the marginalized.

We are lifelong learners who must continually examine our conceptual and our professional assumptions of mental illness. We are committed to ethical behavior toward all who suffer emotional pain and are convinced that we must be aware of the environment that contributes to that pain in individuals, families, and communities. We advocate for inclusion, equality, justice, and nurturing of the environment.

We will, therefore:

According to our individual means, provide the benefits of our psychological knowledge to those who do not have adequate access by making that knowledge affordable. We will recognize any opportunity to remediate the systemic injustice of poverty and racial discrimination.

Address that we are the privileged and recognize the naiveté that flows from that privilege concerning people who are marginalized.

Commit ourselves to continuing education in the ways our social system victimizes the marginalized and in ways we can repair that damage.

When we have opportunity, make public statements in support of equality, justice, and community for all human beings, for their animal companions, and for the environment in which we live and upon which our health, safety, and very existence depends.

Look for particular, local, useful ways to address these societal issues in our work with our patients/clients, in our study and with our colleagues.

Therefore: the Board unequivocally re-commits to these values. We commit to telling one another when we are transgressing against others, particularly micro-transgressions, receiving this feedback, and educating ourselves to understand and resolve to do better. We recognize we do not know what we need to know. We recognize the need to listen. We, as mostly folks who carry quite a lot of privilege, recognize the responsibility to initiate relationships with and protect the needs of our Black, brown, and queer colleagues and friends. We recognize our freedom is bound up in the liberation of all. We recognize our need for both safety and discomfort.

We commit to publicly prioritizing and centering this effort. Our effort must be sustained. In any of our lifetimes, we will not *finish* this work.

We recognize that true commitment to this work is not convenient. It will bring up discomfort consistently, and it will require ongoing contributions of time and energy from many people. And of course, it is also *more than inconvenient* to exist in a society that consistently harms you in both large and small ways, and then makes it nearly impossible to access resources needed to heal that harm. It is *more than inconvenient* to have to seek a restroom while fearing mocking, harassment, or worse. It is *more than inconvenient* to receive legal counsel to adopt your own children because your rights as a parent may be taken from you. It is *more than inconvenient* to live in a place where sites of chattel slavery are now party venues. And so we— especially those among us holding the most privilege amongst our various identities— do not see the inconvenience of this mission as reason to hesitate.

We do not know all of what this will look like. We recognize that living with integrity is more important than tradition. While we know this will involve increasing access to NPI's membership

and offerings for those with less privilege, we have yet to get into the weeds of HOW this will happen— we simply know that it must, and we are willing to get creative and do what it takes to move consistently in the direction of our values. And to take accountability when we, individually and as an organization, inevitably screw up or get something wrong.

We say this publicly to hold ourselves accountable. We need to listen. We must initiate. We must do better.

While it felt important for us to distribute this communication clearly and swiftly, we know this is only the first step of an evolving, ongoing effort that we plan to thread through every aspect of NPI. We welcome your thoughts, feelings, questions, feedback, and ideas.

In the spirit of equity, justice, and love,

The Board Members of NPI

*“I have long since come to believe that people never mean half of what they say, and that it is best to disregard their talk and judge only their actions.”
--Dorothy Day*

“To sit on the front steps — whether it’s a veranda in a small town or a concrete stoop in a big city — and to talk to our neighborhoods is infinitely more important than to huddle on the living-room lounge and watch a make-believe world in not-quite living color.” -- Harvey Milk

“The process of empowerment cannot be simplistically defined in accordance with our own particular class interests. We must learn to lift as we climb.” --Angela Davis

“True belonging has no bunkers. We have to step out from behind the barricades of self-preservation and brave the wild.”¹-- Brene Brown

“I love my family, even as I critique their dysfunctionalities.” --bell hooks

¹ [ed. note: per Brene Brown, *braving the wilderness* = “to stand alone in our integrity” Brown, B. (2019). *Braving the Wilderness: the quest for true belonging and the courage to stand alone*]