

# NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2022 | ISSUE #3

E-NEWSLETTER FROM THE DESK OF JODI STREICH, Ph.D. - MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR



## WHAT'S INSIDE

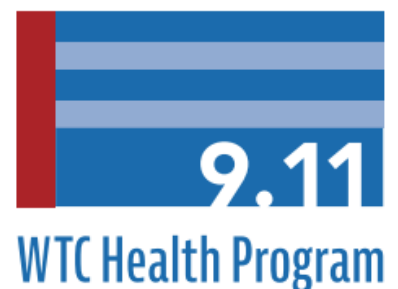
A MESSAGE FROM OUR MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR  
STRESS REDUCTION TECHNIQUES

**NEW!** -FALL 2022 GROUPS

**NEW!** -MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT SERIES

9/11 EVENTS IN NYC

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH





A MESSAGE FROM OUR MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTOR

# GREETINGS EVERYONE!



The Rutgers World Trade Center Health Program Clinical Center of Excellence continues to remain committed to your ongoing physical and mental health needs at this time. We want to encourage all of you to make your annual monitoring appointment. We miss seeing all of you and look forward to your next visit!

The ongoing need for social connectedness continues to greatly impact our mental and physical wellbeing. This need for social connectedness has existed throughout humanity and this pandemic has driven the point home and has affected each and every one of us. One way of dealing with social connectedness is our experience of belonging to a social relationship, group, or community. As we move towards the many shifts in society, one thing remains a constant: Human Connections.

September 11, 2022 marked the milestone of the 21st anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. We want you to know that we will never forget, and we continue to stand right by your side. Being proactive and reconnecting with friends and family or building new relationships can help stave off your increased loneliness at this time. We invite you to make your well-being a priority and try new activities to build fulfilling human connections. Now is the time where this is more possible than ever before. Within our unique population and shared trauma, more and more people are recognizing just how interconnected we are and the kind of importance that we make in each other's lives. Know your strength and recognize your own impact on one another. You are not alone. We look forward to seeing you soon. Thank you all for your continued service.

**J O D I S T R E I C H , P H . D .**  
**M E N T A L H E A L T H D I R E C T O R**

# 25 QUICK WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS

Taking care of your long-term mental and physical health  
is an important part of stress management.

However, there isn't always time to take a nap, hike a fourteener, or read a novel.

Thus, here are **25 ways to reduce stress in five minutes or less.**

From eating chocolate to meditating, there is a quick stress-relieving tactic for everyone.



## 1. BREATHE

Slow, deep breaths can help lower blood pressure and heart rate.  
Try pranayama breathing, a yogic method that involves breathing  
through one nostril at a time to relieve anxiety.

The technique is supposed to work the same way as acupuncture,  
balancing the mind and body.



## 2. LISTEN TO MUSIC

No matter what the song, sometimes belting out the lyrics  
to a favorite tune makes everything seem all right.

If you're in a public place, just listening to music can be a  
quick fix for a bad mood.

Classical music can be especially relaxing right before bedtime.



## 3. TAKE A QUICK WALK

When you're feeling overwhelmed or having trouble  
concentrating, go for a quick stroll around the block.

You'll get the benefits of alone time, physical activity, and  
a few minutes to gather your thoughts.



# 25 QUICK WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS

CONTINUED...

## 4. FIND THE SUN

If it is a sunny day, head outside for an easy way to lift your spirits.

Bright light can be an effective treatment for people who suffer from depression, and can even cheer up otherwise healthy people.



## 5. GIVE YOURSELF A HAND MASSAGE

When there's no professional masseuse in sight, try giving yourself a hand massage for instant relaxation. Hands in general can carry a lot of tension.

## 6. COUNT BACKWARDS

When worries are running rampant, try slowly counting to 10 and then back again to calm down. It's harder to freak out when you're busy remembering what number comes before seven.



## 7. STRETCH

Standing up for a quick stretch can relieve muscle tension and help you relax during a stressful workday. Try a shoulder roll-out or a chest-opening stretch right from the desk chair.

## 8. RUB YOUR FEET OVER A GOLF BALL

You can get an impromptu, relaxing foot massage by rubbing your feet back and forth over a golf ball



## 9. CLOSE YOUR EYES

Take a quick break from a busy office or a chaotic household by just lowering your eyelids. It's an easy way to regain calm and focus.

## 10. SQUEEZE A STRESS BALL

On days when you want to strangle a coworker, your roommate, or the driver in the next lane, squeeze a stress ball instead. It's an easy, portable, and non-violent way to relieve tension.



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# 25 *QUICK WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS* CONTINUED...

## 11. TRY PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Anxious? Just squeeze, release, and repeat. Progressive relaxation involves tensing the muscles in one body part at a time to achieve a state of calm.

The method is a great way to help fall asleep.



## 12. BE ALONE

Five minutes of alone time can help you collect your thoughts and clear your head.

## 13. GET ORGANIZED

Clutter could be contributing to your stress. Take a few minutes to reorganize your desk, leaving just what you need on top.



## 14. DO SOME YOGA

Put your feet up—against the wall, of course. The Vipariti Kirani yoga pose involves lying on the floor and resting the legs up against a wall. Not only does it give the body a good stretch, but it helps create peace of mind, too.

## 15. EAT SOME CHOCOLATE

Just a square can calm your nerves. Dark chocolate regulates levels of the stress hormone cortisol and stabilizes metabolism.



## 16. MEDITATE

Five minutes is all it takes to reap the benefits of meditation. There's evidence that just two quick sessions of meditation per day can relieve stress and depression. Find a comfortable spot in a quiet place, focus on your breath, and feel those anxieties start to disappear.

## 17. CUDDLE WITH A PET

After a rough day, snuggle up with a pet. Pets can boost self-esteem and peace of mind.



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# 25 QUICK WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS CONTINUED...

## 18. CHEW GUM

A stick of gum is a surprisingly quick and easy way to beat stress. No matter the flavor, just a few minutes of chewing can reduce anxiety and lower cortisol levels.



## 19. SIP GREEN TEA

Green tea is a source of L-Theanine, a chemical that helps relieve anger. Boil the water, pour it out, and take a soothing sip.

## 20. LAUGH

There is science behind it! A good laugh can increase blood flow and boost the immune system!



## 21. DRIP COLD WATER ON YOUR WRISTS

When stress hits, run some cold water on your wrists and behind your earlobes. There are major arteries underneath the skin, cooling these areas can help calm the whole body.

## 22. CREATE A ZEN ZONE

Find a space that's completely stress free where you can go to relax. Set up a comfortable chair, light some incense and disappear there for a few minutes until the tension dissipates.



## 23. WRITE IT DOWN

Putting our emotions on paper can make them seem less intimidating. Try journaling to calm your nerves.

## 24. EAT SOME HONEY

Besides being a natural skin moisturizer and antibiotic, honey also provides compounds that reduce inflammation in the brain, meaning it fights depression and anxiety.



## 25. TALK TO A FRIEND

When something is really bothering you, it can help to share your feelings. Find someone you can trust to share what's on your mind.



★ **NEW** ★

# MENTAL HEALTH SPOTLIGHT SERIES

September 2022 Features:

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FIREFIGHTER

**Interview with Captain Lathey Wirkus**

&

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF  
A PORT AUTHORITY POLICE OFFICER

**Interview with Detective Frank Accardi**

CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE 

Are you interested in being in our spotlight series in the future?

Please contact: [wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu](mailto:wtchp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu).

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FIREFIGHTER

## Interview with Captain Lathey Wirkus



Lathey was a deputy chief in the Elizabeth Fire Department, where he worked for 36 years. During September 11th, when he was a captain of his department, he worked through the night into the next day and was there for three days, his department was at Ground Zero for a week. He is currently retired from the Elizabeth Fire Department and is pursuing other interests. He currently lives in New Jersey where his wife works in EMS and his son is a captain in a rescue unit.

The following is a brief Q&A about Lathey and his time in emergency services:

**Q:** How did you get into this line of work? How did you know this is what you wanted to do?

**A:** "I've always wanted to be a firefighter. When I was 8 years old, I would go to the firehouses in Union, NJ. The guys would show me how to make a military bed with perfect corners, and gave me a full set of turnout gear. I was having trouble in math so the guys got together and hired a tutor to help me improve. And it worked! These guys showed me how to be a man, and how to be a firefighter.

In 1977, I enlisted in the army national guard and I was trained as a combat medic after basic training. That really got me hooked in emergency services work"

**Q:** What do you like most about your job, what parts of your mission did you connect to the most?

**A:** "Helping people on the worst day of their lives. It was a great feeling when the bell would ring and out the door we go to help someone in need. I got on the job in 1981 when there were still fire alarm boxes on each corner, when someone had an emergency, a bell would ring in the firehouse."

**Q:** How have you grown professionally from when you first began to where you are now?

**A:** "As you move up the ladder as a boss, you unfortunately may not make the best decisions. As you gain wisdom and experience, your decisions become more organized. "

**Q:** What are some challenges related to your role and how did you overcome them?

**A:** "Many of the challenges were self-created, so I worked hard at my job in the hopes of getting better and smarter."

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**Q:** What was your biggest accomplishment?

**A:** "My biggest accomplishment was being promoted to deputy chief and working as a shift commander. I was always a tough boss but was always thinking of the safety of the battle tested warriors (firefighters). When you are out in front of a building that is on fire as an incident commander, there was a great sense of accomplishment knowing the firefighters were taking care of business. "

**Q:** What advice would you have for young candidates starting out?

**A:** "From the first day you start the job, train hard, read books about firefighting, learn your craft, and as you move up the ranks, remember that the guys are your best asset."

**Q:** What are your proudest moments looking back?

**A:** "I was able to make several high-risk rescues with the help of the guys. Unfortunately, one did not work out so well and I spent time in the Saint Barnabas burn unit. After several surgeries and a long recovery period, I was able to return to work."

**Q:** What do you like to do when you're off the job? When are you happiest?

**A:** "I like to take my boat and go fishing. I am happiest when I'm at my shore house with my wife and family"

**Q:** How do you define success?

**A:** "Overall, success for me was working with a fine-tuned team and helping people in rapid fashion with any emergency. "

**Q:** Closing remarks?

**A:** "I would like to close with this, I am grateful to Dr. Udasin and all the staff for keeping me alive, you guys are the best. A special shoutout to Jodi for helping me see things in a different light, and that gives me hope. If you responded to September 11th, 2001 and are not in the medical monitoring program, sign up today. "

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PORT AUTHORITY POLICE OFFICER

## Interview with Detective Frank Accardi



Frank is a retired Port Authority Police Detective who operated in New York and New Jersey. He retired in July 2020 and currently lives in New Jersey.

The following is a brief Q&A about Frank and his time as a Port Authority Police Officer

**Q:** How did you get into this line of work? How did you know this is what you wanted to do?

**A:** "I have always wanted to be a cop, for me it was about helping people and communities."

**Q:** What do you like most about your job, what parts of your mission did you connect to the most?

**A:** "I enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life. I liked that no day was going to be the same, there was always new situations arising."

**Q:** How have you grown professionally from when you first began to where you are now?

**A:** "I learned to be more compassionate and recognize that there is a lot of grey area and also to not bring work home with me."

**Q:** What are some challenges related to your role and how did you overcome them?

**A:** "For the first few days of 9/11, friends and families would show pictures of their loved ones asking if we have seen them. Knowing that so many families lost loved ones on 9/11, the Port Authority department tried their best to recover anything that could be recovered to the families of the victims of 9/11. Especially id cards that were found."

**Q:** What was your biggest accomplishment?

**A:** "Working at Ground Zero for 10 months with fellow officers and still being here today to enjoy my family and grandson."

**Q:** What advice would you have for young candidates starting out?

**A:** "Be honest and professional. Know what you are doing. "

**Q:** What are your proudest moments looking back?

**A:** "Becoming a port authority police officer and working with the department in the recovery of the 1993 bombing and the rescue and recovery of Ground Zero. Also being promoted to detective."

**Q:** What do you like to do when you're off the job? When are you happiest?

**A:** "I like to spend as much time as I can with my family and grandson and going to the gym. And I am happiest when I'm with my family, grandson, and friends."

**Q:** How do you define success?

**A:** "Being healthy and having a family that loves you."

**Q:** Do you have a favorite quote?

**A:** "'Don't be late for leaving early!"  
"WAM?!-What About Me (quote that was derived from ground zero)"

**Are you interested in being in our spotlight series in the future?**

**Please contact: [wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu.com](mailto:wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu.com).**



# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

## IT IMPACTS EVERYONE



Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life.

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health. Depression can increase the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for mental illness.

### POSSIBLE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- Low Mood
- Anxiety
- Increased Irritability
- Lack of Motivation
- Poor Sleep
- Avoiding Others / Isolating

**The Rutgers WTC Health Program Clinical Center of Excellence is Here to Help**

#### ANNUAL MONITORING

We provide mental health screening and monitoring on an annual basis for our patients.

#### INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Our highly trained team offers the best care either in person or virtually.

#### GROUP THERAPY

We offer a variety of therapeutic and skills based virtual groups. This is a non-judgmental, safe space where you can receive support from your peers.

*Please reach out, we are here for you.*

**Contact: [wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu.com](mailto:wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu.com).**

## Fall 2022 Virtual Groups

The WTC Mental Health team at Rutgers University will continue to offer a variety of virtual groups where you can connect, support one another, and learn new skills to promote well-being across a variety of life domains including - relationships, life transitions, physical health concerns, stress and mindfulness.

### DESCRIPTION

#### 21 Years Later: 9/11 Support Group

Individuals can collectively share their unique experiences with the support of their peers in a safe, therapeutic environment. These process groups will be held once a week.

#### 9/11-Related Cancer Support Group

This group provides a safe, therapeutic setting, where first responders can process their experiences with cancer amongst peers who have undergone similar health issues. It is a peer support group led by trained facilitators with a focus on sharing coping strategies, relating personal experiences and processing life changes due to a cancer diagnosis. There will be a 20-minute session of guided mindfulness intervention that will be introduced in this group. Group sessions are offered through a secure video platform, once a week for 75 mins.

#### Peer Retiree Support Group

This group aims to provide support around life changes related to transitions such as retirement and other personal changes. It is a peer support group led by trained facilitators with a focus on sharing coping strategies, relating personal experiences of grief and loss, and building a sense of community. Group sessions will be held through a secure video platform once a week for 60 minutes.

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anyone who is interested in receiving additional support around the 21st anniversary of 9/11. This is an OPEN group. New members are welcome to join all year long.

Anyone who has been diagnosed with a 9/11-related cancer and is interested in receiving support around this diagnosis (even if you are in remission).



Anyone who is interested in receiving support around life changes, adjustment, and transitions.

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## Fall 2022 Virtual Groups (Continued...)

### DESCRIPTION

#### Project Uplift

This is a program that teaches mental health skills along with mindfulness and meditation skills to help members cope with increased stress, anxiety, depression, or chronic health problems. You will learn information, practice activities, and engage in peer support. Group sessions will be held by phone, once a week for 60 minutes. This program runs for 8 consecutive weeks.

#### Health and Wellness Group

This group focuses on enhancing overall well-being. Topics include managing stress, maintaining good physical health, improving communication skills, sleep hygiene, nutrition, social supports, and better understanding the mind/body connection. This group meets weekly for 90 minutes.

#### Women's Support Group

This group is aimed at helping members increase resilience, confidence, empowerment and improving self-understanding through the power of interpersonal relationships. The goal is to create a vision to guide you and strengthen your sense of self, and, to develop effective coping strategies through open discussions and group feedback.

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anyone who is experiencing increased stress, anxiety, depression, or chronic health problems and is interested in learning new coping skills.



Anyone and everyone!



Female first responders.



## Fall 2022 Virtual Groups (Continued...)

### DESCRIPTION

#### Couple's Workshop

The Couples Workshop will be led by two trained facilitators. It aims to provide skills and support for you and your partner and will focus on topics such as improving communication, managing stress and increasing fun and play! The workshop consists of 4 sessions, which will be offered through a secure video platform once a week for 2 hours. Both individuals must be willing to participate.

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anyone interested in forming and maintaining a better relationship with their partner!



If you are interested in attending any of these groups, please email:

[wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu](mailto:wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu)

# COPE

MONDAY

VIRTUAL GROUP

6 – 7:30pm

Habit change | Forgiveness | Gratitude | Mindfulness | Self-exploration | Stress & anger management | Empathy | Self-care

## COPE: CHALLENGING OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

### WHAT IS THIS GROUP ABOUT?

Have you found yourself drinking or engaging in other harmful behavior? If yes, you are not alone. Social isolation due to the pandemic, dealing with existing health issues, and lock down measures have caused a great deal of stress and anxiety. For many, alcohol and substance use have become a way of coping with all of it.

### WHO IS THIS FOR?

Anyone who is interested in gaining greater self-awareness by listening to and sharing with others.

### INTRODUCING: MIKE SMITH and Jodi Streich

**Mike Smith, LMHA, LCADC, CRC** has worked in various aspects of the counseling and human service profession for over 35 years. He is licensed as a mental health and substance abuse counselor. In addition, he has extensive experience conducting various types of therapeutic group activities.

**Jodi Streich, Ph.D.** serves as the Director of Mental Health at Rutgers University World Trade Center Health Program Clinical Center of Excellence. She is responsible for the development and implementation of mental health services for the WTC first responders. Her passion and clinical focus have always been in trauma and healing. Dr. Streich also proudly serves Veterans who have suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and other mood disorders. She is dedicated to removing the stigma of mental health and normalizing the impact of traumatic events in survivors. Dr. Streich is licensed in the states of NJ and NY.

This is an open group. If you are interested in attending, please email: [wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu](mailto:wthcp-help@eohsi.rutgers.edu)

RUTGERS WORLD TRADE CENTER HEALTH PROGRAM



## MEDITATION WORKSHOPS

Meditation is considered a type of mind-body complementary medicine. Meditation can produce a deep state of relaxation and a tranquil mind. During meditation, you focus your attention and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind and causing stress. This process may result in enhanced physical and emotional well-being. Meditation can help carry you more calmly through your day and may help you manage symptoms of certain medical conditions. This group is ongoing, so it is not mandatory to attend every session.

## QI GONG WORKSHOPS

Qigong (pronounced "CHI- GUNG") is the healing power of the combination of breath awareness, body alignment, meditative movements and self-massage. In qigong practices, we move the body's energy (Qi or chi) and replace stagnant Qi with coordination of breath with the movements and intent. These practices have been proven to improve medical, emotional and spiritual health. In Chinese philosophy, it's considered a method of building and balancing life energy through exercise. This is a weekly class is available to anyone at any time!

## INSTRUCTOR BIOS

### BOB LAVIN

Bob Lavin is a retired firefighter from the Elizabeth, NJ Fire Department. He is a cancer survivor and patient of WTC Health at Rutgers Having been diagnosed with PTSD from a lifetime of personal trauma, Bob was drawn to Qi Gong for therapy. He received so many blessings from qigong practice for the past 7 years and is inspired to give back through sharing his practice with others. He became an IQTC certified Integral Qigong Practice Leader in April of 2019.

### JOSEPH CAPUTO

Joseph Caputo (Duhk Song Sunim ) is a seasoned Zen Monk, director of Soshimsa Zen Centers 1000 Hands Outreach Program and an active member of the WTC Health Program. He is currently teaching weekly Zen, Mindfulness, and Relaxation methods of meditation at WTC Health Program. The program trains its participant to utilize these meditation techniques as tools for health and overall well-being of mind, body, and spirit.

Duhk Song Sunim has been actively teaching meditation and Healing Arts throughout New Jersey for over a decade. He favors a practical approach to teaching with emphasis on experience over academic knowledge. By making his instructions easily understood, class participants are able immediately begin to benefit from their newly gained knowledge.



## 9/11 Events in the NYC Area

### TRIBUTE IN LIGHT



Tribute in Light is one of the most powerful and healing works of public art ever produced. The blue twin beams are presented annually by Municipal Art Society of New York, shining from dusk on September 11, through dawn the next day. Visible within a sixty-mile radius on a clear night, the Tribute in Light has become a world-renowned icon of remembrance, honoring those who were lost, as well as those who worked so hard to get our city through that terrible trial.

### ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL COMMEMORATES 9-11 ANNIVERSARY

St. Paul's Chapel, known as the "Little Chapel that Stood," stands directly across from the World Trade Center, and in the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks, was a sanctuary for relief workers to rest and pray. Millions of visitors continue to visit the site annually.

In prior years, at precisely 8:46 AM, when the first plane crashed into 1 WTC (North Tower), St. Paul's, rings the Bell of Hope in a pattern of "four fives," (five strikes, repeated four times), the traditional firefighters' salute to the fallen. At the same time, the change-bells of Trinity Church will toll. There are additional varied activities throughout the day. Doors open at 8am. RSVP: <https://www.trinitywallstreet.org>

**NEVER FORGET**

09.11.01

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# TRAVIS MANION FOUNDATION 9/11 HEROES RUN

The 9/11 Heroes Run 5k welcomes runners, ruckers, and walkers of all levels and of all ages. This is an annual event which takes place on or near September 11th. It is the perfect opportunity for families and individuals in your community to honor local veterans, their families, and first responders. The 9/11 Heroes Run unites communities internationally with the goal to never forget the sacrifices of the heroes of September 11th and the wars since: veteran, first responder, civilian and military.

Our very own Medical Director,  
Dr. Iris Udasin ran in the race!



September is National Suicide Prevention Month

# CALL OR TEXT:



# 24/7 Support

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. All month, mental health advocates, prevention organizations, survivors, allies, and community members unite to promote suicide prevention awareness. National Suicide Prevention Week is the Monday through Sunday surrounding World Suicide Prevention Day. It's a time to share resources and stories, as well as promote suicide prevention awareness. World Suicide Prevention Day is September 10. It's a time to remember those affected by suicide, to raise awareness, and to focus efforts on directing treatment to those who need it most. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a leader in suicide prevention and mental health crisis care. Since its inception, the Lifeline has engaged in a variety of initiatives to improve crisis services and advance suicide prevention for all, including innovative public messaging, best practices in mental health, and groundbreaking partnerships. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is independently evaluated by a federally funded investigation team from Columbia University's Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene. The Lifeline receives ongoing consultation and guidance from national suicide prevention experts, consumer advocates, and other stakeholders through the Lifeline's Steering Committee, Consumer/Survivor Committee, and Standards, Training and Practices Committee.