



2024 Impact Report

This report highlights the programming metrics, strategic growth, and community impact in 2024 for SeekHealing, a North Carolina-based 501(c)(3) with thriving communities in Asheville, Waynesville, and online.



*Express Your Mess workshop hosted at
SeekHealing Waynesville*

About SeekHealing

SeekHealing is a WNC-based nonprofit transforming mental health and trauma recovery by addressing one of the most critical—and most overlooked—factors impacting public health: **loneliness and social isolation**.

Our mission is to improve social health: the quality of human connection that individuals experience in their lives and relationships. Poor social health contributes to worsening outcomes in every other public health domain, including mental health, substance use, housing insecurity, and chronic disease.

Thanks to early support from partners like Dogwood Health Trust and the Stand Together Foundation, SeekHealing has been operating since 2018 as one of the first loneliness initiatives in the country and has now served over 8,000 people. Core programs include:

- **Listening Training (LT):** ultra-accessible public health education that empowers individuals to unlearn maladaptive social cognition and relate with compassion.
- **Connection Practice Meetings (CPMs):** empathy circles offering judgment-free space to practice vulnerability, pro-social skills, and mutual support.
- **Seeker Pairings, Connection Missions, and peer support activities:** facilitating informal emotional and practical support across diverse communities.

We focus our services on eight impact areas: those navigating mental health and substance use challenges; BIPOC and Latine individuals; LGBTQIA+ folks; people under 25; people over 65; those experiencing homelessness; individuals recently incarcerated; and people living in rural isolation. Our work centers equity, accessibility, and community empowerment.

Our Mission

SeekHealing facilitates meaningful human connection to strengthen social health, address loneliness, and equip people with the power to give and receive authentic support. We do this to improve the effectiveness of mental health treatment systems and reduce deaths of despair.

Our Vision

We envision a world where everyone belongs, where resilient and compassionate communities thrive at a slower pace – a world people no longer wish to escape, but live in together.



**SeekHealing staff retreat
in Asheville**

Our Values

Presence

Bring your full attention and presence to every interaction you have. Notice when your attention is fragmented. Take time to pause. Name what's happening.

Relationship

Connect. Prioritize relationship and quality of connection over goal achievement. Seek connection with the other humans in every shared space.

Sharing Power

Notice power dynamics, and question when power gets stuck with one person or group. Step into power when it's needed from you, and immediately look to see how you can pass it on.

Mutual Benefit

Strive for relationships that balance giving and receiving. Be aware of what you are receiving when you give, and what you are giving when you receive. Value reciprocity.

Healing

Question what works for you and what doesn't. Consider your needs. Prioritize self-care. As you heal, you will be better able to face the unknown, creatively solve problems, empower others, and build community.

Knowledge

Acquire the best knowledge from any and all sources that will enable you to improve your performance. Share your knowledge proactively. Provide and solicit challenge consistently and respectfully.

Dignity

Honor the uniqueness of individuals, and remember that we are stronger in community.

Bottom-Up

Those closest to a problem often know best how to solve it. Empower people to lead the way forward.

Radical Authenticity

Speak and express your truth. Be vulnerable. Speak up if you're not being heard. Say the things that are hard to say. Practice integrity and do what you say you're going to do.

Radical Compassion

Remember that we are all healing from something. Notice & adjust to holding space when someone's triggered. Engage quiet voices. Meet people where they are – even the most taboo or shameful places. Be kind.

Balancing Authenticity with Compassion

Without compassion, authenticity can cause harm. Maintain awareness of what you need while caring for others, and stay connected to compassion when speaking your truth.

2024 By the Numbers

7,052

Total sign-ins at
SeekHealing Events

2,120

New people reached

1,682

Calls and texts received to the
WNC Listening Line emotional
support phone system

1,219

SeekHealing Events
hosted in 2024

303

People completed
Listening Training

97%

Of **Connection Practice**
participants reported feeling
welcome, included, and more
connected than when they arrived

The Story of 2024

Hello, world!

Whether you're meeting SeekHealing for the first time through this impact report, or have been a part of this community for years, thanks for being here. Your support and however you are living this mission of facilitating more intentional human connection in our disconnected world is vital to all of our future and wellbeing.

2024 was a year of powerful transformation for SeekHealing. As the world around us continues to reckon with compounding crises—from mental health to climate change—we made some bold moves to deepen our impact and expand what is possible in the field of social health.

The biggest shift came in how we lead. This year, SeekHealing officially transitioned from a founder-led model into a new Executive Triad—a non-hierarchical leadership structure in which three directors share equal authority and report collectively to our Board of Directors. This evolution reflects our core values in the workplace as well as the people we serve: that healthy systems prioritize relationships over productivity, and that leadership is most powerful when shared.

Melisa Gonzalez, our new Director of Operations, brings passion for transformational systems and a deep commitment to justice as a Queer, Indigenous woman.

Imani Ustawi Cave, a former board member and Asheville Community Engagement Leader, now serves as Director of Programs. A master facilitator and Black woman with 17 years in recovery, she brings fierce heart and integrity to every space she holds.

Jenesis Nicolaisen, SeekHealing's co-founder and longtime Executive Director, now focuses exclusively on fundraising and advocacy. A Queer, non-binary human with 8 years in recovery, Jenesis remains our loud, strong voice of advocacy for this mission to bring social health to the forefront of public wellbeing.

To focus that growth, we now organize our work across eight key impact areas:

- People navigating mental health and substance use
- BIPOC and Latine communities
- LGBTQIA+ folks
- Youth under 25
- Elders over 65
- People experiencing homelessness
- People recently incarcerated
- Rural residents experiencing isolation

Each impact area is receiving tailored programming, partnerships, and measurable outcomes—while being woven into the broader social fabric of SeekHealing's public community programs. We're already seeing it: more vibrant, interdependent groups of people served by these programs, resilient to polarization, and built for belonging.

That resilience was tested—and proven—in the wake of Hurricane Helene, when Western North Carolina faced unimaginable loss. Some of us lost everything. All of us lost something.

In response, we pivoted immediately: opening our Asheville and Waynesville Centers for open-door, trauma-informed listening circles four days a week, with facilitators and volunteers offering peer-led support for six-hour windows each day. We deployed community Mental Health First Aid teams to first responders and resource centers. And we showed up for each other.

Over 40 people walked through our doors on the first day alone, many shaking, crying, or collapsing into chairs before saying a word. Stories emerged—of people pulling neighbors from floodwaters, of houses sliding down mountains. And still, something else emerged too: an almost sacred sense of mutual support and interdependence.

That's the spirit we are committed to preserving. Long-term recovery requires more than rebuilding infrastructure. It requires social healing. It requires neighbors knowing how to find each other, people knowing how to listen, and citizens trained to hold space when grief shows up at the grocery store, or in a school hallway.

In 2024, SeekHealing became a go-to resource for holding emotional sanctuary space in communities here in WNC — not just in our centers, but at our partner locations and local gatherings. We partnered with organizations in each of our eight impact areas, and held safe sanctuary space for people to decompress at gatherings like Blue Ridge Pride and Firefly Gathering.

We helped people slow down and remember how to be together. Our role in community is to deepen the good work already being done by enhancing the quality of human interaction in every setting.

The thread tying it all together is simple: healing happens in community. And community happens when we prioritize relationship over transaction, care over control, and presence over performance.

With love, for love,
Imani, Jenesis and Melisa

P.S. Wait ... did Jennifer change their name to Jenesis? Yes! As a part of their recovery journey, our fabulous Executive Director now goes by Jenesis. Their name changed on October 8th, 2024, the day they celebrated their re-birthday and 8th anniversary of beginning a recovery journey. Feel free to shoot them an email if you're curious to hear more about that story!



**SeekHealing's Executive Team,
Jenesis Nicolaisen (L), Imani Ustawi (M),
and Melisa Gonzalez (R)**

Impact Areas

At SeekHealing, we have always been committed to supporting individuals from diverse backgrounds and communities, especially those who face barriers to connection and healing. Over the years, we've seen remarkable participation from a variety of populations at our events, including neurodivergent people impacted by substance use and mental health challenges, older adults, young adults, BIPOC and Latine individuals, LGBTQIA+ communities, unhoused people, rural populations, and those navigating the justice system.

In 2024, we laid essential groundwork to deepen our impact and more intentionally support the diverse communities we serve. Now, we're excited to share the next step in that journey: the launch of new affinity groups, each designed to center connection, healing, and peer support within eight key impact areas. This allows us to provide more intentional and culturally-relevant programming, ensuring that individuals from these communities have the support they need in spaces that understand and respect their identities and experiences.

We believe in honoring the autonomy and resilience that exist within communities, and that the people who belong to those communities should be the ones leading them. Representation matters, and that's why SeekHealing's affinity groups are led by trained facilitators who share similar identities and lived experiences with participants. This approach empowers individuals to become leaders in social health and wellness within their own communities. We're deeply excited to witness the healing, connection, and empowerment these groups will continue to foster, in Western North Carolina and beyond.

*Substance Use
+ Mental
Health
Recovery*

*Older Adults
(65+)*

*Young Adults
(16 - 25)*

*BIPOC
(Including
Latine)*

LGBTQIA+

Unhoused

Rural

*Justice System
Involved*

Impact Areas

Substance Use & Mental Health: We are expanding our programs for people in recovery or living with mental health challenges, offering a community-oriented approach to healing.



Older Adults (65+): Creating dedicated spaces for seniors to combat loneliness, which has been linked to a range of health risks, including depression and dementia.



Young Adults (16–21): With increasing rates of loneliness among younger generations, we're offering tailored programs to foster connection and support for youth navigating challenges in mental health.



BIPOC and Latine Communities: These affinity groups will provide culturally competent services that address social health challenges that disproportionately affect Black, Brown, Indigenous, and Latine individuals.



Impact Areas

LGBTQIA+ Communities: LGBTQIA+ affinity groups will focus on reducing the stigma and isolation often experienced by these individuals, particularly youth, by providing a safe space for connection and healing.



Unhoused People: Focused on rebuilding social networks, we're creating opportunities for unhoused individuals to build community and access the resources they need to break the cycle of social exclusion.



Rural Populations: We will continue our efforts to bridge the gap for those in rural areas, where isolation is compounded by geographic and logistical barriers to social connection and support.



Justice System-Involved Individuals: By offering dedicated support for those affected by the justice system, we help individuals reintegrate into society and rebuild the social connections for a successful transition.





Flower Arranging Workshop hosted by
Advisory Council Member, Alan Muskat

Asheville

2024 Impact

420 Connection Events hosted

- **45** Recovery population events
- **6** LGBTQIA+ events
- **2** Older adult (65+) events
- **2** Unhoused events

347 participants signed-in in a total of **2,012** times

121 First Conversations held



This year, SeekHealing Asheville continued to evolve in response to community needs, deepening our commitment to creating spaces of connection, healing, and mutual support. Through new offerings, expanded leadership, and a strengthened ability to respond to crises, we witnessed the power of community care in action.

New Spaces for Healing and Connection

One of the most exciting developments this year was the expansion of offerings designed to meet people where they are. We introduced **Recovery Connection Practice**, **Astral's Neurodivergent Connection Practice**, and **Elder Connection Practice**. **Sound Healing Immersion** brought a powerful new element to our work, and we also expanded access to holistic healing through **Reiki**, **Breathwork**, and **Open Heart Meditation**. We also launched several new **Community Nests** including a **Men's Nest**, **Chronic Illness Nest**, and **Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Nest** for those in need of connection around specific experiences and identities.

Adapting in Times of Crisis

2024 was a year that tested the resilience of the Asheville community. In the aftermath of the Hurricane Helene, SeekHealing Asheville launched extended **Open Connection Practice Meetings**, offering longer sessions for emotional processing and co-regulation. Additionally, we launched an emergency response crew and **Hurricane Huddles**, creating a network of rapid response and mutual aid. One of the most profound moments of the year came during **Seeksgiving**, where over 50 people gathered—many of whom had been directly impacted by the hurricane. The event became more than just a holiday meal; it was a space of refuge, warmth, and connection for those who might have otherwise had nowhere to go. Many shared that it was the most meaningful Thanksgiving they had experienced in years.

Strengthening Community Leadership & Infrastructure

With the growth of our programming, we also welcomed a new Community Engagement Lead and relocated our office within the United Way building, moving from Room #300 to Room #138—creating a more welcoming and accessible space for both new and returning Seekers. This year, we saw many more community members stepping into facilitation roles and shaping SeekHealing's offerings from the inside out. Overall, 2024 offered opportunities for community members to move into leadership, share their gifts, and shape healing spaces in meaningful and authentic ways.



Seeksgiving at White Horse Black Mountain

"I'm LGBTQ+ and am what you call a multiple – a person who has more than one person living inside me, which some people refer to as Dissociative Identity Disorder, or DID. I live in an apartment building in Asheville for older folks who live with disabilities like me. When the storm hit, I was one of the youngest and most able-bodied who lived here. The stress was intense, but I felt grateful to be able to be of service, and I used all the tools I've learned in treatment and recovery to take care of myself and meet my own needs as best I could. SeekHealing really made that possible for me. I got so much out of going to Connection Practice after the hurricane. I had been so focused on what was happening where I live, and trying to react to it, that I had really lost touch with my feelings and my connection with the people. Just sitting in that room at SeekHealing and hearing people's stories and caring about people, and having people care about me, really brought me back to humanity. I have hope now that we humans can cooperate and learn how to live as "Helene's Initiates." I believe this hurricane might make it possible for us to live in more cooperation, more loving your brother as yourself. You should try it, I highly recommend it."

- Teska, SeekHealing Asheville community

Waynesville

2024 Impact

250 Connection Events hosted

- **114** Rural population events
- **75** Unhoused events
- **35** Recovery events
- **10** Older adult (65+) events
- **3** LGBTQIA+ events

152 participants signed-in in a total of
787 times

37 First Conversations held



*Listening Training participants
at SeekHealing Waynesville*

The past year has been a testament to the power of human connection in Waynesville. Over the course of 2024, SeekHealing Waynesville has become a steady presence in Haywood County, offering a space for people to gather and connect. What started as a small and quiet effort has transformed into a vibrant and expansive community.

Creative Expression as Connection

Art-based programming became a key way for people to engage with SeekHealing Waynesville in 2024. We hosted two **Express Your Mess workshops** and art gallery connection experiences, inviting participants to process emotions through creative expression. **Mocktail socials** at Art After Dark provided another way to foster connection.

Holding Space for LGBTQIA+ Youth

In 2024, SeekHealing Waynesville launched a **Queer Youth Nest** for LGBTQIA+ youth to connect and build supportive relationships and hosted an **Emotional First Aid** tent at Haywood Pride. Having a visible presence at the event meant that people had a place to land—whether they needed immediate emotional support or just a quiet moment to regroup.

Disaster Response

In Hurricane Helene's aftermath, SeekHealing deepened its partnership with Haywood Christian Ministry and Pigeon Community Multicultural Development Center to provide consistent community outreach. Attendance at Connection Practice Meetings tripled in the months that followed, growing from an average of 1-2 people to 9 people consistently. This shift marked a turning point, creating a core community that hadn't existed before and solidifying SeekHealing's presence in the area.

Expanding Reach in Rural Appalachia

While the hurricane marked a turning point in local engagement, outreach had already been growing beyond Haywood County. We expanded into Madison, Macon, and Swain counties, working to bring trauma-informed support to more rural areas. We had a presence at the **Recovery Rally in Cherokee** and **Overdose Awareness Month** events, helping to lay the groundwork for deeper community connections. Regular outreach at the **Waynesville Farmers Market** created new opportunities for engagement, meeting people where they were and introducing them to the idea of social health in everyday spaces.



"SeekHealing has been really important to me over the last few months. After feeling lost and unsure about how to make new connections, I decided to attend an Art Connection Practice. I hadn't done art in a while, but it turned out to be a great way to meet people and feel connected. When the hurricane hit, I realized how important it was to continue seeking out these spaces, and SeekHealing offered just that. The consistency of the events, Sarah's ability to bring together people from all walks of life, and the opportunity to engage with community leaders has been invaluable. I'm grateful that SeekHealing exists."

- Kye, SeekHealing Waynesville community

Online

2024 Impact

430 Connection Events hosted

- **50** Neurodivergent population events
- **41** Recovery events
- **11** BIPOC/Latine events

829 participants signed-in in a total of
2,969 times

142 First Conversations held



In 2024, SeekHealing Online experienced a year of significant expansion, both in terms of community engagement and offerings. 2024 can be best described as a "year of growth" for our Online community, with a marked increase in attendance, new partnerships, and an evolving virtual space that welcomed greater diversity and deeper sharing.

Partnerships and Growth

One of the key highlights of 2024 was our partnership with **The Phoenix**, an organization dedicated to supporting people in recovery. This partnership greatly impacted SeekHealing's online presence—doubling, if not tripling, attendance at Connection Practice. This influx of new faces brought more emotional depth to the Online community.

Shifts in Community Culture

Partnering with The Phoenix opened the door for more honest and vulnerable conversations around addiction and substance use in the Online community. As the community became more diverse, the emotional depth of group shares grew, too. That sometimes meant conflict came up, but people met those moments with care and respect. We remembered that facing tension together—rather than avoiding it—can actually build stronger connections. Facilitators and participants alike grew through the process of repair and reflection. A mix of new voices and lived experiences has made the Online space richer, helping create a culture of openness, support, and mutual learning.

New Events & Facilitators

We launched a **Recovery Connection Practice** and the **Cogito Collective**, two new initiatives that provided participants with additional emotional support and intellectual engagement. In addition, four new facilitators joined the team, bringing fresh perspectives and unique strengths to connection experiences.

Attendance & Impact

SeekHealing Online experienced significant growth in attendance throughout 2024. Notably, our largest-ever **Listening Training** session, which saw 38 participants, was a major highlight. Additionally, **C-PTSD Connection Boosters** provided crucial support for individuals navigating complex trauma. These events proved to be transformative for many, helping participants gain valuable insights and tools for healing.

Social Health Training

2024 Impact

303 Listening Training participants

37 Social Health Facilitation Training (SHFT) and Crossover Training graduates:

- **10** Neurodivergent graduates
- **10** LGBTQIA+
- **9** BIPOC/Latine
- **3** Older Adults (65+)

10 people became certified as Social Health Professionals:

- **5** Recovery population
- **4** BIPOC/Latine
- **3** LGBTQIA+
- **2** Older Adults (65+)

In 2024, SeekHealing's Social Health Training services supported transformational experiences across a diverse range of partner organizations—from faith communities to corporate teams—each with unique needs and opportunities for connection.

Haywood Street Congregation

Years ago, Haywood Street hosted Story Circles led by the late Barbara Bates Smith. This year, in partnership with SeekHealing, Haywood Street brought Story Circles back—this time rooted in a non-hierarchical, trauma-informed approach to emotional and mental wellness. We began by offering Listening Training for Haywood Street's staff in the spring, followed by a customized two-month facilitation training in the summer. Weekly training sessions throughout June and July prepared staff to lead Story Circles for the broader congregation in August. This revival honored Barbara's legacy and was made possible by a generous gift from the late Karen Timko, a beloved member of the SeekHealing community.

Eaton Corporation

At Eaton, we trained about 15% of staff and 30% of managers (around 40 people total). The training had a significant impact, with employees reporting increased self-awareness and agency in managing stress. The training successfully integrated a harm reduction lens into the corporate environment, empowering participants to navigate stress and difficult conversations more effectively. Managers reported feeling better equipped to support their teams in healthier, more constructive ways. Participants also shared how the training improved personal relationships, offering tools for connection that extended beyond work.

Foster Nation

In 2024, we deepened our partnership with Foster Nation, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering foster youth on their journey to self-sufficiency through transformative mentorship. As part of this collaboration, SeekHealing provided Listening Training to Foster Nation's mentors, equipping them with trauma-informed tools to foster meaningful, supportive relationships with their mentees. Our training addresses common challenges in volunteerism by nurturing social health, dismantling power dynamics, and empowering mentors to listen with greater presence and compassion.



*Facilitation Training offered in partnership with
Haywood Street Congregation*

Hurricane Helene

When Hurricane Helene struck Western North Carolina on September 27, 2024, the devastation was profound, leaving homes destroyed and communities in shock, grief, and uncertainty. The storm left many facing not only physical loss but also profound emotional trauma. While no one could have fully anticipated the storm's full impact, SeekHealing's community-led, trauma-informed model of mental health support allowed us to respond quickly and effectively. Thanks to strong relationships with local partners, we were able to mobilize swiftly and activate support systems through our network of trained Social Health Facilitators, volunteers, and staff. These "community superheroes" have been at the core of our disaster relief efforts.

On October 2, we began adapting our programming for maximum accessibility, offering **Open Connection Practice Circles** at our SeekHealing Centers in Asheville and Waynesville. These sessions, held four days a week for five hours at a time, were designed to provide a flexible and welcoming environment where individuals could come in anytime, be heard, and connect with others. The open format of these sessions was particularly appreciated by the community. One participant shared, *"I like that it's rolling so I don't have to worry about arriving at a specific time. And the window of time makes it so that I can attend easily."*

On October 8, we launched the **Helene Survivors Connection Practice** on Zoom, which offered a safe virtual space for people to connect, process their emotions, and receive emotional support in the aftermath of the storm. Our **Pop-Up Community Listening Booth** initiative, which started in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, proved to be an invaluable tool in reaching even more people. Every Friday, we set up listening booths at partner organizations, such as 12 Baskets, Pigeon Community Multicultural Development Center, Nanostead, and Ingles, bringing emotional first aid to survivors across the region. Our **Mental Health First Aid** teams were deployed to support first responders and staff at community distribution centers, ensuring emotional care was available alongside the distribution of material resources. Our efforts provided individual support, facilitated group connections, and strengthened community resilience through mutual aid and collaboration across organizations.

In the months after the storm, the emotional wounds of Hurricane Helene remain fresh. The **WNC Listening Line** has become a critical resource for those dealing with grief, trauma, and loss, and community organizations continue to refer individuals to SeekHealing for support. In response to these ongoing needs, our Executive Director has joined the Buncombe County Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG), working alongside local and national partners like the Center for Disaster Philanthropy to address mental health risks and foster social cohesion across WNC. This collaboration is essential in building long-term resilience among the region's most vulnerable populations.

The impact of Hurricane Helene on WNC has underscored the importance of community-driven support systems. SeekHealing remains committed to continuing our efforts to provide accessible, compassionate care to Hurricane Helene survivors, and we are proud to be part of the broader community response that prioritizes both immediate relief and long-term recovery. With the support of our partners and the community, we will continue to ensure that no one has to face the emotional aftermath of disaster alone.



Listening Booth participant receiving emotional first aid in Swannanoa, NC



Open Connection Practice Circle for Hurricane Helene survivors at SeekHealing Asheville

Sanctuary Spaces

Creating safe and welcoming environments for individuals to gather, connect, and heal is at the heart of SeekHealing's mission. Throughout the year, we facilitated sanctuary spaces at key events across the region, offering places for emotional support and community building.

At the **Blue Ridge Pride** event in Asheville, our 10x10 tent was filled with people from start to finish, providing an inclusive space where individuals could connect. At the **Firefly Gathering**, we created a sanctuary space where we taught listening training skills, empowering attendees with tools to offer compassionate support within their own communities.

On **Overdose Awareness Day**, SeekHealing partnered with local organizations including Buncombe County, Community Paramedics, Umoja, Operation Gateway, WNCAP, Sunrise Recovery Community, Haywood Street Congregation, and a powerful group of panelists who shared their personal stories and insights. The event offered an opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing impact of the opioid crisis, honor those we've lost, and provide emotional support to those affected by substance use. Our sanctuary space became a place for grieving, listening, and healing, helping attendees navigate the complexities of grief and loss while fostering community resilience.

During the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, sanctuary spaces were set up at distribution hubs across the region, providing **emotional first aid** to those impacted by the storm. These spaces became a crucial refuge in the midst of overwhelming circumstances, fostering a sense of safety and connection.

By facilitating these sanctuary spaces, SeekHealing continues to offer opportunities for people to come together. We look forward to expanding our sanctuary space offerings in 2025, creating even more opportunities for connection and support across our region.



Blue Ridge Pride sanctuary space



Firefly Gathering setup



Overdose Awareness Day at Carrier Park



***Thank you for your continued
support of our programs!***

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seekhealing.org (828) 222-5029



*Make a donation to support
social health initiatives today.*