

WE RISE INTERNATIONAL

FALL 2024 NEWSLETTER



Upcoming Events

**Join the Churches Care Online Course
January 19 - March 1, 2025**

Do you know a Christian Pastor, Ministry Leader, Lay Leader, Chaplain, Health Professional, or Social Worker who would like to learn more about mental health, trauma, and addictions, and ways they and their church can more effectively support individuals and families, reduce stigma, and increase knowledge and wellbeing in our churches? We'd love to have them (and you) join the next cohort of the Churches Care Online Course - starting January 19, 2025! Info p 2.

Churches Care: Increasing effective support around mental health in the Christian Faith Community!

Here are our Churches Care Course Presenters:



Get Involved

**Volunteers
Needed,
remote or
in person**

Newsletter/blog
writers/coordinator

Fundraising and
Grantwriting
Intern or Volunteer
(training provided)

Community Event
Volunteers in PA

IT Support volunteer

Churches Care

Join the Winter 2025 Cohort

Churches Care Online Course

18 hours of self-paced, online training over 6-weeks



Since 2019, the Churches Care Program has been strengthening the ability of Church leaders and their congregations to provide effective support to individuals and families experiencing mental health or addiction struggles. One of the key components of this program is our 18-hour training for Church & Lay Leaders, and Health Professionals & Social Workers in churches. Broader and deeper than Mental Health First Aid, this training increases participant knowledge of mental illnesses, substance abuse, trauma, ways to support and assist others, connect people to treatment and resources, emergency response tips, and strategies to educate, increase support and reduce stigma throughout entire congregations.

Join us January 19 - March 1, 2025 for our Winter cohort. [Click here to register](#) or contact Deborah Miller at health-team@weriseinternational.org for information. 1.8 Pastor/Clergy CEUs provided by Brethren Academy. We look forward to having you in the course!



This Giving season

**Support
We Rise
International!**

**Your support makes
our work possible!**

501C3. All donations are tax deductible. Please [click here to support the work of We Rise Internatinoal](#) or contact us via Janelle@weriseinternational.org

Hear from Churches Care Participants!

- "I would recommend this training because it covers topics we are hesitant to talk about and downright afraid to confront or deal with." - Pastor Yingst
- "A good introduction to the topics covered for those who want to do a better job serving those in need, & equipping congregations to do so." - Pastor Davis
- "I knew the brush strokes of mental illness and addictions, but this helped me to understand better what I am seeing in those I am supporting, how to respond better in the future, and what church wide action might need to happen so we can all be more supportive." - Pastor House
- "You are all highly qualified individuals who teach relevant material in an engaging and informative way - THANKS!" - Pastor Stultz
- "I think everyone can benefit from this class and would highly recommend it to all pastors and church office staff..." - K. Beaty, Church Admin
- "There was so much good information balanced between statistics, science, and personal experience." - E. Kauffman, Pastor & Hospital Chaplain
- "I definitely would recommend the training to others because a lot of people are battling mental health issues & people need to know how they can help." - R. Young, Community Healthcare Worker
- "Most assuredly would highly recommend this course for content and context. Excellent addition to learning tools for ministry." A. Painter, Ordained Minister



NEW We Rise Mental Health SEEDS Program (Programa Semillas) Responds to the Urgent Shortage of Mental Health Care for Hispanics in the U.S. by Providing Hope & Support

“I’m so glad I found this group!” The woman says. “It’s hard to find someone to talk about mental health with who speaks Spanish and understands Hispanic culture!”

The group leaders smile and welcome her into the group of Latina-American women who sit chatting in a circle of chairs at the hispanic community center housed at Alpha and Omega (Hispanic) Church of the Brethren in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It’s the fourth week of an 8 week long Spanish-speaking Anxiety Support Group for Women run by We Rise International through our new Latino initiative, the Mental Health SEEDs Program or in Spanish “*Programa Semillas de Salud Mental*.” Programa Semillas is a 3-year grant funded initiative started by We Rise in October 2023 to increase the mental health support available for Latino families. We Rise leads the program and partners with churches, universities and other nonprofits across Lancaster city to roll it out.

According to local and government statistics, Latinos in the U.S. face barriers to receiving mental health services including discrimination; cultural stigma; high poverty rates; limited health insurance; and especially a shortage of qualified Spanish-speaking mental health counselors. As a result, Latinos in the U.S. often experience inadequate access to Mental Health assistance and have high suicide rates due to unmet Mental Health and Substance abuse needs. Pennsylvania, where part of the We Rise team is based, is home to over one million Latino residents. This includes recent immigrants but also Latino families living in PA for generations. The shortage of Spanish-speaking, culturally competent mental health counselors has resulted in unmet mental health needs for Latinos in PA, and across the nation.

Seeing this urgent need, We Rise has risen to respond... (Programa Semillas. Cont. on p 3).

*It’s hard to
find someone
to talk about
mental health
with ... (in)
Spanish...*

Programa Semillas (continued from p 2)

*“We’re excited to see
”Programa Semillas”
impacting lives...*

*...and expanding our
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universities...*

*We’re ... honored to
experience the passion
and commitment of the
Interns who have joined
the program and are
sharing the wisdom gained
from their experience
growing up as Latinos in
the U.S., to now make a
difference in the lives of
others.*

*...together we are helping
meet the (mental health)
needs ...(of) the Latino
community*

*- Janelle Bitikofer, Executive Director,
We Rise International*



In October 2023 We Rise developed “Programa Semillas de Salud Mental” (The Mental Health SEEDs Program) through which we train and empower Spanish-bilingual Latino University and Graduate Social Work and Counseling students in mental health via internships at We Rise. The Interns receive training in mental health, then impact their communities by leading free Spanish-speaking mental health support groups at spaces donated to We Rise by churches and nonprofits across the area. We Rise Interns and staff also provide spanish-speaking mental health presentations at Latino churches and other organizations.

“We’re excited to see this new education and support program of We Rise really impacting lives in Pennsylvania, and expanding our partnerships with churches, other nonprofits, and universities.” says Executive Director Janelle Bitikofer. “We’re also honored to experience the passion and commitment of the Interns from various universities who have joined our team and who are sharing the wisdom gained from their experience growing up as Latinos in the U.S., to now make a difference in the lives of others.”

“Together we are helping meet the needs for increased bilingual mental health counselors, Spanish speaking mental health support, and mental health education for the Latino Community. We believe the model we have created could be expanded or replicated to help meet mental health needs in other communities across the nation.”

Learn more about the impact of Semillas on p. 5 & 6.

**University Interns interested in Programa Semillas contact
Janelle@weriseinternational.org**

“If bingo is going to be at the same time as group, then I’m not going to bingo! I’m going to our *group*!”

-- quote from a retired Spanish-speaking participant in a We Rise Programa Semillas Mental Health support group for senior adults living in low-income housing.



PHOTOS OF PROGRAMA SEMILLAS (MENTAL HEALTH SEEDS) IN ACTION



Programa Semillas interns:
Left - Grad Student Claudia Garcia (Lancaster Bible College),
Right- Undergrad Anallely Rujerio-Soto (Shippensburg University)



Programa Semillas Grad Student Intern Esther Smith (Millersville University) talking to Spanish-speaking seniors about Semillas Support Groups.



ED Janelle talks about Programa Semillas on Spanish Speaking Radio Station “Radio Centro”



ED Janelle Bitikofer and Pastor Joel Joel Peña from Alpha & Omega Community Center/Alpha & Omega Church of the Brethren, talk about Programa Semillas Spanish support groups and counseling, to community members attending the Annual Alpha and Omega Fall Festival health fair.

Programa Semillas “Hope Groups”/ “Support Groups” are held at the locations of our community partners, including Alpha and Omega Community Center (Church of the Brethren), the Lancaster City Housing Authority, Church World Service, and others, who provide free space for the groups.

HOPE GROUPS: MY STORY

BY ANALLELY RUGERIO SOTO

My name is Anallely Rugerio Soto, and I am a first-generation Latina-American. Growing up I have seen the struggles my family has gone through when it comes to obtaining resources. The language barrier was a major set back for my parents when they first arrived in the United States. Spanish is my first language. It was the only language spoken at home up until I started school, which is where I learned English. Being the first daughter and the oldest, I was the one who had to translate for her parents when they needed help finding something at the grocery store or when trying to order food at a fast-food restaurant. As I got older, I would translate for them at their doctor appointments if they let me.



I was so excited to know that there was a program wanting to help the Latino community and their mental health needs...

Being the oldest daughter of an immigrant family is not easy. The topic about mental health was not spoken about in my household. Growing up, I watched my mother cry and struggle due to tough situations she was going through. If doctors would mention seeing a therapist, they would tell her that unfortunately there was not one that spoke Spanish. They told her there were over-the-phone translators that could assist...but she did not feel comfortable seeking help that way because she felt like it was not as helpful as receiving support in Spanish. This is why I think that the Semillas de Salud Mental Program at We Rise International (MH SEEDs) is so important. When I first heard about it, and about the opportunity to do my university social work practicum here at We Rise International, leading Spanish mental health support groups through Programa Semillas, I was so excited to know that there was a program wanting to help the Latino community and their mental health needs. It is a topic in the community that is barely spoken about due to the stigma behind it.

My generation is the one finally opening the doors to the mental health topic in the Latino communities. We are breaking the cycle and speaking about our mental health needs.

I personally struggle with anxiety and depression. I was recently diagnosed at the beginning of the year, and it has not been easy. Being the oldest daughter I have had to figure out many things on my own. So, asking for help was not on my list of things to do for many years. I bottled up so many emotions and feelings throughout the years that it got to the point where I could not take it anymore. My body had a physical reaction to the stress and anxiety I was experiencing and that was when I decided to reach out for help. It is not an easy thing to do which is why I believe the Semillas Program is so important. The Semillas program offers a safe space to talk about mental health in encouraging spanish-speaking groups. Through this program we are breaking the stigma and providing individuals in U.S. Latino communities the opportunity to express themselves and feel comfortable talking about mental health.

Anallely Rugerio-Soto is a Senior Social Work Major at Shippensburg University, completing her social work university practicum in Programa Semillas at We Rise International. While completing her practicum at We Rise she has co-led three 8-week Spanish-speaking mental health support groups (two anxiety support groups for women at Alpha and Omega Community Center, and one mental health support group for Hispanic older adults at Lancaster City Housing Authority - Church Street Towers). She is so committed to Programa Semillas that she drives an hour each way to come lead the groups. Thank you, Anallely, for your impact!