

WE RISE INTERNATIONAL

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2020

Our Mission

Empowering the World
with Health and Hope

Our Values

Interconnection, Equity, Respect,
Compassion, Innovation, Resilience



The Heart of We Rise International

We believe that every community has strengths to combat the problems that face the world today. Neighbors lift up neighbors. Strangers help each other. Working with communities of all sizes, we empower people of all backgrounds to maximize their strengths and respond to their struggles – together.

**MORE
DETAILS
TO
COME!**

Upcoming Events

March 7 Churches Care program

Our first mental health training for church leaders was well received in Lancaster, PA. We are inspired by the enthusiasm of the church and community leaders who participated!

May 2 & 16 Churches Care program

Trainings for Chambersburg, PA may be postponed due to COVID-19 but will still happen this year (2020). If you are part of a church and want more information about how to participate in this program, you can find the details and [register here.](#)

First Annual Bike-A-Thon

Get your bikes out and join us for a fun-filled fundraising bike event in PA! We're aiming for Sept. depending on COVID-19. We'll share more details in the June newsletter and website



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Health in a Time of Crisis

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STRENGTHENING MENTAL HEALTH IN A TIME OF CRISIS: WE RISE INTERNATIONAL RESPONDS TO COVID-19

Sharing the vision:

By Janelle Bitikofer

We Rise International was developed to partner with communities in the US and around the world, empowering them to improve their health and well-being with strategies that work for them. Two years after our founding, the We Rise Int'l team has honed-in on two sets of target health issues – Mental Illnesses and Addictions (MI/SA) and Diabetes Types 1 and 2 (T1D and T2D).

You'll hear more about the vision for We Rise International partnerships related to Diabetes Type 1 and 2 in the summer newsletter. For now, as the COVID-19 outbreak spans the globe seriously affecting the U.S. and countries around the world, this newsletter focuses on mental health -- an often forgotten yet important aspect of all disasters and public health emergencies

Three weeks ago, I stood in front of a group of 30 church leaders in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, providing the first in our series of trainings on mental illnesses and addictions. It was the beginning of the *Christian Faith Communities Improving Outcomes in Mental Illnesses and Addictions Program* (now called the *Churches Care Program*) a joint initiative of We Rise Int'l, Eastern Mennonite University and the Lancaster Legacy Foundation is partnering with 80 churches in Pennsylvania, to increase their understanding of mental illnesses and addictions, and their capacity to effectively support individuals and families in their congregations and communities who are experiencing a mental illness or addiction. The training went well. The church leaders in attendance were enthusiastic about the topic, and reported excitement about the Churches Care program which will provide guidance to their churches in supporting individuals and families on these themes over the next 18 months.

As we chatted together with the church leaders that day, the Coronavirus outbreak was still mostly affecting China, and people here weren't dwelling on it. The outbreak had not yet hit the U.S.

Since that time, of course, much of life around the world and in the U.S. has drastically changed -- albeit temporarily -- as the virus has swept the globe and we've all begun social distancing. We've postponed (not cancelled,) the second part of that first *Churches Care* training, and may end up doing it online. People across the U.S. and around the world are experiencing heightened anxiety. Since We Rise Int'l works in mental health support and education, we are responding, to

help people reduce their stress levels, fear and anxiety, and support each other emotionally during this time. Emotional well-being is essential to help maintain a healthy body and immune system. A global crisis like this one causes fear, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and for those who lose loved ones - grief. By supporting each other and working together we can help meet each other's emotional needs and keep the light of hope lit during difficult times.



Though the outbreak in the U.S. is a constantly changing situation, We Rise International is already responding in the following ways:

- 1.) Executive Director Janelle Bitikofer provided COVID-19 coping tips on WJTL Radio, a Pennsylvania Christian radio station, this past week, and has offered to do the same on other stations.
- 2.) The [Churches Care Program](#) is providing a mental health clinician (counselor) to support and provide guidance to the leaders of all churches participating in the program as they respond to mental health needs in their congregations and communities. The 30 church leaders who attended the training several weeks ago will be supported by the Churches Care clinician as they provide emotional support to address the anxiety, depression and social isolation needs of their congregations and communities during and beyond the outbreak of COVID-19.



Timely thoughts: In this time of COVID-19, people with pre-existing mental illnesses like major depression, anxiety disorders and psychotic disorders are at risk of increased symptoms due to elevated life stress, and may need extra support. All of us can be at risk of feeling overwhelmed, anxious, isolated, sad, having problems with sleep or appetite. These are mental health symptoms common in a time of crisis. It's important not to let them overwhelm us but rather to be intentional about our "self care" by taking care of our emotional needs. [Click this link to hear tips on self-care and reducing feelings of isolation that Janelle shared during her recent appearance on WJTL radio.](#) We're all in this together and by supporting each other we'll get through it!

THANK YOU NEW TEAM MEMBERS



Big thanks to Marc Evans, community development worker, community organizer, and diabetes health advocate in the Dominican Republic, for becoming the first member of the We Rise International Sustainability and Local Partnerships (SLP) Advisory Team. The SLP Team will provide guidance to assure that We Rise Int'l projects always maintain a focus on local needs, empower local leadership, and assure local sustainability. Check out Marc's bio, coming soon to the We Rise Int'l Website.



Enormous thanks to Linda Witmer, Director of the "RN to BSN in Nursing" program at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU)! Linda has helped build a partnership between EMU, We Rise International, and the LMC Legacy foundation. This partnership is moving forward the Faith Communities Improving Outcomes in Mental Illnesses and Addictions Program (Churches Care Program). Over the next 2.5 years the program will reach out to 80 churches across Pennsylvania to train and empower them to support people with mental illnesses and addictions in their communities. Linda has poured her heart, expertise, and wisdom into this project; she's in it for the long haul. Thank you, Linda!



Three non-profit organizations on the North Coast of the Dominican Republic (DR) needed volunteer assistance in fall 2019, so we joined forces and recruited the Kallemyns. Our partner organizations Levanta Ministries, and A Serving Heart, are two great ministries devoted to the people of the DR. Dan and Rosemary Kallemyn, two experienced retired nurses, who for the past six years have done medical volunteering in the DR, answered the call for volunteers. They spent six weeks dividing their time between each organization

These partnerships were a great success. For We Rise International, Rosemary and Dan developed fundraising strategies, researched global issues related to diabetes, interviewed experts and people with diabetes in the Dominican Republic, prepared briefs for financial supporters, and developed articles and a template for the newsletter. Huge thanks to Dan and Rosemary who not only paid their own way traveling and volunteering, but blessed us with their passion for health, nursing, and the Dominican people with the work they did for all of us! We could not have made as much progress as we did without them and hope that they will continue their relationship with us long term!

Streetlights Project Update



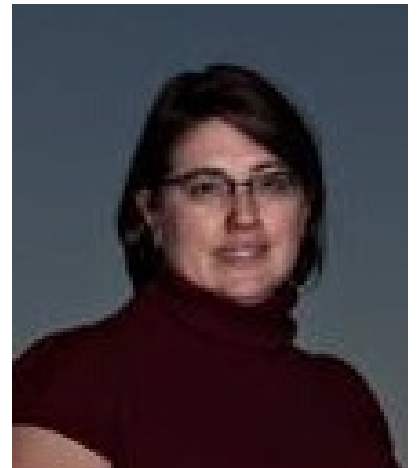
The Streetlights Project is our current U.S. based initiative that was created in 2018. This program is helping communities provide mental wellness, reduce substance addiction, and decrease the stigma that affects individual struggles with mental illness and addiction. 25% of people experiencing a mental illness say the first place where they sought help was in a church, but churches say they need training and support to respond.

The *Faith Communities Improving Outcomes in Mental Illnesses and Addictions Program* ([Churches Care](#)) is a 3-year grant funded Pennsylvania initiative developed in partnership with Eastern Mennonite University, Lancaster, and funded by the Lancaster Legacy Foundation. The program is providing advanced training and support to 80 diverse Christian churches across Pennsylvania. The program will improve the faith communities' ability to provide evidence-based, medically and spiritually relevant wrap-around support and linking for appropriate medical intervention, for individuals and families experiencing mental illnesses and addictions. Mental Health and Addictions Professionals will also be trained. Staff has been hired and our first cohort of church leaders began the training and support program March 7th. Our next in-person trainings have been temporarily postponed due to COVID-19, but the program continues online.

We Rise Welcomes Janel Long to the Team

In November 2019 We Rise Int'l Health Technical Advisory Team Member Janel Lehman Long was hired by We Rise International into the role of Research and Logistics Coordinator for the Faith Communities Improving Outcomes in Mental Illnesses and Addictions program (Churches Care). The project rolled into action this March and will continue for the next 2.5 years, providing training and support to increase Churches' ability to effectively support individuals and families experiencing mental illnesses and addictions

Janel, who has a BA in nursing, a master's degree in Anthropology, and years of experience is coordinating logistics for the trainings and conducting research and evaluation throughout the program, helping We Rise International and EMU assess the effectiveness of the Faith Communities Improving Outcomes in Mental Illnesses and Addictions (Churches Care) program, and helping churches assess and improve their ability to provide helpful support to those in need.



Janel's work will help assure that the program is effective in increasing the knowledge and abilities of Churches to respond to mental illness and addictions needs, and that the program continues to improve as needed in order to have the largest possible helpful impact on the Christian Faith Community.

Welcome, Janel, to this new role!

Computers Needed



We Rise International is in need of three quality used laptop computers; as our staff grows, so must our electronics. All donations are tax deductible. If interested, please contact us via Janelle@werise.international.org



Ways to Get Involved with We Rise International

[Click here
for our
COVID-19
Response
updates](#)

1. Stay informed by signing up for our quarterly newsletter - and share it with your friends.

2. Refer a college or graduate student to apply for an internship with We Rise International. A great way to get involved and build up that resume!

3. Volunteer! Seeking a web guru & program assistant. Remote - serve from home or from our field office on the North Coast of the Dominican Republic.

4. Join us for the upcoming bike-a-thon in Lancaster, PA fall 2020

5. Encourage church leaders, as well as mental health and addiction professionals in the PA area to sign up for the Churches Care program and other trainings offered through the Streetlights Project.

6. Support We Rise International financially through an individual or business donation at any time, or organize a fundraising event in your community. WRI is a US 501C3, all donations are tax deductible.

To sign up for any of the above, go to <https://weriseinternational.org/home>

Global Partnerships

We Rise International partners with community organizations striving to reach the global *Sustainable Development Goals by 2030*. These goals were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The SDGs are a global commitment, recognizing that ending poverty must accompany strategies to improve health and education; ideas that are shared around the world.

Donations are Tax Deductible

WRI is a US based 501c3 global non-profit organization. All donations received are tax deductible. Tax exempt 501c3 letters are available upon request.

Ready to Partner Globally

With Technical Advisory Team members specializing in the fields of mental illness, addiction, global health, public health, women's health, internal medicine, and sustainable development, We Rise International is poised to partner with communities in the U.S. and around the world.

Board of Directors and Staff

Founding Board of Directors:

Amy Vercler, JD
Karin Shank, MS, MLS
Beth Good, RN, PhD

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Janelle Bitikofer, MSW, LCSW

Research and Logistics Coordinator
Janel Long, RN, MA

Program Development Associate
and volunteer coordinator
Desiree Irvin

Intern
Michaela Thomas

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