



At Kingdom Sanctuary

HeartFire Women's Trauma Healing Center
www.heartfirecenters.com

Executive Summary

According to the United Nations (UN), "Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today." The UN identifies it as "a major obstacle to the fulfilment of women's and girls' human rights" and "occurs worldwide, cutting across all generations, nationalities, communities and spheres of our societies, irrespective of age, ethnicity, disability or other background" (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>). In response, the UN launched The Spotlight Initiative focused on eliminating all forms of VAWG. Consistent with this initiative but operating from a Kingdom perspective, HeartFire Centers was incorporated with the vision of providing an innovative and comprehensive solution to the problem of VAWG, particularly in the Caribbean region.



Within VAWG is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and/or psychological aggression (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>). Women experiencing IPV may require any or all of the following: safe housing, childcare, trauma counseling, life skills training, vocational training, employment, health services, and legal support. HeartFire Centers provide the basic needs of safe housing, food, childcare, and education while also treating psychological trauma and its systemic effects on women's minds and bodies.

The children of the women experiencing IPV are also at risk, as exposure to domestic violence is traumatic for kids. Untreated trauma has long-term effects on mental, physical and social health for adults and children. The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>) concluded that adults who had experienced four or more ACEs (domestic violence, abuse, neglect, parent with mental illness or substance abuse, abandonment, etc.) were twice as likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke, three times more likely to develop COPD or contract hepatitis, five times more likely to have depression, ten times more likely to be an intravenous drug user, twelve times more likely to attempt suicide, and had an overall reduced life expectancy of twenty years. Dr. Robert Block, former President of the American Academy of Pediatrics, stated, "ACEs are the single greatest unaddressed public health threat facing our nation today." When trauma is treated effectively, the mind and body can heal and outcomes like those previously mentioned can be avoided. The HeartFire Women's Center provides trauma healing for women and their children so they can recover and live long, healthy lives.

Central to the HeartFire philosophy is that our minds and bodies were designed to heal, and HeartFire Centers aim to create an environment most conducive to healing. HeartFire is about rewiring the nervous system towards wellness, and a felt sense of safety, which is where healing naturally occurs. HeartFire helps clients make lifestyle changes that support wellness, while also providing cutting-edge therapeutic interventions to facilitate resolution of trauma in the mind

and its systemic effects on the body, from chronic illnesses to obesity. The women also receive life coaching and parenting education to facilitate healthier relationships with children and future partners, as well as vocational training and job placement so women graduate the program with a sense of purpose and a plan for self-sustainability.

Mission Statement

“Our mission is to help as many people as possible get free from the effects of unresolved psychological trauma on their minds, bodies, and relationships and walk in the fullness of who God created them to be.”

Vision Statement

“Our vision is to build sanctuaries where women and children can heal from the effects of trauma/intimate partner violence and receive the support and resources they need to thrive.”

OUR PROGRAM

I. A Foundation of Safety

The first step to healing is to establish a foundation of safety. Our bodies were designed to heal however, they only initiate healing procedures when the nervous system signals that it is safe to do so. Our nervous systems have two settings: safety or danger. When our nervous system signals danger, emergency procedures are initiated, just like when we are preparing for a hurricane, normal repair and maintenance procedures are suspended or paused until the anticipated threat passes. This is helpful and adaptive when threats occur, but they are not meant to be the norm. When someone continually feels unsafe because they live in a threatening environment, or because the memories of traumatic experiences keep their brains looping through perpetual threat responses, the body is unable to regulate and in turn, resume normal operating procedures, like healing, connecting with loved ones, and focusing on personal development and life goals. In essence, they are living in survival mode and unable to thrive.

When a woman enters our program, our first goal is to help her brain to signal “safety” so we can embark on the healing journey. We do this by providing safe housing, well equipped with 24-hour security. We also provide safe and secure childcare and schooling, so women can focus on their healing. We also provide legal support to help women take the steps needed to ensure their continued safety in the future, as well as to address any pending legal matters.

II. Mind Care: Mental Wellness

Once the foundation of safety is established, the basic needs of food and shelter are met, and care is provided for the children, women are finally able to focus on their own healing. Trauma rewires the nervous system to continually scan for threats and remain hypervigilant, ready to fight, flee, or freeze, as needed to survive. We start by processing the way the brain has stored memories of traumatic events and experiences, so they are no longer triggering

threat responses in the present. We employ several different trauma protocols including Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART), Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories (RTM), and Eye Movement Desensitization Therapy (EMDR), and Somatic Experiencing (SE). Next, we work on developing new neural pathways through a process called neuroplasticity, to rewire the brain towards regulation, safety, and calm. We accomplish this using a combination of approaches including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Equine Therapy, and various expressive arts therapies. Traditional counseling approaches such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Emotion-Focused Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Solution-Focused Therapy and Narrative Therapy are also employed as needed. Children will also participate in individual and family counseling in accordance with their developmental capacities and needs.

III. Body Care: Physical Health

While women are healing their minds, we will also be supporting the restoration of their health through a combination of lifestyle practices that we hope will become a way of life for them moving forward. All women will have access to medical care while in the program, beginning with a comprehensive evaluation to identify their specific needs. Women will have access to chiropractic care to address any misalignments they may have due to physical abuse and trauma. While any required medications will be permitted, the goal will be to provide natural healing options whenever possible, including the use of pharmaceutical-grade nutraceuticals, herbs and vitamins, particularly those that support optimal brain health. Movements such as dance, stretching, and exercise are central to the program as trauma is also stored in the body at the cellular level, and just as an animal shakes to come out of “freeze”, movement helps to release trauma from the body. It also aids in reducing inflammation, improving brain function, reducing stress and improving mood, focus, and clarity. Fresh, whole food meals, juices, and smoothies will be provided that support brain health and aim to reduce inflammation and improve methylation, a common issue with those who have experienced prolonged trauma. *“Let food be thy medicine.” - Hippocrates*

IV. Heart Care: From Surviving to Thriving

When women are feeling safe, peaceful, calm, healthy and focused, they are ready to move out of survival mode and into thriving. This is where they really blossom. We provide life coaching to help them to identify their strengths and interests and then help them to create a plan to accomplish their dreams. Once they've identified their area of interest, they will participate in vocational training and education to prepare them for their future career. The next step is placement in their target job, where they will receive ongoing mentoring to support them in their transition to independence. Part of the coaching at this stage is also creating a vision for how they would like to experience themselves in the future, as an individual, a parent, and a partner, and equipping them with the relationship skills needed to thrive. These skills will also equip them for the workplace. The focus in this stage is on personal development, gratitude, optimism, developing a growth mindset, and making a meaningful contribution to the community that is personally rewarding and fulfilling, thereby reinforcing women's sense of personal value, dignity and worth.

This is how we aim to honor and care for our women. We hope you'll join us.

Thank you,

Dr. Leslie

Founder



Dr. Leslie Cary, Ph.D.

Dr. Cary serves at the Founder of HeartFire Women's Center. She is a graduate of the University of Florida, University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University. She is a licensed psychotherapist, marriage and family therapist, and clinical supervisor with over fifteen years of

clinical experience in the field of trauma. She also served as a professor at Palm Beach Atlantic University from 2011 to 2019. Dr. Cary was the prior Chief Operating Officer for Inspired Performance Institute in Orlando, Florida where she provided trauma healing protocols for military veterans, survivors from the Boston Marathon bombing, and for women and children who had experienced physical and sexual abuse. She left Inspired Performance in 2019 with a vision to create HeartFire Healing Centers to provide a safe place for women and children to receive comprehensive and holistic support for trauma healing.

Dr. Cary worked with abused women and children for over fifteen-years and saw first-hand the systemic effects of trauma on children and families. She also witnessed children age-out of foster care and become parents who perpetuated the same abuse and neglect on their children. Motivated to interrupt these cycles of abuse created by unresolved trauma, Dr. Cary began researching how trauma effects the brain, nervous system, social behavior and relationships, and the body as a whole. She quickly recognized there was a significant gap in the availability of therapeutic services to effectively treat trauma, as traditional counseling methods do not work, and specialized training is required. Furthermore, trauma's effects are systemic and must be addressed systemically, utilizing treatment approaches that target the mind, body, and "heart" (relationships and identity). The HeartFire Program has four overarching goals, Peace, Power, Presence, and Purpose, to help women walk in the fullness of their God-given identities and share their gifts and talents with the world.