

What Happened Before Crack, Alcohol, Meth? Before Fentanyl?

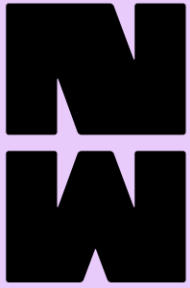
Gina Warren, Pharm.D.

Co-Founder, CEO

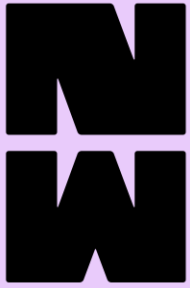
Neighborhood Wellness Foundation (NW)

Fentanyl Awareness & Action Summit

May 12, 2026



**To Know More,
We Need to Look Deeper...**



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) & Impact Multiple Interconnected Systems

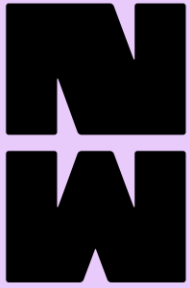
**Abuse, Neglect, Household Dysfunction,
Neurological (Brain) – decision-making,
emotional regulation**

**Endocrine (Stress/Hormonal) – chronic cortisol,
HPA axis activation**

Cardiovascular – hypertension, heart disease risk

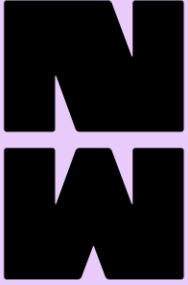
**Immune – inflammation, reduced resilience to
illness**

Metabolic – diabetes, obesity risk



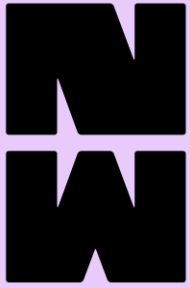
Beyond the Studies— where it begins

The outcomes in DPH
—long before the first hit,
There was the exposure.



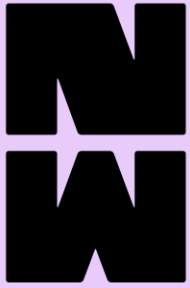
Understanding Human Suffering & Different Ways we React/Cope

- What does that feel like as a child...
- No language to connect to the experiences
- Looking deeper...



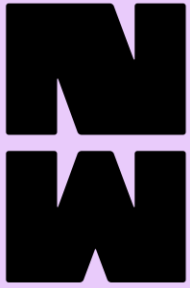
Community Voices

- “Grew up with a ton of violence in my house.”
- “Parents cooking drugs, getting high all night”
- I had to go to school in the morning”
- “Grown folks creeping in your room at night”
- “I just knew that when I started to remember, I had to get high so I wouldn’t have to remember that s**t”



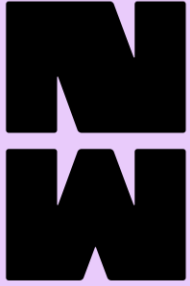
The Patterns ... The Mechanisms that Create them

- Children up all night, most nights, navigating complexities and unpredictabilities....
- Homelessness, fear, violence, hunger... unwanted hands.
- Arrive at school expected to focus and learn
- Parents carrying weight without language to name it.
- Complex systems to navigate in the absence of Foundational Capacities

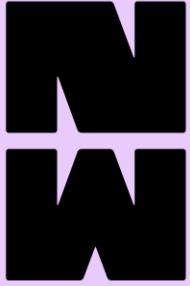


Learning the Language of Behavior

- Dysregulated students—fighting, vaping, laying on the ground, running around the campus, disruptive, withdrawn, self-harming.
- Dysregulated adults—parents overwhelmed, disengaged, addicted, violently reactive.

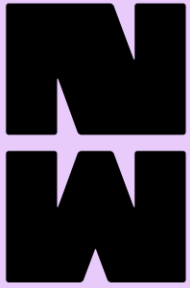


Who Does This Impact?



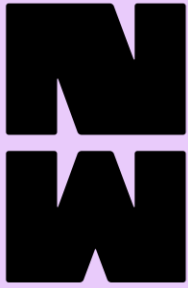
Those Who Struggle Publicly

- “Those people” ...
- Labeled: crack-heads, meth mouth, dope fiend, junkie, drug addict, alcoholic
- Labels dehumanize and create barriers to support.
- They are easily identified in areas of poverty as they are without resources to hide.

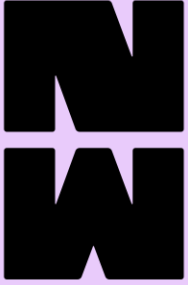


The Original ACEs Study— All Socioeconomic Levels are Impacted

- ACEs and toxic stress shows up across sectors
- Dysregulation can also look like smiling while struggling in silence
- Overworking, perfectionism, alcoholism, other substances used in private
- Chronic health conditions unmanaged because Body is Keeping Score in our silence

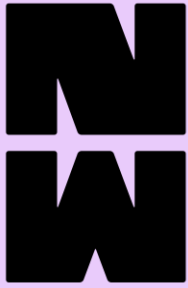


**ROOTS to RISE—
Community Pathways to Impact
the Fentanyl Crises & Other SUD by
Getting to the Root**



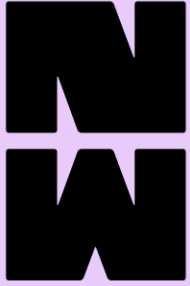
Healing Circles- Community-Embedded Behavioral Health

- 10 years
- Learning the correlation of substance use disorders to human suffering
- Space to share lived experiences
- Listen with compassion—to suffer less
- Open up healthy alternative pathways
- Disrupt the transfer of adversity



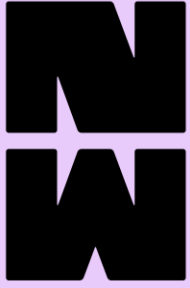
In Partnership with Northeastern
University & Treehouse Family
Foundation

Community Based Participatory
Research to Achieve Health Equity
Concept Mapping of NW Healing Circles



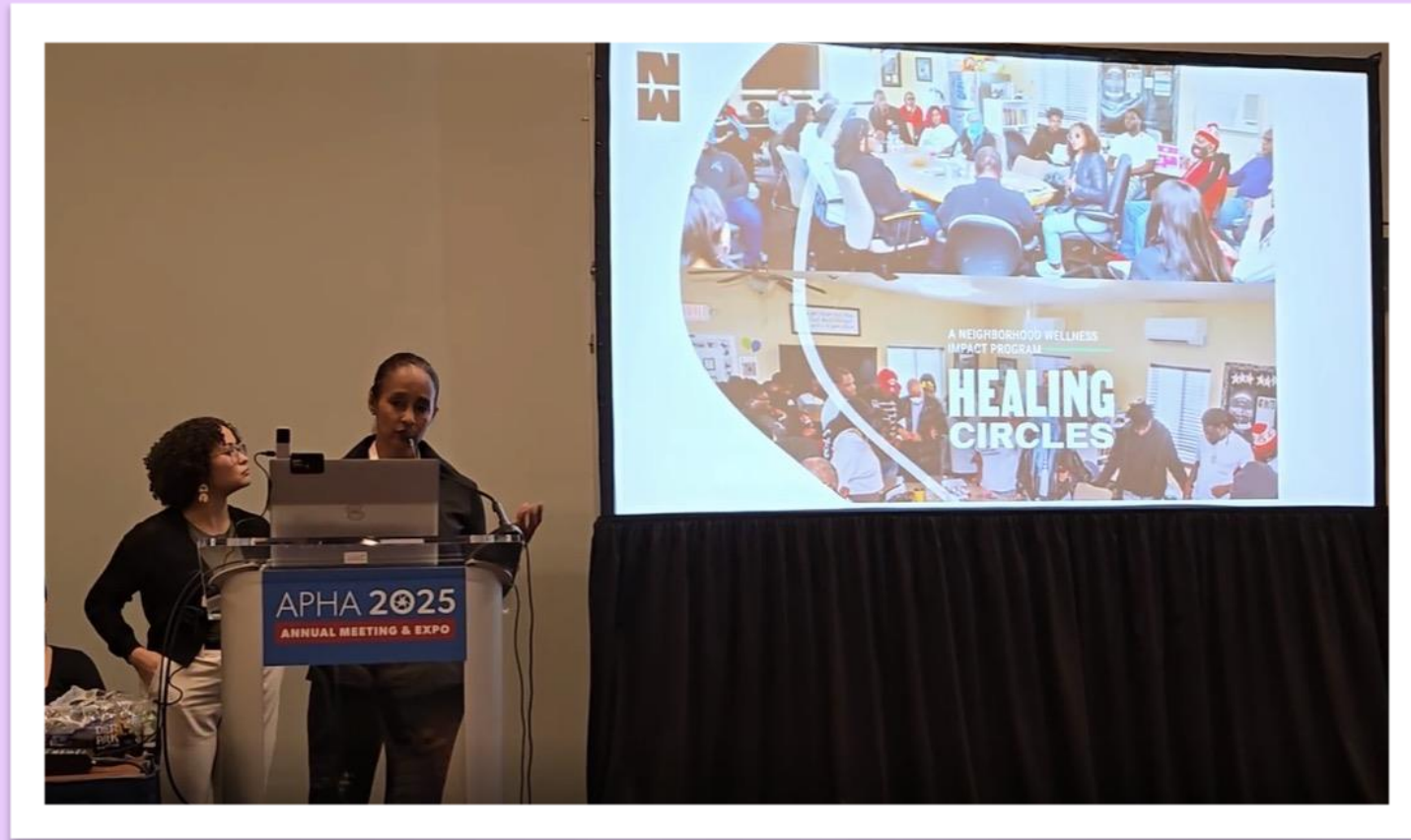
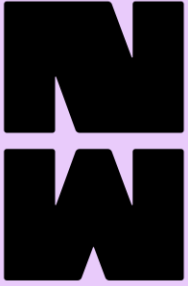
NW Healing Circles Concept Mapping with Northeastern University

- Involves the community
- Partners—not subjects
- Co-creation
- People most impacted, help build the map
- Shapes the data, the meaning, and the solutions together

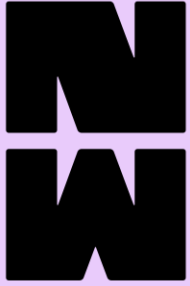


Findings of Healing Circles

- Shift mindsets & unlearn survival behaviors → to become the best version of yourself
- Create safe, vulnerable spaces rooted in trust and belonging
- Build awareness, empowerment, and healing
- Grounded in core values: trust, respect, loyalty, spirituality
- Break barriers with love to build pathways to healthy solutions

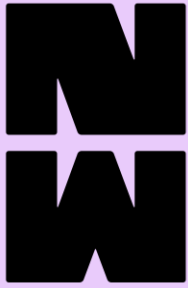


NW Co-Presenting with Northeastern University at American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, 2025 on Community Based Participatory Research to Achieve Health Equity -NW Healing Circles



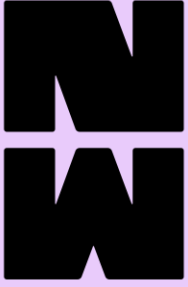
Why Healing Circles & Acknowledging the Correlation of ACEs & Childhood Trauma Matters for Prevention

- Getting to the root through Healing Circles helps to interrupt that cycle
- Awareness, regulation, connection and ongoing support
- Trauma prevention is also fentanyl prevention.



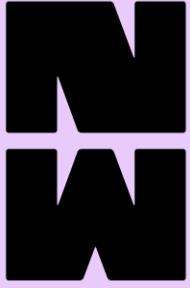
North Sacramento Impact

- In NW service areas, fentanyl deaths fell from 12 to 6 in ZIP 95838.
- Deaths fell from 28 to 8 in ZIP 95815 (2023–2024).



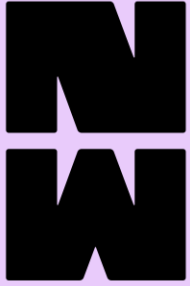
Rise Through Healing

- When systems connect to grassroots work
- ACEs, childhood trauma & the correlation to ACEs is acknowledged
- Strategy and lived experiences move together
- Judgement gives way to understanding
- Criticism to capacity building
- “Those People”, Become All of Us



**Knowing is not enough.
Learning is not enough.
Collaborative Action is what changes
outcomes.**

**So we look deeper—
Working Together Across Sectors**



When we address the root,
Looking Deeper
within ourselves
first...
we change the future.