**Minding Mendocino**

By Jessica Maness, LCSW, Long Valley Health Center

**Turning Inward**

With the ground white and heavy with snow, we have been forced to slow ourselves.  For many of us, this means facing the music.  Staying busy is often a powerful tool of distraction from our inner dialogue, thoughts about ourselves and the world, and emotions that are often uncomfortable.  This is especially true when we have grief, unresolved anger, and painful relationships, charged memories, chronic pain, or many other challenges.  Turning inward to face these challenges can lead to their being healed or to our improved ability to cope with them. This process can seem quite daunting when we might not have the tools or “road map” for such a journey.  While the actual order of these steps may be different for each individual, some guideposts on this road map can help.

               A fundamental tool is a support system.  This system can be many individuals (such as family and friends), a group that is supportive, or one caring person.  How we go about finding such support can be a large step for many of us who have become used to isolation and “going it alone”.   When the comfort zone has become more of a box, it is time to challenge ourselves to step out of the isolation box, especially if we truly want change.  Healing is change.  We can try calling a helper in the area, going to a support group new to us, attending a community event we would normally avoid, or calling an old friend to make amends and rekindle the relationship.  There are many options to explore, even in a rural area.

                A second tool is having a self-care plan. This is true for before and during our healing journey.  This way, we always have something to fall back on if we are having emotional difficulty or need to give ourselves special attention.  Many of us have been taught to “feel guilty” for taking time, or doing anything for ourselves.  However, this is often one of the beliefs that keep us from healing.  It is important to do nice things for ourselves, especially when trying to heal.  Taking a hot bath, a long shower, listening to favorite music, asking to be alone, asking to talk, having a massage, taking a walk, doing yoga, doing our art/expression (painting, journaling/writing, making or singing music, dancing, or pastels). Whatever it is we do is not important, only that it brings us back to ourselves in a way that is calming, centering, loving, and healing.

                With these external and internal resources in play, we are ready to embark deeper on our journey.  It is generally important that we allow ourselves to express our feelings throughout the adventure.  As we learn to accept ourselves for how we feel and think, we become easier for ourselves to hang out with.  Talking with our support group (or person), writing in a journal, or personal expression (crying, yelling, expressive movement, expressive art, singing) can be very helpful tools for the work at hand. Many people find that exercise, particularly walking, is extremely important for this process.  Others explore various modalities of healing and actively seek their answers this way.  Some read copious amounts of books.  There seems to be a theme for those who have created a space for this healing to occur: it begins to occur. Recognizing it helps this process.

                Be gentle with yourself. Healing gradually happens in layers over time.  Sometimes it seems we are not making progress; other times we will be aware of how far we have come.  It is not a journey for the uncaring, or the weak of spirit.  When we take the steps, however, we can look forward to a day when we are becoming a person we like hanging out alone with.  Thanks for reading Laytonville! Remember to write inquiries to: LVHC, Attn: Jessi Maness, PO Box 870, Laytonville, CA 95454.