## RENFREW ONNECTIONS

HOPE, HELP & HEALING





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## Managing Emotions In Times of Unknown

By: **Erin Birely, LCPC**Alumni Services Coordinator

**As I sit down to write this, I'm reflecting on the letter I wrote** for our spring 2020 issue of *Connections*. This time last year, I was focused on helping our alumni celebrate Renfrew's 35 years of expert eating disorder treatment. Little did I know when writing that letter, there would be no in-person celebrations for our 35th year, and instead, almost everything we knew in life would move to a virtual setting. If at that time you had told me this is what the future would hold, it would have been hard to believe, let alone that we would all grow to feel some semblance of comfort in the experience. But that is the funny thing about the unknown—it's usually scarier when we think about experiencing it, than when we actually go through it.

When I think about the unknown, I notice my first reaction is usually one of fear. I think to myself, "What is going to happen?" and "What if I can't handle what happens?!" But this past year forced me to face those thoughts head on, and what I learned is, even when I don't know what will happen or if I can handle it, it won't stop things from happening.

As I think back on this year, I realize life had actually prepared all of us for managing our emotions in unknown situations, as it's what we've been doing all along. While this year was an extreme case, it showed us we can adapt when we need to.

While virtual therapy wasn't something I thought I'd ever be doing, I've found it helpful to be able to work with more clients in more areas than ever before and provide them the help and support they want, but maybe couldn't access before. I've reconnected with people far away from me, because all of a sudden, distance stopped being a barrier to connection when I couldn't see anyone in person, no matter their location!

While I still feel some fear when thinking of the unknown, I've learned I can develop reappraisals that turn a fearful, "What is going to happen?" into a more curious and sometimes excited, "I wonder what *could* happen?"

As we all move forward in life, whatever that may look like, I hope we can use our experiences in this major time of unknowns. Knowing we've done it before and can do it again can strengthen our belief in the ability to handle whatever comes our way.



**Erin Birely, LCPC** 

started working as the Team Leader of The Renfrew Center of Baltimore in September 2016 and joined the Alumni Services Team in 2019 as the Alumni Services Coordinator. Prior to joining Renfrew, Erin had worked in private practice as well as inpatient, partial and intensive outpatient levels of care.

Erin has worked in the field of eating disorder treatment since receiving her Master's degree in 2012. She enjoys working with people to make positive and long lasting changes in life through therapy and building their emotional tolerance.

## Our Collective Voice:

Letter from Renfrew's Founder and President, Samuel E. Menaged, JD

**During the initial COVID-19 pandemic quarantine period,** many were anticipating it would last only a few weeks. However, with this issue of *Connections* we are marking just over a year since the pandemic swept through the country. While it is yet unclear when this unprecedented chapter of our lives may close, hope is ever closer on the horizon with increasing availability of vaccines.

The importance of community and support is still so relevant as we continue to navigate this time of unknowns together. At The Renfrew Center, we've continued to explore how our lives have changed since society went virtual—from a variety of online support groups, to Facebook and Instagram Lives,

and our 2021 National Eating Disorders

Awareness Week campaign, "Beyond the Screen: Invisible No Longer"

(read a full NEDA Week recap on page 3!).

Our residential facilities in Coconut Creek, FL and Philadelphia, PA remain open and accepting new

patients, and we are continuing to offer virtual Day Treatment, Intensive Outpatient and Outpatient Programming to patients during this difficult time.

We are also proud that in addition to states with physical Renfrew locations, we are expanding our virtual services to those residing in a continually growing list of states. While the events of the past year have posed many challenges, it is clear connections through virtual care have proven to be incredibly beneficial, and we look forward to seeing how telehealth may continue to break down barriers to treatment.

While we may not know what the future holds, you can rest assured Renfrew and Alumni Services will be here to support you through it!

Samuel E. Menaged, JD is the Founder and President of The Renfrew Centers and The Renfrew Center Foundation. Mr. Menaged founded The Renfrew Center 35 years ago as the country's first residential treatment facility specializing in eating disorders. He is the past-President of the Board of the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action, an advocacy group based in Washington, DC and a board member of the Residential Eating Disorders Consortium. Mr. Menaged is a former healthcare attorney.

## **Checking In With Your Values**

There's no doubt we've been living in a time full of unknowns—

and that may have impacted your recovery journey. The unprecedented events of the past year have increased awareness on racial injustices, political and social movements, and because of the pandemic, ultimately changed our daily routines. It was suddenly dangerous to see friends and family, and many had to literally bring their work home. Going outside without a reason was discouraged. Feelings of anxiety were suddenly high when planning to do our once-common errands, like grocery shopping, doctor appointments, and even going to school. We were put in a position to decide what and who is most essential.

As the country continues to work on creating a new normal, it does not erase the hardships and adversities we have collectively faced. It can be helpful to reflect on what has become important to you after this past year. I would encourage everyone to identify their current core values, and really break it down and name specific values that help you feel whole, both physically and emotionally.

That could be time alone to recharge and recognize that after pandemic restrictions are lifted, it is still acceptable to say no to plans. Creating time to mindfully connect with friends and family, because that was not always an option. Being outside and enjoying nature and fresh air without a plan. Continuing to learn and advocate for beliefs that resonate with you.

For added support in this time of unknowns, it is imperative to anchor in the moment. It can help to dust off your Unified Treatment toolbox, and a perfect place to start is taking a minute to do a "3-point check:"

- 1. Check in with your thoughts. What are you thinking about?
- **2. Tune in to physical sensations.** What do you feel in your body right now? What kinds of behaviors are you doing with your body, is your leg shaking, do you have a headache?
- **3. Lastly, notice what kind of urges are coming up.** What do you want to do?

This simple and quick tool is a great way to help identify what emotions are coming up and provide an opportunity to explore what they are trying to communicate. Your emotions are your body's natural way of telling you something in your day-to-day is not working.

Identifying your values and your emotions will not only help you through these times, but will ultimately benefit your recovery, too. Living a life aligned with your core values is an authentic, wholehearted life!



Allison Gonzalez,
MSW, LSW
is a Primary Therapist at
The Renfrew Center of
Southern New Jersey. She
graduated with her Master's
in Social Work from Rutgers
University. She has worked
with individuals who struggle
with an eating disorder since
2017 in all levels of care,
from inpatient to outpatient
treatment.

# NEDA Week 2021 BEYOND TUC CODEEN

## INVISIBLE NO LONGER

February 22-28, 2021

Our annual **National Eating Disorders Awareness Week** (led by NEDA) support campaign was a call to action to look deeper than what is visible in pictures or on video, especially when discerning the mental health of ourselves, friends and loved ones.

For our 2021 theme, **Beyond The Screen: Invisible No Longer**, we shared a variety of tips, resources and activities to challenge our community to prioritize mental health away from technology—ultimately focusing on caring for your wellbeing offline.

Below is a small sample of these resources—visit our website, at <a href="https://www.renfrewcenter.com">www.renfrewcenter.com</a>, to see them all!

#### **GENERAL RESOURCES**

- (i
- Active Minds (for young adults 14-25)
- BEAM: Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective
- · National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics
- · National Institute of Mental Health
- · No Stigmas
- · The Loveland Foundation
- · The Trevor Project
- · Therapy for Black Girls
- · Therapy for Latinx

#### SOCIAL MEDIA QUIZ

those you follow?

difficult to do?

sexualities, etc.?

Do you frequently compare yourself to

Have you ever wanted to take a hiatus

Are you frequently preoccupied by how many followers, likes, etc. you receive?

Is social media your primary tool for

avoiding situations you find stressful?

body shape/size, ethnicities, genders,

Does your feed lack diversity in

from social media, but found it too

YES NO





- @renfrewcenter
  - @bodyposipanda
  - · @diveinwell
  - @effyourbeautystandards
  - · @foodheaven
  - · @i\_weigh
  - @lexiemanion
  - @mynameisjessamyn
  - · @sofiehagendk
  - @yrfatfriend

## From the Library

### I Like Me!

By: by Nancy Carlson. Viking Penguin Inc., ©1998 Submitted by: Eileen Binckley, Librarian



While this choice of book may seem a bit unusual, you will be inspired by the content. This is a children's picture book from which you can all benefit.

The main character is a delightful little pig who declares she is her own best friend. She knows all the fun things she is able to do like painting, reading or even riding a bike. She has a selfcare ritual and, moreover, she likes everything about herself including her round tummy. Like everyone, she sometimes feels bad about herself or sad about things, but she knows exactly what to do to feel better. Even when she makes mistakes, she just tries again and again to

make things right. Above all, she knows exactly who she is and declares often, "I'll always be me!"

Despite the format, the message of this short picture book is so relevant. Anytime you need a pick-me-up or need to put a smile on your face, just reach for *I Like Me!* The message is so powerful that I gave it

to my granddaughters and, other than saving it for yourself, you may want to give a copy to your own family or friend.

## NEW RENFREW PATIENT VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS



BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color)

Discussion includes the following topics and their impacts on eating disorder recovery:

- Lived experiences
- Prejudices
- Marginalization
- Racism & racial inequality
- Microaggressions
- Trauma



SAGE (Sexuality and Gender Equality)

The following themes that can hinder eating disorder recovery are discussed:

- Societal pressures
- Gender expression
- Fluidity in identity
- Relationships
- Intersectionalities
- Exploration & questioning

These groups are offered weekly and are for CURRENT Renfrew patients only.

More Information: Call 1-800-RENFREW (736-3739)

## We Are Committed

At Renfrew, we have always been committed to being a diverse and inclusive organization and, in summer 2020, we strengthened this commitment by developing the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force. This multi-member committee is made up of individuals from varying positions and departments within Renfrew. We have been extremely busy in the last 9+ months taking significant steps to create everlasting change as it influences clinical care, ongoing trainings to Renfrew staff and the professional community, as well as human resources policies and practices.

### Some of these exciting changes include:

### A BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) Support Group

for current patients and alumni. We saw a need to create a space where BIPOC patients can come together to share lived experiences, emotions and resources, to allow for the development of valuable tools to support the challenging process of overcoming an eating disorder. Offered weekly, this virtual group is open to all patients, at all levels of care throughout the country.

We also offer a monthly BIPOC Support Group for our alumni community as well. This group is open to all Renfrew alumni regardless of attendance at previous Renfrew BIPOC support events and continues the conversation on the emotional and physical impacts of the current cultural climate. Visit <a href="https://www.renfrewcenter.com">www.renfrewcenter.com</a> for more details and to register.

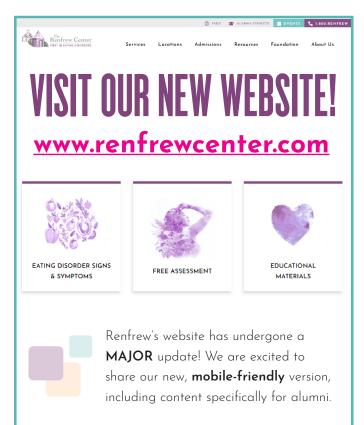
Patient support groups for our LGBTQIA+ community have officially begun. Our SAGE (Sexuality and Gender Equality) Groups provide a safe and empowering space for members to discuss societal pressures, fluidity in identity, and gender expression, along with other pivotal themes that may hinder recovery. We look forward to offering this group to our alumni community in the near future.

We have also been working hard to educate the public on the impacts of race on eating disorders through our media efforts. Some notable placements include:

- Therapy for Black Girls Podcast: Session 165: Let's Chill with the Quarantine 15 Jokes. Interview by Gayle Brooks, PhD, CEDS-S
- SWAAY: Questions That Aren't Being Asked About Eating Disorders in Black Women. Article by Paula Edwards-Gayfield, LCMHCS, LPC, CEDS-S and Robia Smith-Herman, LCSW
- CNN International: Olympic High Jumper Pressured to 'Perform Better' and Lose a Few Pounds. Quotes by Gayle Brooks, PhD, CEDS-S

All of us at Renfrew are proud of these enhancements and know there is more work to be done. Continue to check back in *Connections* and on Renfrew's website for the latest updates from the Task Force.









Wednesday, June 16th Balancing Nutrition and

Pleasure: The Journey to Normalized Eating

Wednesday, June 30th Expression in Recovery: Exploring the Role of Creative Arts to Heal

Wednesday, July 21st Trusting After Trauma: Connecting with Others and Improving Relationships

Wednesday, July 28th Preventing Relapse in College: Navigating the Stress of Being a Student

All webinar re-broadcasts will air at 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm and 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm (EDT).

> For more information or to register, please visit: www.renfrewcenter.com.

## VOICES OF

By: Aja P.

ROWING UP, I'VE ALWAYS LIVED IN A LARGER BODY AND WAS USED TO BEING BULLIED RELENTLESSLY for my size. I was about 12 years old when I first decided to do something about it and began dieting, which eventually lead to me restricting and purging. Even after my parents found out, because of my size, it wasn't treated as the makings of an eating disorder, but as "just another thing wrong with Aja." I continued to use behaviors on and off for years, never believing I had a problem, but that this is just what I had to do to punish myself for looking the way I did.

Fast forward to 2019. I'm 27 years old and the heaviest I've ever been and devastated. My disordered eating habits came back in full swing and turned into a raging eating disorder with a mind of its own. I restricted heavily and purged

what little I did eat. I was terrified of food and obsessed with weighing myself and the idea of getting smaller.

March 2019 was when I finally decided to ask for help and walked through the doors of Renfrew in Philadelphia, PA. There, I was met with dietitians and therapists who validated my illness and told me that regardless of my shape/size, I WAS "sick enough," had an

eating disorder, and deserved treatment. It was hard to accept, but slowly a new way of thinking began to set in.

While it took two more stays at Renfrew that year, and an additional stay at another residential facility for me to get to where I am today, the things I've learned at Renfrew have carried me through my journey. Renfrew taught me to not bury my emotions, and instead use things like the ARC to figure out what my emotions were trying to tell me so I could better cope with them. I also learned to practice self-compassion and that it's okay to be struggling.

Times are hard for a lot of people right now, and the temptation to numb out and use symptoms is high, but to all my readers, please believe that you DO NOT deserve the pain your eating disorder will ultimately bring. Lean into your feelings, have compassion for yourself because your pain is valid, and talk about these feelings with a therapist or someone you trust. The unknown is scary, but we don't have face it alone.

Aja is 29 years old and lives in Florence, NJ. She is an alumna of The Renfrew Center of Philadelphia, PA. She works for a utility company, but her passion is music. She released a debut EP, "New Beginnings," under the stage name SongBird in June 2020, and it is available on all streaming platforms. Her hope is, through her music, she can empower others to blossom into whomever and whatever they want to be, despite the challenges they may face. She is very open about her mental health issues, eating disorder, and recovery from substance abuse. These are topics featured in her songs, as a way to relate to her listeners and show them they aren't alone. She is currently taking a dual certification class in audio engineering and music production in hopes of being able to produce her own songs.

By: Lauren L.

REMEMBER THE DAY VIVIDLY. I was sitting on the couch of my day program, and a new girl asked me if I was one of the therapists.

Me? I thought... no way, I had a meltdown at lunch yesterday.

She didn't realize I was actually in treatment just like her, because our eating disorders don't always show on the outside. Now, I am one of "the therapists," not at a day program for eating disorders, but working with clients of all walks of life on a range of mental health challenges and struggles. How

did I go from one side of this tricky, painful disorder to another? A lot of hard work, resilience, and commitment to overall mental health and wellness, and not just my relationship to food and eating. Most importantly: I did it while connecting with others.

In my healing journey, Renfrew was ground zero. I needed to be taken out of my environment, which was riddled with hard wired behavior patterns of reward and punishment that were so deeply rooted, I couldn't pull myself out of them. I needed Renfrew's structure, tough love, tools, and most importantly, community, in order to rebuild my life and teach my body how to eat normally.

Once I got to a stable place with food, more work began. I was able to look at myself, REALLY LOOK, and not see the eating disorder anymore. I was able to figure out who I am, what I value and what I love, and I was able to look at why I hated myself and my body for so long. Facing this was the hardest part, as my eating disorder had been, in part, born from my dislike of myself. For so long, I clamored onto any way to change my body, but not ways to love it. Treatment helped me move toward that change.

The biggest takeaway I learned through my own therapy, and then going back to school to be a therapist, was to accept that everyone has their struggles, but I don't have to identify with my eating disorder forever. I can accept it as a part of who I am and who I was, have pride in overcoming it, and know at the same time that it is not my whole story. I am so much more than my eating disorder, and you are too!

Lauren is a mental health counselor in New York City. She is an alumna of The Renfrew Center of Philadelphia, PA and Greenwich, CT (Editors note: the Greenwich site has since relocated to White Plains, NY). She graduated from New York University's Master's program in 2020. She still stays in contact with those she met in treatment. Traveling and connecting with other people are her favorite things to do.

## RECQVERY

By: Susan S.

Y RECOVERY BEGAN WITH A GOOGLE SEARCH. I had been using symptoms of my eating disorder for so long, but it wasn't until I started eating so much on a binge, then purged, that I recognized it as a problem. I was just fat and had been basically since birth. An eating disorder hadn't even been on my radar.

When I came for my assessment at Renfrew and was placed in the day program, I honestly thought I was on my way to finally getting thin. Treatment was going to be my last diet, my weight loss solution, the "lifestyle change" I had been searching for since age 9. It was several weeks into treatment and many, many reminders to myself that I had been diagnosed by a professional before I even accepted I had an eating disorder. And once I did, I started to notice the changes I had been hoping for—not in my body, but in my mindset.

I started using mindfulness to connect with the present moment in a way I didn't even know I hadn't been. I started to notice a sense of clarity, like I was truly present

for the first time, like I was actually feeling my emotions instead of doing my best to ignore them or cover them with food. Mindfulness is still a practice I go back to in the hard times when things get fuzzy again. Because they do. The urges still sometimes ramp up, and I still sometimes have the thought that going back to living in my eating disorder would just be so much easier, but I

recognize that using those eating eating disorder behaviors is only easier until it's not.

My recovery has been a challenge, and certainly not one I've always won. I graduated from Renfrew the first time in the fall of 2018, but through some experiences with loss and grief, went back to Intensive Outpatient Programming (IOP) in early 2020. The day I graduated IOP for the second time was the same day the pandemic shut down the world (or at least the state). While most of my treatment was in person, the virtual programming at Renfrew has been the thing that has kept me in recovery during quarantine. I am still currently a member of the virtual outpatient group, and having that chance to touch base every week has been incredibly valuable for me.

So, did I lose the weight I was hoping to when I started treatment nearly three years ago? I honestly couldn't say—I haven't weighed myself since graduation. But what I gained was peace and the true belief that my weight can fluctuate, but my worth cannot. And for that, I am grateful.

Susie is grateful to be an alumna of The Renfrew Center of Baltimore, MD. She resides in Parkville, MD with her fiancé and two cats. She is a former teacher turned HR administrator who spends her free time playing games, listening to podcasts, watching true-crime documentaries, and reporting diet ads on social media for being "false or misleading content." She hopes to use her experience to change people's understanding of eating disorders and those affected.

By: Heather E.

WANT TO SHARE MORE OF MY RECOVERY STORY THAN JUST MY EATING DISORDER STORY. As background, I became very entrenched in the disorder during my freshman year of college and the summer following. I had no idea what I was doing, and that the thoughts I was having weren't normal. If not for my mom, I wouldn't have survived my eating disorder, which has been a very sobering

thought for me.

I went to The Renfrew Center of
Nashville in 2019 and discharged in 2020.

March 2021 marks one year since I wore
my high school graduation cap during my
last group there and then "graduated" when
the day ended by throwing it in the air. I have a few

memories that stick out to me from my time there that all contribute to my ongoing recovery. The first is during my first week in PHP, when I had meals individually in a separate room. They did this for me, to help me, to comfort me, to tell my eating disorder that we will not listen to it. The second one is when I ate my fear food for the first time. My primary therapist and my friends at the table went bite for bite with me while I cried and ate with "ED" screaming in my head. The third is when I felt like I belonged there, as in, when I said the words "I have an eating disorder."

Renfrew was a place that helped me do and talk about things I thought were always impossible. Now I have such a desire to shout my story and educate people and help others who are struggling, and not allow this illness to take anymore of my life. If it were an illness like cancer, treatment wouldn't feel shameful. If it were cancer, people wouldn't diminish the danger of it.

I vow to contribute to this world to take up space and tell my truths.

Heather is 22 years old and lives in Murfreesboro, TN. She is an alumna of The Renfrew Center of Nashville, TN. She is a full-time nanny to a little girl, who she hopes to teach body respect and intuitive eating to, as well as be a safe place for her. Heather is sharing her story unashamedly on her Instagram page, @heatherelaine18, and is starting to write a book with her mom, sharing both of their perspectives on her eating disorder and recovery.



The Renfrew Center Foundation 475 Spring Lane Philadelphia, PA 19128

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Residential & Outpatient Programs for Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating & Body Image Issues

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Philadelphia, PA Coconut Creek, FL

#### ALL LOCATIONS

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Pittsburgh, PA Radnor, PA West Palm Beach, FL

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1-800-RENFREW www.renfrewcenter.com

## **Support The Renfrew Center Foundation**

The Renfrew Center Foundation is a nonprofit organization that helps to advance eating disorders education, research, advocacy, and treatment. Please help us to continue these efforts by making a tax-deductible donation to the Foundation.

#### Donations can be sent to:

The Renfrew Center Foundation, 475 Spring Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19128

Your donation, or that of a family member, may help someone receive the crucial care she requires. In addition, we can continue to educate the public about eating disorders and provide necessary training for professionals in the field.

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CHECK CARD USED: AMEX	DISCOVER MAS	TERCARD VISA
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