

The Western Institute for Social Research (“WISeR”)—Promoting Social Changes To Better Support Living Healthy

The Western Institute for Social Research is a multicultural community of deeply committed and creative students and faculty whose learning efforts are directed toward progressive social change. “WISeR” offers students the opportunity to create personalized BA, MA and PhD programs, and more than simply offering degree programs, we at WISR are dedicated to collaborative learning that can bring about changes on individual and societal levels. Moreover, many students, faculty and alumni are involved in the areas of healing, health, personal growth, and relationship enhancement. Their areas of practice include, for example, trauma therapy, couples therapy, somatic approaches to healing, public health education and activism, and relationship coaching and life coaching. The following two stories illustrate some of the noteworthy accomplishments and inspirational endeavors of WISR learners.

Sherri Kimbell is a WISR PhD student and licensed professional counselor in Colorado. Previously working as a social justice environmental activist, her career evolved to a focus on , helping individuals recover from psychosis in home environments with the support of therapeutic teams. Prior to enrolling at WISR she was Co-Chair of the Contemplative Psychology Department at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado and Senior Clinician and Intensive Psychotherapist with Windhorse Community Services in Boulder. At WISR’s recent Annual Conference in August, Sherri presented and led a discussion of her plans to develop greatly needed therapeutic support for returning military personnel.

As she states on her Wisrville blog [<http://sherrickimbell.wisrville.org>]: “Military personnel are returning to community life with all manner of experiences, including everything from life threatening “major trauma,” (lost limbs, paralysis, etc.), to brain injuries [1 in 5 soldiers returning from “active duty” are returning with TBI, “Traumatic Brain Injury”]. “Secondary trauma,” from witnessing the carnage of war, is ubiquitous for military personnel, no matter their position or station. . . . these individuals will be facing a challenging transition “home.” Presently, 18 soldiers a day suicide [in the U.S.] upon return to U.S. soil and “civilian life,” more than deaths on the “front lines.” Why is the “transition” so difficult such that these individuals choose suicide once “home”? What can we all do, as a country, within our communities, as families to help these courageous individuals come home to healthy and positive “connections” once they are done with “active duty”? How can we all help “re-connect” with returning military personnel such that “coming home” is something worth staying for? And, such that their experience can help and benefit us all? I wish to begin, and continue to engage in a dialogue in which we can all explore how to support our military personnel in “coming home” healthfully. Please join me in this dialogue.”

WISR PhD student, **Shyaam Shabaka** (MPH, University of California, Berkeley) is founder and CEO of Eco-Village farm [www.ecovillagefarm.org] in Richmond, California. There, he has developed an urban farm as a model of sustainability and social activism aimed at educating and involving disenfranchised youth and other low-income citizens in addressing both local and larger societal problems. His PhD studies are focused on his many years’ of creative involvement as a public health professional in addressing such areas as violence prevention and health disparities and health promotion in disenfranchised communities of color. Indeed, in he was

named the 2010 State of California “Community Champion” by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. He also founded Global Vision 20/20, a nonprofit organization helping to empower low-income people in the Americas, Africa, and other developing parts of the world, through self-help programs in health, education, economic development, and sustainable agriculture. He has been developing a program with the International Children’s Resource Institute to use traditional healers in Africa to help educate people about HIV and AIDS prevention.

Because of WISR’s ability to attract and collaborate with learners like Sherri and Shyaam, we have become a **Premier Academic Institute for Social Change Since 1975.**

For those interested in learning more about WISR go to: www.wisr.edu and read about how people can individually design degree programs in such areas as Psychology, Human Services and Community Development, and Education and Social Change, including a Master’s program that leads toward the Marriage and Family Therapist license and the new LPCC license in California. WISR also offers degree programs in collaboration with the Relationship Coaching Institute. WISR also operates a blog site dedicated to progressive social change: <http://wisrville.org>