



## KEY TAKE-AWAYS FROM 4-MONTH PILOT STUDY OF THE RESTORATIVE PRACTICES DEEP LEARNING PLATFORM WITH TEN CLIENT-SERVING STAFF IN A MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATION

### **Abstract:**

This brief paper outlines the purpose, structure, and key thematic take-aways from a 4-month pilot study implementing the Restorative Practices Deep Learning platform with 10 client-serving staff (primarily clinicians) in a mental health organization for employee self-care and wellbeing. Key outcomes among participants included self-reported increases in a) self-awareness of own needs, b) increased selectivity and boundary clarity in relationships in both personal and professional life, c) ability to identify useful practices to respond to those needs, d) increased connection assets, and e) increased presence with clients. Several staff members made significant life changes based on the pilot. Of ten staff who began the pilot, eight successfully completed it, fulfilling the requirements set by the Agency for participation. This paper also attempts to synthesize some key findings regarding best practices for implementation.

### **Pilot Overview:**

Client is a Bay Area California (United States) 501c3 (non-for-profit) mental health organization offering children and family services including school-based programs, after-school programs, family resource centers, youth and justice programming. Primary client populations are children 2-24 years old and their caregivers. Participant group of ten was comprised of master's level clinicians, supervisors, a program director, and a resource coordinator. Of participant group, 1 was African-American, 4 were Hispanic, 5 were White. 1 man, 9 women.

Pilot was structured as a 4-month process introducing 10 staff members to the learning platform. Initial selection of staff participants was through recommendation from supervisors in the organization, and included a short application. Staff curator trained in the learning platform reviewed applications, and curated the pilot on behalf of client agency.

### **Formal structure:**

Participants made a 4-month commitment to attend bi-monthly 90-minute group online sessions with staff curator, and spend 1 hour/week minimum on the learning platform. Language from the agency, which we believe significant to outcomes was essentially, "The Agency is paying you to take care of yourself." It is a credit to the Agency, and important to note here that one driver of program efficacy was the Agency's willingness to compensate employees for their time

on the platform. Engagement would likely have been lower if platform time was on ‘employees own time.’

Bi-Monthly meetings:

Staff curator (trained by Restorative Practices Alliance) hosted twice/monthly 90-minute sessions with participants. Key attributes of facilitation in these meetings include non-judgmental, non-shaming & mindful facilitation by curator. Meetings consisted of:

- Open-ended inquiry questions about platform, such: What are you enjoying? What’s hard for you? What are you learning about yourself? What are you learning about your nervous system?
- Group watching, then discussing key videos (selected by curator and participants) from the platform together, e.g., *Turning on the Connection System*, *The Evolved Nest*, *The Daisy Model of Regulation*.
- Self-reflection questions: How is your experience with the platform impacting you? What are you noticing in yourself? How is this pilot impacting your ability to be present with yourself? With clients?

Participants were required to commit to at least one hour on the platform per week.

## **Results:**

Of 10 participants who began the project, 1 person dropped out after first session. Another had difficulty regularly attending sessions. 8 people continued through program conclusion.

At the end of the pilot, and at intervals throughout, curator requested and compiled feedback from participants. Feedback is structured here into themes along qualitative lines:

### 1) Self-Care theme

#### a. Curator noted:

- i. “All participants who completed the pilot made a change in how they showed up for themselves.”
- ii. “All participants who completed the pilot made a change in who they allowed into their inner circle.”

#### b. Participants have said:

- i. “I’m learning to build self-care into my schedule...how to make this a habit.”
- ii. “Protecting time on my calendar for self-care.”
- iii. “I think that being in this cohort and also utilizing the restorative practices has helped me a ton to prioritize myself. To prioritize my mental health and to take a pause from this work so that I can really be present. I feel like I have been trying to hold it all together for so long that I have in some ways become numb to my own health and I see it coming out in different ways health wise and as I age. I plan to reset and ground and continue to use the platform if I am allowed to in the future.”

## 2) Performativity vs. Authentic Engagement

- a. Curator noted: “One person was diligent, and kept doing more and more practices and feeling worse and worse...then realized they were just filling up their time. There was a breakthrough where they realized, “Oh, the whole point of this thing is...How do I be me?” Then they started thinking, “What is important for me to get back to? What do I really care about learning?” Then things shifted for them.”

## 3) Taking the Time to Assimilate the Information

- a. Many people commented that there were films/ practices that they watched multiple times. Noted that they had to slow down to take it all in. These are deep/profound practices/ films.

## 4) How does this training impact your work with clients?

- a. Participants stated:
  - i. “Feelings are contagious. If I am regulated and take care of myself, it will trickle down to staff and then down to the clients and families they serve.”
  - ii. “We utilize mindfulness in most all of our sessions, we practice kinder thoughts and re-training the brain, we offer open space to listen and share in a non-judgmental space, and not assume we understand someone’s experience.”

## 5) How has platform increased your connection? (participant responses)

- a. “Doing afro-brazilian/samba dance four times per week, attending therapy, talking with friends more, being more vulnerable and talking more with support, most of my sessions with clients back to back out in the community, I am now giving myself time between sessions (coming out of shutdown) to reground myself before I move on...really respecting my in-between time to prepare myself for what’s next.”
- b. “Being at home with mother and being supportive with family, working on boundaries mostly, going outside, feeling better, stopped eating sugar, intermittent fasting, looking at what is needed, sunshine is important, checking in with friends, therapist around personal issues, getting someone/friends who can hold my stuff. Feeling good about how I am showing up in the world.”
- c. “Did **Turning on the Connection System**, was good, new information and taking notes, eating healthy and could tell the difference, not as tired. Family and other issues have impacted sleep which caused my food intake to not to be as good...Getting outside more, taking off early when I work longer days to have better boundaries. Better in tune with my body and paying attention. Really seen a difference in paying attention to body feedback to triggering information and how to care for self and not “push through” which is fatiguing. Feeling energized rather than depleted.”
- d. “Validation of traditional ways and being in connection. Validation of not having to be home all alone rather being in community. Social/cultural vs scientific, functional. Business validates productivity, how do I get out of business. **Turning**

**on the Connection System** was validating of why I was so out of sorts by creating disconnect on the inside by “doing” on the outside. Couldn’t sit 7 minutes before and now up to 10 minutes. Moving the self, down out of high alert status.

- e. Watched “**The Evolved Nest**, re-evaluating with myself and work, helped me to decide to stay home with my children for a year. Present for my children (son has ADHD and its hereditary) I can feel myself thinking all the time, how do I stay present and not just have such an agenda. [Working on] Ground myself, planting a garden and watching the strawberries grow and water them. So simple and so satisfying. I am not looking towards trips or parties to seek pleasure and then it would come and go and I would have to plan the next thing. Now I don’t have to have to have something to be happy. I can be happy with my garden and my kids and family to be happy. Looking forward to being connected and teaching them to also be more connected. Started teaching Zumba again.”
- f. “Speaking to surrounding animals and nature which has changed my perspective in modern day society. Being present to all around me more and assessing the effects of technology. The script has been flipped and I am more in connection with the heart and feeling more connected. More attunement with self and therefor with nature. I don’t have to go camping because it is within me. It has helped me to be in deeper connection with self. **Clean your heart** video-blew my mind, shock and disbelief, it is our choice every day to start the car (**Drop Fossil Fuels**), I can see the pain in his eyes, the level of responsibility to make the choice of what is true to me. My choices in the world make me more connected to myself and to the world.”
- g. “Been self-contained and the need for connection and what I would squish into a normative box. I am now reaching out and connecting to others. The oppressive level of anxiety and depression is decreased, not sinking as far and able to sit with my emotions. It brought back a piece I didn’t realize I had lost, art, reading and connecting with others. [Agency] has provided time and space to heal. I am grateful for this experience. I can now speak my truth regardless of how it may be received, and it has been received well.”
- h. “This process has shown me a couple of big things, my word is intentional in my life around connections, cultivate, turn off the ones which are not healthy if they cannot be healthy. I am looking at being me and not what others want or need of me. I am no longer a chameleon. Do I know what my core values are? Am I learning to appease and be a peacekeeper or am I learning to be myself? I am awakening to sit with different emotions, I am learning [to] receive praise and love and am exploring more. [Focusing on] Intentionality and presence and what connections I want in my life and where my energy goes.”
- i. “Continue to stay on the journey of connectedness, working out with friend...my mood and energy have improved drastically. If I did not do this with another (connected) I would not be able to do this on my own. **Evolved Nest** really hit me the most as well. I watched the **Coming out of the Pandemic** video and I think I am ok, but I am asking myself and my kids how they are feeling, reflect how we feel. Looking forward to it. Watched **Healthy Relationship** video, I reflected on how to create a safe space for my kids to talk about things as well as my clients.

Staying more connected, be vulnerable with those who I feel safe to and give myself props when I do a good job! Continue to evolve for myself.”

**Other key learnings:**

- 1) Platform “Does not replace the human connection and sharing with each other.”
- 2) Skill of curator in holding mindful circle/ inquiry space is paramount.
- 3) This is human work—creating and building connection—supported by the learning platform, but it is relational and human work.
- 4) There is a sequence of key videos/ films/ practices that seem to resonate specifically with pilot group, and are likely to be generalizable within the agency at large
- 5) Agency articulating that they are ‘paying employees to take care of themselves’ seems important to adoption/ engagement, and the work culture of the Agency

To learn more about how the Restorative Practices Deep Learning platform can support your organization, please contact [support@restorativepractices.com](mailto:support@restorativepractices.com) or +1.844.737.8772