



# LEARNING IMPACT REPORT

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## 2025 St. Thomas Lutheran Church Facilitator Training

*St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana*



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As a pastor, GPS improves the pastoral tool box both in terms of the pastor’s caregiving skills and the creation of accessible programming that would be an asset to a wide variety of congregational and ministry settings. As a human, I feel more prepared to meet people where they are and witness their transformation.  
”

— Reverend Adrienne Meier  
St. Thomas Lutheran Church

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2025, St. Thomas Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Indiana partnered with GPS Group Peer Support to strengthen the congregation’s capacity to support healing, connection, and mental well-being within both their faith community and the wider region. GPS provided in-person facilitator training to clergy and congregation members who share a commitment to creating safe, trauma-informed spaces for those who have experienced religious trauma, LGBTQIA+ harm, or exclusion within faith settings.

The two-day intensive GPS Facilitator Training, followed by a virtual five-session Skills Series in September and October, prepared **participants** to confidently lead peer support groups using GPS’s evidence-based, trauma-informed model. Participants gained practical skills in active listening, group facilitation, and trauma-sensitive care while learning to balance structure with compassion. The training’s emphasis on safety, connection, and self-awareness resonated deeply across participants’ varied professional backgrounds—including mental health, recovery services, social work, and ministry—making the model adaptable to a range of community needs.

Evaluation data demonstrated exceptional outcomes. **Confidence in key facilitation skills increased by an average of 93%**, with an **82% increase** in participants’ confidence to create trauma-sensitive environments. Every participant rated the GPS model and trainer expertise as *excellent or good*, and **100% stated they would recommend the training** to colleagues. Participants described the experience as both transformative and highly applicable to their daily work, highlighting GPS’s clear, accessible framework and its alignment with community-based care.

The partnership between GPS and St. Thomas reflects a powerful convergence of values. By bringing GPS to its congregation, St. Thomas Lutheran Church has taken a bold and faithful step toward transforming spiritual harm into shared healing—embodying a theology of grace through action and creating a lasting model for faith communities committed to trauma-informed care.

## BACKGROUND

St. Thomas Lutheran Church in Bloomington, Indiana reached out to GPS Group Peer Support as part of its commitment to strengthening mental health and healing within its congregation and the wider community. Under the leadership of Reverend Adrienne Meier, the church received a grant from the Center for Congregations in Indiana through its Mental Health Initiative, creating an opportunity to build sustainable, trauma-informed support within a faith-based context.

St. Thomas expressed a desire to bring GPS Facilitator Training to members of the congregation, clergy, and local helping professionals—including social workers and neighboring clergy—to launch ongoing peer support groups. The church’s primary focus is on serving individuals who have experienced religious trauma and LGBTQIA+ harm, recognizing the deep wounds that can result when faith communities misuse power or exclude people based on identity.

During conversations with GPS, Rev. Meier described patterns of harm familiar to many who seek refuge at St. Thomas: people whose previous churches judged them, silenced their pain, or taught that suffering was a punishment from God. Some had been clergy or church workers themselves; others had endured spiritual abuse or exclusion tied to sexuality, gender identity, or personal struggle. St. Thomas, led largely by women and grounded in a less hierarchical Lutheran tradition, seeks to model a different kind of power, one rooted in grace, equity, and compassion.

This partnership reflects a natural alignment between GPS’s theory of change—that every person is inherently good and capable of healing—and Lutheran theology’s view of grace, which holds that human beings are both imperfect and wholly loved. In both frameworks, wholeness comes through connection, self-forgiveness, and community. By bringing GPS to St. Thomas, the congregation aims to create safe, structured spaces where people can name harm, rediscover their worth, and practice healing together.

Through this initiative, St. Thomas Lutheran Church is taking a bold step toward transforming religious trauma into collective healing—embodying the belief that grace abounds, and connection restores.

“GPS offers an excellent training for anyone interested in supporting others in their community.

— Participant in the GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church

## INTRODUCTION

The demand for high-quality, peer-led mental health support is rising. As communities face stress and trauma, the need for skilled facilitators to create safe, supportive spaces has never been greater. GPS Group Peer Support (GPS) meets this need by providing evidence-based training that equips individuals to lead structured, trauma-informed support groups.

- 1. Training Purpose & Scope:** The 2025 GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church prepared 13 participants over an intensive two days of in person, interactive learning in group facilitation, active listening, and trauma-sensitive care. Participants were then welcomed back for five Skills Session workshops over the course of two months to strengthen their ability to plan and facilitate support groups.
- 2. A Range of Participant Backgrounds:** Attendees included mental health professionals, substance use/recovery specialists, case workers and managers, program directors, parent group facilitators, and individuals with lived experience of trauma, all united by a shared goal of creating supportive peer spaces.
- 3. Practical, Immediate Application:** The training emphasized structure, consistency, and responsiveness, allowing participants to integrate GPS principles into their work immediately.
- 4. Trauma-Informed Care & Group Dynamics:** Participants learned to recognize and respond to group members' emotional and psychological needs while practicing active listening, de-escalation, and conflict resolution.
- 5. High Confidence Gains & Participant Endorsements:** Participants reported increased confidence across multiple measures, highlighting GPS's structured approach as a key factor in making group facilitation more manageable and impactful.
- 6. Ongoing Impact & Expansion:** Many participants plan to pursue advanced GPS certifications or introduce the model into new settings such as healthcare organizations and community centers.
- 7. Broader Mission:** GPS's structured, evidence-based training strengthens the peer support network, expanding access to trauma-informed mental health care and creating lasting community impact.

“  
This is an excellent training for developing  
and facilitating groups, especially  
regarding difficult and sensitive issues.  
”

— Participant in the GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church

## EVALUATION RESULTS

### Participant Feedback and Training Impact

#### High Recommendation Rate

The 2025 GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church received universal endorsement from participants. Among those who completed the post-training survey, **100% indicated they would recommend the program to their colleagues**, underscoring the training's perceived value and effectiveness.

#### Positive Training Experience

Participants provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding various aspects of the training, including the expertise of the trainers, the GPS Group Peer Support model, and the overall training structure. Specific findings include:

- **85%** of participants rated the overall learning experience as “excellent.”
- **100%** rated the trainers’ expertise as “excellent/good,” highlighting their proficiency in delivering the material and fostering an engaging learning environment.
- **100%** rated the GPS model itself as “excellent/good,” reflecting its applicability and relevance to their professional roles.

#### Increased Confidence in Group Facilitation

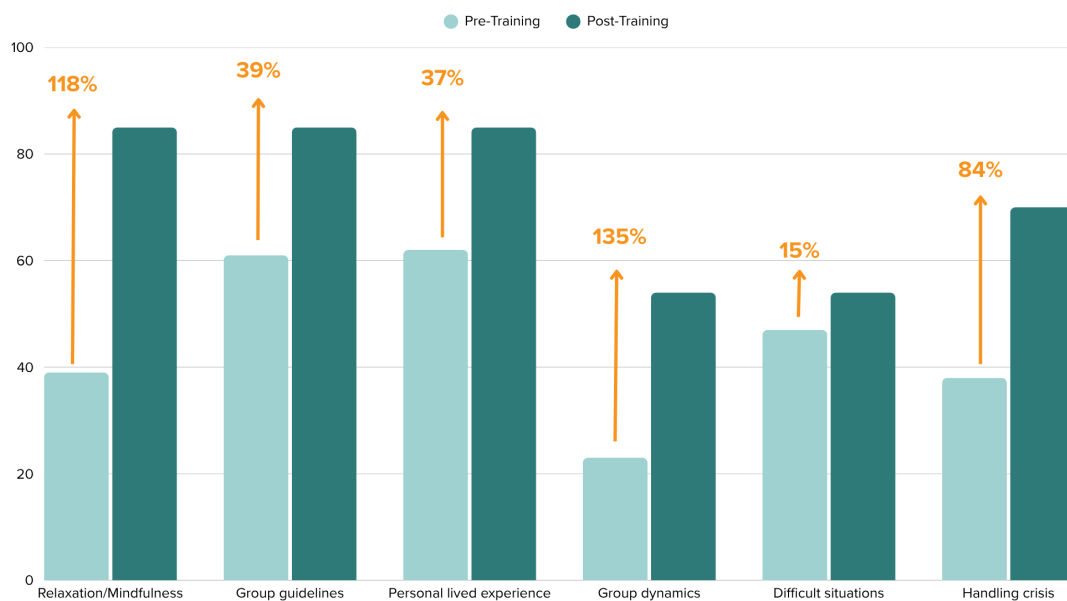
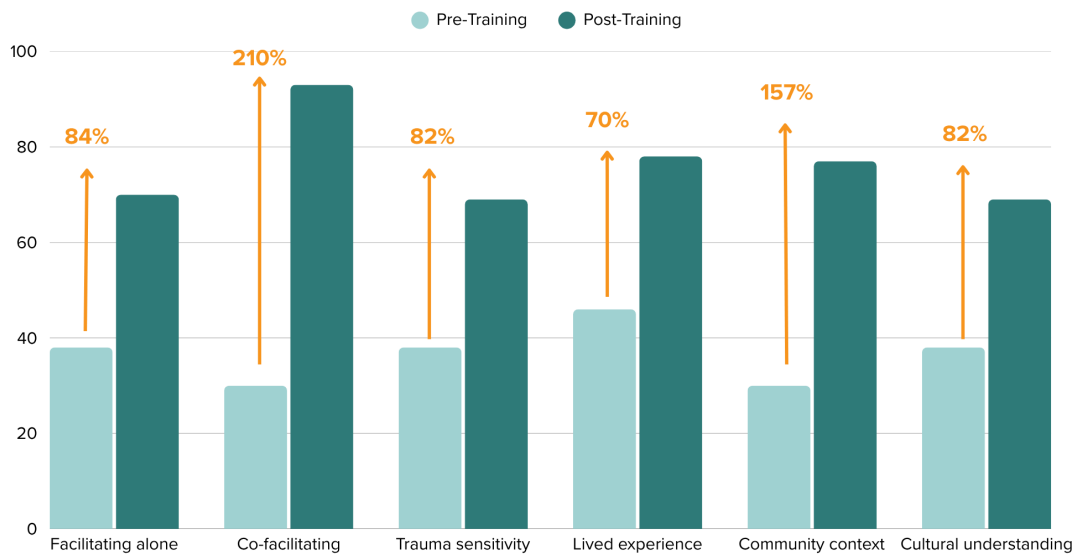
**The training significantly boosted participants' confidence across all measured competencies.** Pre- and post-training comparisons revealed:

- Confidence increased by a minimum of **15%** across all skill areas, with a **notable average increase of 93%**.
- A significant **82% increase** in confidence levels when it comes to creating a trauma-sensitive setting and using trauma-informed skills in leading groups.

These findings demonstrate that GPS Facilitator Training not only equips participants with practical skills but also fosters a high level of confidence in applying these skills within their professional contexts. This data reinforces the training’s efficacy in preparing facilitators to lead trauma-informed, culturally responsive group sessions effectively.

For [a detailed explanation of specific areas measured](#), please refer to the addendum at the end of this report.

## CONFIDENCE LEVELS



## PARTICIPANT INSIGHTS AND FEEDBACK

The GPS Facilitator Training has proven to be a transformative experience for participants, offering practical tools and strategies to enhance their professional effectiveness and confidence. Feedback highlights how the program’s trauma-informed approach aligns seamlessly with participants’ existing practices while introducing new methods for group facilitation, cultural competence, and creating safe, supportive spaces for healing.

### A Strong and Accessible Model

The GPS Facilitator Training is what brings the GPS Model to life — transforming it from a framework on paper into a lived practice of connection, safety, and healing. Through in-depth learning, guided practice, and reflection, facilitators come to understand not only *how* the model works but *why* it works. The training equips them with the structure and confidence to create trauma-informed spaces where people can share authentically, be supported safely, and grow together. This deep understanding strengthens the consistency and integrity of the GPS Model, ensuring that every group reflects its core values of presence, compassion, and resilience.

“ I thoroughly learned the model and rationale behind it, which helps me understand how to implement it better ”

“ It’s useful to have a framework to safely support a group in a trauma-informed way where the group can have structure to share while being supportive and not damaging to participants. ”

“ I love the framework. It is very clear and intuitive once presented. ”

## Preparing Facilitators to Lead with Confidence

GPS Facilitator Training equips participants with the knowledge, skills, and presence needed to lead peer support groups with confidence and care. Grounded in an evidence-based, trauma-informed framework, the training helps facilitators navigate the complexity of group dynamics, create emotional safety, and guide conversations around sensitive topics with compassion and clarity. Participants leave the training prepared not only to implement the GPS model effectively but also to adapt it across diverse settings and communities — bringing structure, support, and healing wherever groups gather.

“Leading a peer support group well takes more than you think, and GPS helps prepare you for that.”

“This is an excellent training for developing and facilitating groups, especially regarding difficult and sensitive issues.”

“It's a great training on a model that can be applied to various situations and groups that need support and care.”

## The Impact of GPS Skills Sessions

Following the initial GPS Facilitator Training, participants continued their learning through a series of GPS Skills Sessions designed to deepen confidence, strengthen facilitation techniques, and provide space for ongoing reflection and practice. These sessions allowed facilitators to apply what they learned in real time, receive feedback, and connect more fully with peers who share a commitment to trauma-informed, compassionate group leadership. The continued engagement reinforced key elements of the GPS model—structure, presence, and shared humanity—helping participants translate training into sustainable, skillful practice.

“The additional forms made crafting sessions much more clear. Having lots of ways (manual, brief guide, forms) helped when I was stuck.”

“We often used the skills sessions to workshop upcoming sessions that one of the facilitators was leading.”

“It helped remind me of the pieces that go together in a session and especially, how impactful well thought-out reality statements can be.”

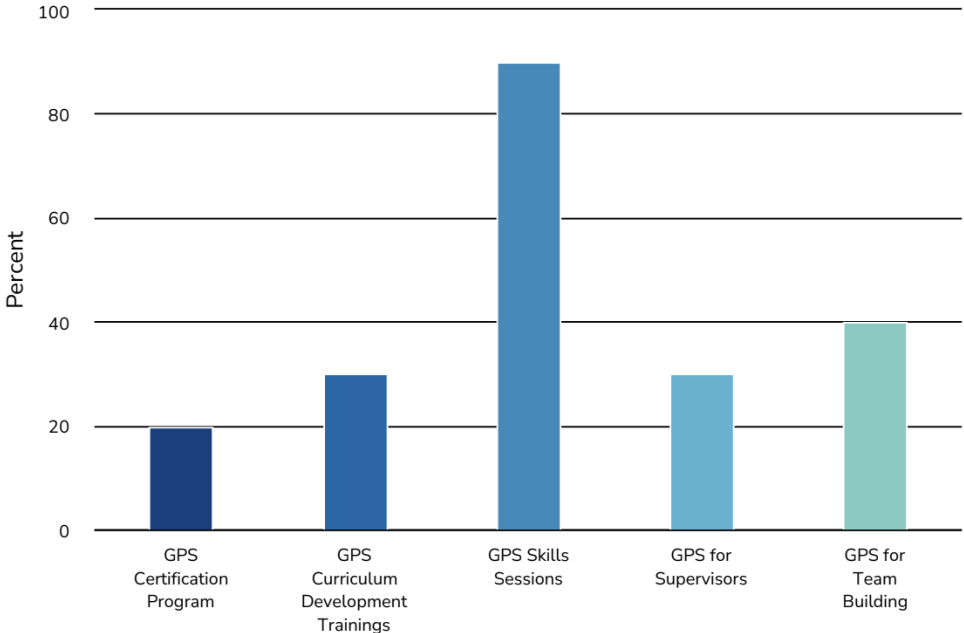
### **The insights shared by participants underscore the profound impact of the GPS Facilitator Training on their professional development and practice.**

By equipping facilitators with trauma-informed frameworks, culturally responsive tools, and practical strategies for group dynamics, the program empowers professionals to create environments that foster healing, resilience, and meaningful connection.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback reinforces the training’s essential role in enhancing the quality of care provided to a range of different communities.

## Interest in Future Learning Opportunities with GPS

Participants indicated a strong interest in attending future GPS training programs immediately after finishing the facilitator training. Most notably, **90% of respondents were interested in strengthening their abilities** by participating in GPS Skills Sessions.



## TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

### Participant Profile

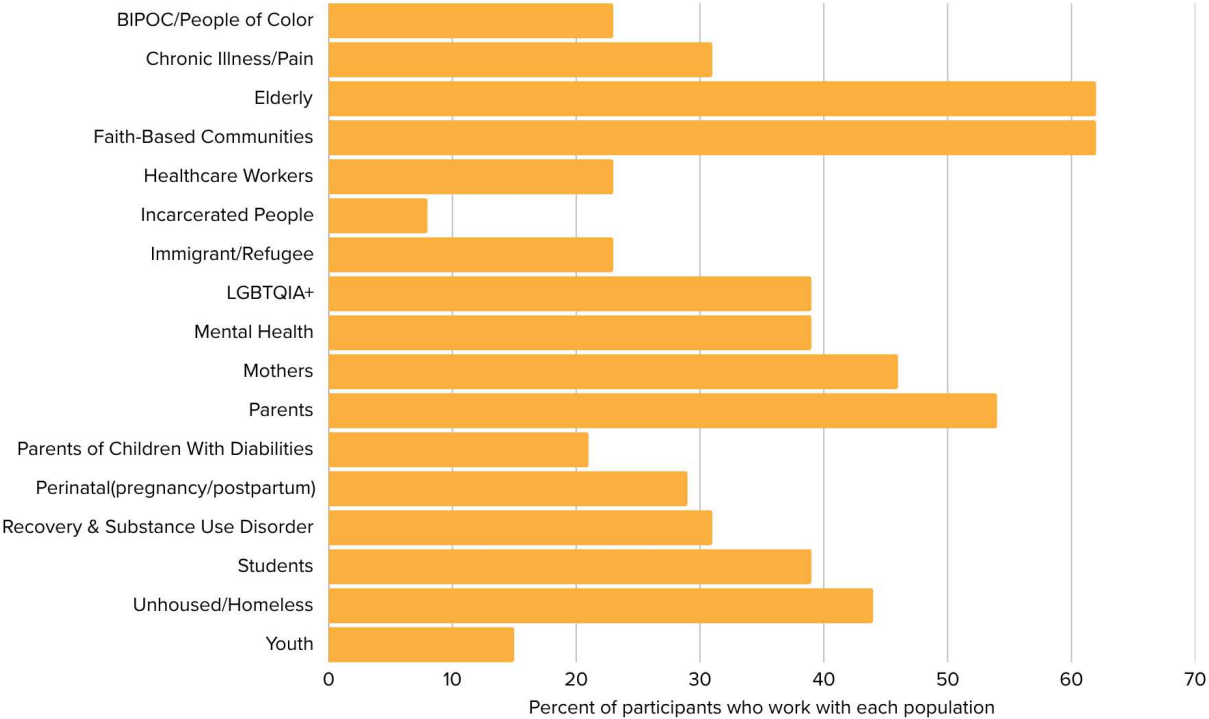
The range of backgrounds, experiences, and expertise of the participants demonstrates the broad applicability and relevance of the program. By including individuals from various professional sectors, educational backgrounds, and facilitation experience levels, GPS ensures that its training is both accessible and impactful, fostering a more inclusive and skilled network of facilitators.

Participants in the facilitator training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church included pastors, doulas, mental health therapists, and community-engaged parishioners. **For [a more detailed demographic description of participants](#), please refer to the addendum at the end of this report.**

Participants consistently highlighted the value of GPS’s structured approach, which provided a clear framework for both beginners and seasoned facilitators. By fostering a welcoming and supportive learning environment, GPS continues to expand access to high-quality, trauma-informed peer support across a range of different communities, strengthening the reach and impact of group facilitation.

This training embraced a wide range of perspectives and experiences, emphasizing and addressing the range of needs of both facilitators and the communities they serve.

**POPULATIONS SERVED**



## Commitment to Inclusive and Fair Support

GPS Group Peer Support is dedicated to fostering an environment where all participants feel seen, heard, and valued. Our programs are designed to create welcoming spaces, uplift varied perspectives, and remove barriers to participation. To assess how well we meet these goals, participants were asked targeted questions about their experiences during the training.

### Key findings include:

- **Creating Welcoming Spaces:** 75% of participants agreed that the training successfully created a safe and supportive environment for individuals of all backgrounds.
- **Encouraging Varied Perspectives:** 83% of respondents affirmed that a range of viewpoints were actively sought and valued throughout the training sessions.
- **Ensuring Fair Treatment and Addressing Bias:** 75% of participants agreed that GPS fosters an environment where everyone is treated with respect and consideration.
- **Understanding Trauma and Identity:** 84% of respondents reported that the training deepened their understanding of how trauma intersects with a variety of factors including lived experiences, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and sense of self.

These results highlight GPS's ongoing commitment to ensuring its programs are welcoming, fair, responsive, and impactful for the communities it serves.

Having these support groups sends powerful signals to our community: If you're hurting, if you've been hurt by churches, if you're queer, if you're lonely—this is a place where you can find love and support.

— Reverend Adrienne Meier  
*St. Thomas Lutheran Church*

## IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

The GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church has demonstrated a significant positive impact on participants, enhancing their confidence in all aspects of group facilitation, particularly when it comes to running trauma-informed, faith-based support groups. Participants reported increased commitment to leading support groups in their communities and expressed strong interest in pursuing further professional development in the GPS model.

Since facilitator training, St. Thomas has launched a handful of support groups for their parishioners. The church hosted two different support groups on Mother's Day, one on Grief and Loss, and another on Complicated Family Relationships. In addition, they hosted a support group for LGBTQIA+ allies during Pride month, and another support group for those impacted by religious trauma.

Rev. Meier plans to incorporate the GPS model not only in formal support groups but in church events and community interactions as well. A key example was their "Pie with the Pastors." new-member event, where GPS structure helped manage time, emotional boundaries, and inclusion.

St. Thomas uses GPS both as a program (facilitated support groups) and as a cultural framework (embedding trauma-informed care into congregational life). It became a vehicle for healing, inclusion, and spiritual renewal — aligning perfectly with the church's mission to make grace and safety tangible in their community.

# ADDENDUM

## TRAINING OVERVIEW

The 2025 GPS Facilitator Training for St. Thomas Lutheran Church was structured to ensure that participants received a comprehensive and engaging learning experience. This section provides a detailed breakdown of the training curriculum, key learning components, and the interactive methods used to reinforce facilitator skills.

### Structure of the Training Program

The training was delivered virtually over one weekend, consisting of:

- **Live interactive sessions:** Engaging workshops facilitated by experienced GPS trainers.
- **Role-playing and practice exercises:** Opportunities for participants to apply newly learned skills in a supportive environment.
- **Small group discussions:** Facilitated conversations to deepen understanding and refine facilitation techniques.
- **Facilitator demonstrations:** Trainers modeled best practices, offering practical examples for effective group leadership.
- **Recorded Modules:** While attendance at live sessions was encouraged, in order to meet the varied needs of participants, recorded versions of the modules were made available, allowing for flexibility and accessibility.

### Key Learning Modules

Each session was carefully structured to build upon the previous content, reinforcing a strong foundation for group facilitation:

1. **Introduction to GPS & Group Facilitation:** The fundamentals of leading a peer support group and understanding the GPS model.
2. **Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Environment:** Techniques to establish safety, trust, and empowerment within groups.
3. **Effective Communication and Active Listening:** Skills for ensuring meaningful, engaging, and trauma-informed groups.
4. **Managing Group Dynamics:** Strategies for handling challenges, conflicts, and ensuring equitable participation.

5. **Mindfulness and Grounding Techniques:** Practical exercises to support emotional regulation and focus.
6. **Facilitating Welcoming and Supportive Conversations:** Encouraging openness and meaningful connection in group settings.
7. **Navigating Difficult Situations:** Tools for handling crises and responding to group challenges effectively.

## EVALUATION METHODS

To assess the impact and effectiveness of the 2025 GPS Facilitator Training for the St. Thomas Lutheran Church, a structured evaluation process was implemented. Participants were asked to complete **anonymous pre- and post-training electronic surveys**, providing valuable insights into their experiences, confidence levels, and the training's overall impact.

### 1. Pre-Training Survey:

- **Purpose:** Collected baseline data to understand participant demographics and gauge their initial confidence levels in group facilitation.
- **Key Components:**
  - Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, language proficiency, and educational background).
  - Professional context, including prior experience running support groups and current roles.
  - Confidence levels across various group facilitation skills that would be addressed during the training.

### 2. Post-Training Survey:

- **Purpose:** Measured changes in confidence levels and gathered feedback about participants' experiences in the training.
- **Key Components:**
  - Reassessment of confidence levels using the same metrics from the pre-survey to quantify growth.
  - Debriefing questions to evaluate participants' perceptions of the training's relevance, usefulness, and effectiveness.
  - Open-ended feedback on specific aspects of the training, including the GPS model, trainer expertise, and applicability of skills learned.

This dual-survey approach provided a comprehensive evaluation of the training, highlighting its strengths, areas of improvement, and the measurable growth in participants' skills and confidence. The findings serve to refine future training sessions and validate the efficacy of the GPS Facilitator Training program.

## Participants were surveyed about their confidence levels both before and after the training. The following areas were measured:

- **Facilitating groups alone:** Participants self-evaluated their ability to independently lead group sessions, reporting significant increases in confidence and competence after the training.
- **Co-facilitating groups with another leader:** Participants assessed their collaborative leadership skills, noting marked improvement in their ability to co-lead group sessions effectively.
- **Creating a trauma-sensitive setting and using trauma-informed skills in leading groups:** Participants evaluated their capacity to establish safe, supportive environments, demonstrating enhanced proficiency in applying trauma-informed practices post-training.
- **Including content related to the lived experience of group members:** Participants reflected on their ability to incorporate members' lived experiences into discussions, with notable growth in ensuring relevance and authenticity.
- **Discussing the community context of individuals in group:** Participants assessed their understanding of how social, cultural, and environmental factors influence group members, showing significant gains in integrating these contexts into discussions.
- **Cultural understanding and implementation in leading groups:** Participants evaluated their cultural competency, reporting substantial improvements in recognizing and addressing the diversity of group members effectively.
- **Leading relaxation/mindfulness exercises for groups:** Participants self-rated their ability to facilitate relaxation and mindfulness techniques.
- **Explaining group guidelines:** Participants assessed their competence in establishing and communicating group guidelines, noting enhanced clarity and effectiveness after the training.
- **Sharing personal lived experience appropriately as a facilitator:** Participants reflected on their skill in sharing personal experiences appropriately, reporting increased confidence in using this technique to build trust and connection.
- **Managing group dynamics:** Participants evaluated their ability to navigate group interactions and address conflicts, showing significant growth in maintaining a positive and productive atmosphere.
- **Managing difficult situations:** Participants assessed their readiness to handle challenging scenarios, with improved strategies for managing resistance, disruption, or emotional distress.
- **Appropriately attending to individuals in crisis:** Participants self-rated their ability to respond to crisis situations within a group setting, demonstrating increased confidence and preparedness after the training.

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The range of differences of the participants emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive facilitation, ensuring that GPS-trained facilitators can support a wide range of communities.

- **Age Range:** Participants ranged from 31 to over 70 years old.
- **Gender:** 85% identified as women and 15% as men, reflecting St. Thomas being led largely by women.
- **Racial and Ethnic Background:**
  - 100% White
  - 8% Asian
  - 8% Mixed race

### Educational Background

Participants came from a variety of educational backgrounds, highlighting the accessibility of GPS training to individuals with different levels of academic preparation while fostering a shared commitment to peer support.

- **62% hold a master's degree and 8% hold a doctorate**, demonstrating a strong foundation in professional expertise.
- **31% hold a bachelor's degree**, indicating a high level of academic preparation among participants.

# ABOUT GPS

GPS Group Peer Support is a strength-based, trauma-informed, and welcoming approach to group therapeutic care, offering consistent mental health support during times of stress, crisis, and change. This evidence- and trauma-informed model has been successfully implemented across a range of populations and settings, delivering impactful results. By incorporating mindfulness-based stress reduction, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, peer-to-peer support, and other evidence-based modalities, GPS effectively mitigates the long-term effects of stress and trauma. The model allows for rapid replication in an easy-to-learn format for both peer specialists, people with lived experience, volunteers, and lay leaders, as well as professionals. GPS trainings are interactive, ensuring participants gain a comprehensive understanding to begin using this proven, impactful approach in their communities. GPS's innovative, scalable, and replicable approach aims to foster a supportive environment where individuals can find the resources and strength to move through difficult times with confidence and resilience.

## **A Note About Language Usage:**

GPS is committed to using respectful and widely accepted terminology when referring to individuals and groups. Throughout this material, we have aimed to use terms that reflect how people describe themselves. We recognize that language evolves over time, and we remain committed to updating our manuals, curriculums, and reports as terminology shifts to better reflect the preferences of the communities we serve.

## **Contact Us:**

**Website:** [GroupPeerSupport.org](https://www.grouppeersupport.org)

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