

TRAINING REPORT

RESTORE PROJECT

PITTSBURGH, PA
3-7 MARCH 2025

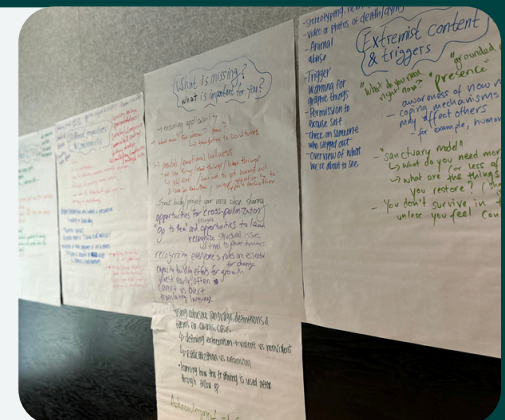




On 3-7 March 2025, Violence Prevention Network USA (VPN USA) organized a five-day training as part of its RESTORE Project, bringing together professionals from various sectors such as mental health, social work, education, faith communities, law enforcement, and policymaking. Unlike conventional training programs that rely on lectures and theoretical discussions, the RESTORE training focused on hands-on, interactive learning. Over the course of five days, participants engaged in practical exercises that replicated real-world challenges in disengagement and shifts in belief systems, during which they applied intervention strategies in a controlled but realistic setting.

“ What stood out was the setup. In law enforcement, you usually listen to a PowerPoint presentation and maybe get a chance to speak. This was completely different — everyone was actively engaged, sitting in a circle, and encouraged to share their perspectives. The open discussions and interactive format made it a much more engaging and valuable experience.

TJ McGraw, Probation Officer, Franklin County Juvenile Probation



What made the RESTORE training particularly impactful was the diversity of perspectives in the room. The training encouraged participants to step beyond their usual roles, work through case-based scenarios, and critically examine their approaches to intervention. Many described it as one of the most engaging and challenging professional experiences they had attended—one that not only enhanced their skills but also pushed them to reconsider their assumptions about radicalization and the disengagement process. The program provided a deeper understanding of how to support individuals in leaving extremist environments and fostered professional relationships that will extend well beyond the training itself.



Understanding Disengagement Through Practice

A defining aspect of the RESTORE training was its emphasis on learning through experience. Exercises encouraged participants to step into the mindset of individuals grappling with disengagement from violent behavior to gain a profound understanding of the emotions and thought processes involved. One of the most impactful aspects of the training was the self-reflection component and the way it challenged participants to critically examine their own assumptions about extremism, radicalization, and disengagement. **Marcia Bazan, an extremism assessment psychologist working in the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Counterterrorism Unit** described how the program required her to experience intervention techniques firsthand, giving her a deeper empathy of what individuals might feel when asked to reconsider deeply held beliefs. She noted that this experience reshaped how she approaches her work, making her more attuned to the emotional and psychological challenges individuals face when disengaging from extremist ideologies. For **Hassan Naveed, a consultant with years of public service experience**, the training challenged him to engage with the material in a more personal way than he had expected. He noted that the exercises provided valuable insight into the complexities of helping someone reconsider deeply held beliefs. The experience reinforced the importance of patience, trust-building, and understanding the personal and social factors that influence an individual's willingness to change.

Because of this training, I learned that I can take my experiences, no matter how negative they were, and turn them into something positive — by educating others, by telling my story, and by helping people understand that change is possible.

Shane Falwell, Director, Tomorrow's Neighbors & Marcus Youth Discovery Group



“It’s been very helpful to have conversations with folks in different disciplines, people we don’t normally have the opportunity to interact with. While we’re processing what we’re learning, we get immediate feedback on potential barriers and possible successes. That has been really valuable.”

Solomon Armstead, Manager of Violence Prevention and Community Outreach, City of Pittsburgh



Challenging Assumptions and Reframing Perspectives

The training challenged participants to rethink how they approach radicalization and disengagement, shifting the focus from control and correction to understanding and support. Through discussions and practical exercises, they explored how trust-building, community connections, and systemic factors influence the process of leaving violent extremist ideologies behind. **TJ McGraw, a Juvenile Probation Officer from Franklin County** shared how the training shifted his perspective on intervention. Coming from a background in probation and threat assessment, he was accustomed to a structured, enforcement-driven approach. However, through the exercises and discussions, he realized that building trust and offering non-judgmental support could often be more effective than a strictly punitive approach. By better understanding the motivations and vulnerabilities that lead individuals toward extremist ideologies, he saw how proactive engagement and early intervention could help prevent further radicalization, particularly among juveniles.



“ The training was eye-opening, both professionally and personally. I didn’t expect so much personal reflection, but that’s exactly what made it powerful. Each day built on the last, keeping us in that mindset and allowing us to go deeper. That process helped me understand how much emotional weight this work carries and why self-care is essential in our field.

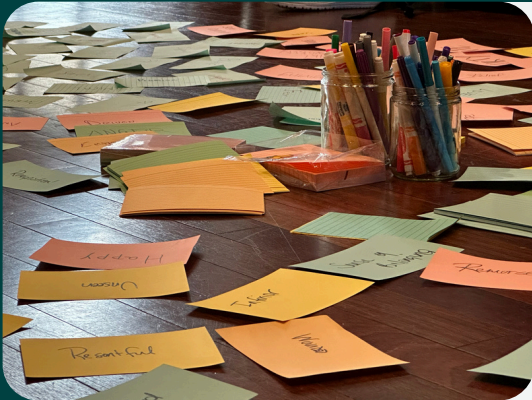
Rebecca Salsbury, Clinical Unit and Help Center Director, Washington Co. DHS

For **Rebecca Salsbury, Clinical Director at the Washington County Department of Human Services**, the training reinforced the importance of working within a person’s existing support system rather than isolating them. She reflected on how the training provided a fresh approach to addressing extremism—not by forcing individuals to abandon their identities but by helping them find new ways to belong in non-violent, constructive environments.

This shift in approach, she noted, would have a direct impact on how she supports individuals struggling with extremist influences in her community. **A policy specialist** also remarked on how the training broadened her understanding of how structural and systemic factors contribute to radicalization. The discussions made clear that interventions should not only focus on the individual but also address the broader societal conditions that create environments where extremist ideologies can take root. This perspective, she stated, would be crucial in shaping more effective, evidence-based policies moving forward.



The training also placed an emphasis on recognizing early warning signs of radicalization and the importance of non-confrontational engagement. **Sean Harvey, CEO and Senior Strategic Advisor at the Warrior Compassion Institute**, found the RESTORE training approach particularly useful in helping individuals reconsider their worldviews in a way that feels natural rather than forced. He noted that the training's mix of theory and practice provided concrete tools that could be immediately integrated into his practice and gives him renewed confidence in his ability to guide individuals toward alternative paths.



“One of the biggest takeaways was realizing how much I didn’t know, and that’s a good thing. The structure of the training helped me grow, and I can already see how I’ll bring it back into our work with youth and families.”

Jose Díaz, Director of Programs,
The HEAR Foundation

Strengthening Professional Networks and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Beyond skill-building, the training fostered a strong sense of professional community. Many attendees emphasized how valuable it was to work alongside professionals from different disciplines, sharing strategies and discussing good practices. These interactions also revealed common challenges faced across sectors and encouraged participants to rethink their approaches in light of new perspectives. **Wendy Elkenberg, Program Manager at the Pennsylvania Office of Homeland Security** remarked that the interdisciplinary nature of the training was one of its strongest aspects. She explained that gaining insight from mental health professionals and social workers helped shape a more holistic approach to policy implementation, ensuring that governmental strategies align with the realities of frontline intervention. Similarly, a **director of human services** shared that the training provided a fresh framework for understanding how biases—both personal and systemic—shape the disengagement process. By engaging in direct discussions about these biases, participants left with a stronger foundation for their work.

For those working directly with at-risk individuals, RESTORE provided practical tools that could be integrated into ongoing casework. **Allizandra Herberhold, Intervention Counselor, Parents for Peace** described how the training gave her a structured method for facilitating difficult conversations around violent extremism. She shared that, prior to the training, she often struggled to engage individuals without triggering defensiveness. Through the training exercises, she learned strategies for maintaining open dialogue and creating space for individuals to question their beliefs without feeling attacked. This, she emphasized, would be essential in her efforts to support community-based interventions moving forward.



Expanding our Impact



The RESTORE training successfully provided participants with practical skills, built strong professional relationships, and encouraged them to reflect deeply on their approach to violence prevention. The training also helped participants better recognize signs of radicalization or vulnerabilities, enabling earlier and more effective intervention. The training significantly grew its referral network for the RESTORE Helpline, allowing participants ongoing access to coaching whenever they encounter challenges related to violent extremism. With this expanded referral network, the Helpline now offers increased capacity and benefits from a wider range of professional expertise.

Looking ahead, VPN USA plans to bring the RESTORE approach to additional regions across the U.S., adjusting the training methods to fit local community realities and needs. We are already working on enhancing the training structure based on feedback from participants, developing our practical toolkits, and offering ongoing mentoring to ensure trainees receive continued support. RESTORE aims to become a practical and widely-used model for preventing violence and supporting disengagement efforts across the country. Future trainings will be announced on our website.

Being in public service for the last 10 years, it was really important to engage with professionals from government, psychology, and social work. This training provided a truly interdisciplinary way of addressing these issues, which is far more effective than relying on the same old procedures and tactics.

Hassan Naveed, Principal, Naveed LLC



Contact Information

For more information about the RESTORE training program please contact us at:
contact@violence-prevention-network.org

The RESTORE Helpline is a confidential support service for individuals showing early signs of violent extremist behavior, and for families or professionals concerned about someone at risk. The helpline offers anonymous guidance, practical strategies, and connections to trained intervention specialists:

Phone: 412-756-3643

Email: help@restore-project.org