

TRAINING REPORT

# RESTORE PROJECT

PITTSBURGH, PA  
2-5 FEBRUARY 2026



Violence Prevention  
Network USA



RESTORE



On 2-5 February 2026, Violence Prevention Network USA (VPN USA) organized a four-day training as part of its RESTORE Project in Pittsburgh, bringing together professionals from across Southwestern Pennsylvania who are often the first to notice when something feels “off” for a young person, a client, a student, or a community member. The training focused on what it takes to respond early — before a situation escalates — and to do so in ways that are supportive and non-punitive.

***“I feel strongly that it's important to understand the key and core components of what can create extremist ideologies and perpetuate a person on that path.”***

Angelica Joy Miskanin, Art Therapist & Trauma Specialist, Jewish Family & Community Services



Participants worked through real-world scenarios and group discussions to better understand what can pull someone toward extremist ideas, why certain narratives can feel persuasive, and why stepping away from violent ideologies is often complicated and non-linear. A central aim was building practical confidence: recognizing early warning signs, knowing what questions to ask, and practicing response options that balance empathy with safety. The training also made space for participants to reflect on their own roles and assumptions, and to think about how protective factors—connection, stability, purpose, and support—can reduce vulnerability to violent extremist influence.



Just as importantly, the training reinforced that prevention is not a solo effort. Participants explored how to navigate the broader prevention landscape in the region, including emerging online dynamics, and how to identify when to bring in additional support. This report brings together what participants said they learned and what they feel better equipped to do as a result, based on both the training and post-training interviews.

## From Labels to Lived Experience — Understanding Pathways Into Violence

Early sessions established a shared foundation on radicalization pathways, including push-and pull factors and why extremist narratives can feel compelling. Participants explored the complexity of belief change and the practical difficulty of letting go of violent ideologies. The training emphasized understanding before correction: mapping needs, identity, belonging, and personal context as core elements that can influence a person's trajectory toward violence.

Participants learned that prevention work starts with understanding what draws people toward extremist beliefs and what unmet needs may be involved; this framing helped them think beyond labels and toward practical ways to support disengagement.

***“Understanding that people may connect to violent extremism out of a deep desire to belong, or because other needs in their life weren't met, gets us closer to understanding what we must provide to prevent and provide a way out.”***

*Megan Rose, Director, Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh*



Several participants connected the training content to their existing work in trauma-informed services, community support, and institutional response systems. For some, the training created a clearer frame for understanding how unmet needs—especially belonging and connection—can shape vulnerability to violent extremist influence.



***“I know of folks personally and professionally that I would like to utilize the skill sets that I'm learning in this training to be able to continue lines of communication with them, not have them feel that they are shut out or they have nowhere to turn but inward or to more extreme facets to gather information or find contact, camaraderie or community.”***

*Amethy Weikel-Sandstrom, Events Manager & Creative Consultant, Creative Chem Co*



## Practical Responses: What to Do When You're Worried About Someone

A core emphasis of the training was translating understanding into earlier, safer action. Participants reviewed indicators and early warning signs, discussed how violent ideologies can develop through online pathways, and practiced concrete response skills. The training moved from identifying risk factors to deciding when to intervene and how to respond in ways that reduce escalation.

Participants described leaving with a clearer sense of what to look for and how to respond in a way that is supportive rather than reactive, including greater confidence in using structured reflection and de-escalation techniques.



***“We can all kind of be extremists in our own ways and things that we're passionate about... as long as we are aware of our own biases and our own things that we put to the table... you can help somebody... as long as you are able to kind of counteract it with that balance.”***

*Kemarra Moses, Case Manager, Garfield Jubilee Association, Inc.*

The training also asked participants to reflect on their own biases and ‘extremes’ — not as a moral equivalence, but as a way to build humility, emotional awareness, and steadier engagement when encountering rigid or harmful belief systems.

## Building a Cross-Sector Prevention Network in Southwestern Pennsylvania

Beyond individual skill-building, participants highlighted the value of learning alongside professionals from different disciplines. The training structure—discussion in shared space, collective reflection, and case-based work—supported relationship-building and reinforced the idea that prevention is a community responsibility. Across interviews, participants emphasized that this work cannot sit with a single profession or agency; they valued meeting peers across systems and seeing how a coordinated network can reduce default reliance on punitive responses by creating clearer pathways to early, supportive intervention.

***“This really is about creating a network where we all can make a difference.”***

*Mallory Helbling, Career Development & Career Coaching, Sharpsburg Neighborhood Organization*



Participants identified a few distinct ways in which this training helped to address macro-level social patterns on a local level: the experience of divisiveness, changing social conditions, and the need for belonging and community. Several also pointed to challenges created or amplified by online ecosystems and ‘digital divides’. Participants also emphasized keeping communication open with people at risk of turning inward or further toward extremist spaces, and building a broader network so individuals and third parties know where to turn.



***“One of the things that struck me the most ... is that you have put a bunch of people who all have the same mission, but have not necessarily met each other in the same room. What this training has made possible is the creation of a group of like-minded individuals who I really think will work together going forward toward this goal.”***

*Moses Lemann, Coordinator, Duquesne Office of Opportunity, Community Building, and Engagement*

For some, the training connected directly to institutional responsibilities—such as responding to bias reports and navigating the tension between punitive responses and approaches that support reintegration into community.

***“This training is helping me understand the importance of building integrated communities — and, in an online world, how to rebuild the village that maybe millennials grew up with but don’t have in the traditional sense now.”***

*Rita Porterfield, Senior Investigator, Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations*



## **Why This Training Matters for Southwestern Pennsylvania**

What came through across the participant interviews is that many professionals in Southwestern Pennsylvania are already encountering early signs of grievance, social withdrawal, fixation, identity-based hostility, or bias-related harm—but often without a shared framework for interpreting what they are seeing, and without clear, trusted pathways for what to do next. The RESTORE training helps close that gap by strengthening early, non-punitive responses that can be used before a person escalates to crisis, violence, or deeper entrenchment. It equips participants to move from uncertainty (“I’m worried, but I’m not sure what this is or what to do”) to a more confident, structured approach grounded in relationship, safety, and practical referral options.



Just as important, the training builds a common language across sectors that do not always work side by side—behavioral health, education, community-based services, reentry, and other frontline systems. Participants described how valuable it was to learn with people who share the same goal but operate under different constraints and thresholds. That cross-sector lens reduces default reliance on punitive responses by helping participants see alternatives earlier: how to check assumptions, ask better questions, document concerns responsibly, and connect people to support in ways that protect community safety and preserve the possibility of repair and reintegration.

In practice, this training supports participants' day-to-day work by helping them:

- Recognize early indicators without overreacting or minimizing, so they can intervene proportionately and ethically.
- Respond with clearer options (conversation approaches, boundary-setting, safety planning, and referral pathways) rather than “wait and see” or immediate escalation.
- Strengthen protective factors which participants identified as essential in preventing isolation from hardening into risk.
- Operate within a network, not alone—knowing who else to consult, when to hand off, and how to coordinate across systems while staying non-punitive and trauma-informed.

Over time, this approach builds regional capacity: not just better-informed individual practitioners, but a more connected prevention ecosystem in Southwestern Pennsylvania— one where early concerns can be held with care, shared responsibility, and credible next steps.



***“Anybody in the community can have a role... preventing harm coming to others. And so the more people that can get that message out and can help look for warning signs, the better.”***

*Denise Herr McCann, Executive Director,  
Centre Helps*

## Contact Information

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

The [RESTORE Helpline](#) is a free and 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](mailto:help@restore-project.org)

