



# THE 3<sup>rd</sup> GLOBAL Muslim Mental Health CONFERENCE 2025

**HEALING MINDS AND SOULS:**  
Integrating Faith & Science in  
Overcoming Addiction



# **WholeLife Community: Holistic Paradigms for the Treatment of Substance Use Disorder and their Comorbidities**

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**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Muslim Mental Health Conference— July 7-8, 2025**  
*Healing Minds and Souls: Integrating Faith and Science in Overcoming Addiction*



# Introduction

The landscape of mental illness in Malaysia, encompassing Substance Abuse Disorder (SUD), depression and anxiety is characterized by increasing prevalence, cultural stigmas and systemic challenges. We have seen steadily rising increases in mental disorders, with close to 1 in 3 Malaysians above the age of 16, experiencing some mental health challenges. The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) reported, that in 2023, at least 8-12% of the population Malaysians suffered from severe depression, and a significant number of Malaysians exhibited impulses for suicide and self-harm. Add to that, significant addiction related diseases such as smoking, sugar addiction/metabolic disease and social media addiction.

Substance Abuse Disorder (SUD) and its comorbidities (depression, anxiety, PTSD, etc) are the manifestation of both physical and mental challenges. As therapists, one of our primary responsibilities is to be non-judgmental. As such, we should foster and provide opportunities (within our capacity) for **Multiple Pathways of Recovery**.



## **Holistic Practices for Recovery (a partial list)**

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), a major US government agency, has provided evidence, that by addressing our domains of function, a holistic impact creates a synergistic effect, which can reduce relapse and foster long term Recovery. Some of these holistic interventions include:

- **Positive addictions**, first theorized by Glasser (1976), is characterized by being engaged in creative, healthful, fun, and joyful activities and pursuits, even to the point of being considered ‘addictive’. In fact, *any* activity, including positive addictions (Glasser, W. 1976), that can distract, replace or ameliorate physical/mental cravings for substances, can and should be considered a treatment. This especially mirrors and utilizes what Marlatt (Marlatt, 1985) and Bowen (Bowen, 2009) refers to as ‘Urge Surfing’. Positive addictions can include, but are not limited to activities such as yoga, exercise, breathwork, running, writing, playing music, painting, doing crossword puzzles, etc. In essence, by displacing cravings for substances with these activities, we shift our life focus to more productive and less harmful activities. Physiologically, these activities stimulate dopamine release, not attributed to chemicals. One might even think of positive addictions as a form of harm reduction. Positive addictions can include activities of *passion development*. Since we are all unique beings, with our unique genetic and life histories, there are limitless activities that could be included in the category of positive addictions. When doing an initial assessment of a new client, it would be valuable to include an inventory of potential activities that could be designated as passion development/positive addictions. ([www.alkomusic.com/wholelife](http://www.alkomusic.com/wholelife)) is my assessment tool



- **Meditation** has long been recognized as a healing and healthful mental/emotional activity. It is a mainstay of several spiritual practices including Buddhism, Islam (tafakkur/contemplation, dhikr/remembrance), Hinduism and Christianity. Meditation can take several forms including Transcendental Meditation (TM), where a mantra is repeated, mindfulness meditation, watching the breath, and guided meditation. Meditation is a powerful tool for promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and enhancing cognitive functions. It has been demonstrated by several researchers including Marlatt, Dakwar, Levin, Zgierska, Rabago, Chawla, Kushner, and Koehler, that when practiced, it decreases substance use and increases relapse prevention.
- **Mindfulness**--In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn established the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. This was based on his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. The program was initially developed for chronically ill patients, that had challenges with conventional, allopathic medical treatments. Mindfulness involves the conscious, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. This awareness can be both a mainstay of our thinking patterns, and/or enveloped into mindfulness meditation. The habit of mindfulness, as demonstrated by Bowen, Witkiewitz, Clifasefi can assist in the amelioration of cravings as well as modulate affective, cognitive and self-regulation processes. This author also theorizes that side benefits of mindfulness could include increased safety, security, and better decision making, by being more present in our cognition. Mindfulness is an important part of Buddhist practices. Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022), the well known Vietnamese Buddhist monk and founder of Plum Village, was very active in promoting the practice of mindfulness in our daily life, as well as his work promoting non-violence and peace.



- **Art Therapy** provides the opportunities to express emotion, process trauma, build self-esteem, as well as providing a creative outlet for releasing stress and producing Dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and motivation. Arts-based activities (music, visual arts, dance and movement, drama, computer graphics and games, etc) have been demonstrated to reduce relapse, substance cravings, and to foster all important self-purpose and identity. Music Therapy, one of the most prominent arts therapy treatments, is used to treat an impressive scope of disorders including anxiety, depression, PTSD, schizophrenia, dementia, in addition to addiction. Many countries and US states have specific curricula for the Arts Therapy specialization.
- **Qigong** represents a series of traditional exercises, originating in China. It encompasses meditation, controlled breathing, gentle movements, and tapping on various nerve centers, muscles and bone and joint areas. It promotes mental clarity, relaxation, emotional balance, and has shown to aid in neuroplasticity and Recovery.
- **Breathwork** has long been recognized as a significant therapy by many spiritual practices, as well as from holistic practitioners. Fundamentally, it represents a most important tool of regulating and controlling our parasympathetic system, especially when there is a challenge in cortisol production. Breath work is an important part of ancient Yogic and Ayurvedic practices and traditions. Its origins are spiritual, meant to cleanse both body and mind, while helping to nurture peace, equilibrium and a union with the cosmos. There are many You-tubers teaching breathwork: I especially like the School of Breath.



**Yoga, Yoga Nidra, Mudras, Exercise, and Tapping** are physical practices and disciplines that have been demonstrated to control or reduce stress, anxiety, depression and aid in Recovery. I find Mudras fascinating, and have been practicing them with some personal success. They are gestures and formations that you form, usually on your hand, that have connections in the nervous system, utilizing Chakras and other knowledge based on Indian wellness practices. I personally use Yoga Nidra as well--lying on my back, in a meditative relaxing position, and tapping, which is literally tapping on various bodily nerve centers. Many examples can be viewed on Youtube, with abundant anecdotal and empirical evidence available on the Internet.

**Herbs and proper nutrition** provides our physical body with the optimum fuel and building blocks for repair. There is a universe of herbs, edibles, nutraceuticals, and nutritional practices that need investigation. (I love my combination of Ashwagandha and Tulsi (adaptogens) for my anxiety.) The challenge is that the Allopathic world (based on BIG PHARMA), is not interested in un-trademarkable cures or prevention, that are not the province of petro-chemically based pharmaceuticals. As practitioners we should lobby for palliatives in this area, to include our entire populations' well being.





# **WholeLife Manifesto and the WholeLife Community**

## **Background**

- Personal Background---Hippie--IV user—Therapeutic Community—Positive Addiction of Music;
- 40 years and many careers later (after the Crash of 2008)—Received my MS in Addiction Counseling;
- Schooling was inadequate—lack of Holistic tools and the importance of Peers;
- Received Train the Trainer Certs with Faces and Voices of Recovery for Peer Support Specialist (PSS) Training—coalesces very well with 12-Step, but goes beyond by enabling and empowering PSS as competent paraprofessionals;
- Spent 12 years in various clinics, courtrooms, and government organizations;
- Formulated the paradigms of WholeLife Community in 2019, as represented by the *WholeLife Manifesto*, which cites the importance of Multiple Pathways of Recovery, the importance of Holistic and Integrative Practices, and addressing our domains of function;
- Opened WholeLife Counseling in 2019, unfortunately, closed down by Covid.



## **The WholeLife Manifesto: a framework for Recovery**

According to Grok AI, “The WholeLife Manifesto is a holistic, integrative framework for SUD treatment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of physical, mental/emotional, spiritual, passion development, community, and vocational domains to foster recovery and well-being. It draws from biopsychosocial-spiritual models, positive psychology, and recovery-oriented systems of care, aiming to replace maladaptive behaviors with positive, sustainable practices. Recovery is a lifelong process that requires addressing all domains of function to achieve a balanced, fulfilling life”.



## **WholeLife Manifesto--Core Principles (work in progress):**

- We support and foster non-judgmentalism, meeting clients where they are at, utilizing harm reduction, and multiple pathways of recovery;
- We believe in fostering Cultural Competence;
- We support and foster holistic and integrated, interventions, efforts, and activities, by addressing our multiple domains of function; we support all matters of helping our clients gain resilience and empowerment, including vocational means;
- We support the training and nurturing of Peer Support Specialists;
- By utilizing the power of Community, and recognizing that a loss of community bonds and resources, we can harness helping resources in addressing addiction and mental illness;
- We supporting and foster recreation, fun, healthy activities and knowledge, the arts (music, visual arts, hobbies, media production, video, book clubs, songwriting, groups, classes, etc)
- We support robust and diverse groups for Spirituality, Recovery, Peer Recovery Support, Groups, etc, that address our shared life challenges, as well as specific Person-Centered and Humanistic oriented counseling;
- We believe that Recovery is possible, and that we can control our own destiny. We believe that there are many different spiritual pathways that support Recovery and a positive way of life. We align ourselves with a variety of organizations and individuals whose philosophies of Recovery bring hope, fresh insights, and newer perspectives to the Recovery Movement.



# **WholeLife Community: a model**

**WholeLife Community** as envisioned, is a self-sustainable, holistic, integrated therapeutic organization, purposed to form a physical community resource.

A WholeLife Community Center will offer a host of therapeutic, artistic/creative, recreational, and vocational resources to the community-at-large. Designed as a worker owned co-operative, most of the activities would be operated by individuals and community members who would be responsible for programming, and have a stake in outcomes. It would conform to cultural competent and community standards, wants and needs. Within its 10-15,000 sq. ft space we would observe a beehive of activities of interest to the community at large:

- Classrooms hosting a robust schedule of community activities, classes, trainings and workshops for vocation, literacy, the arts, recreation, holistic health and spirituality. These would include mini-classes in music, the arts, managing social media, and technology.



## **WholeLife Community (cont)**

- Behavioral health groups including group therapy, family group, couples group, spirituality groups, peer support specialist training, and other therapeutic groups such as yoga, qigong, exercise, breathwork, etc. These could be part of a ***WholeLife Mental Health Clinic or Recovery Clinic or?***
- Arts, music/recording, video, and other creative studios and production facilities, as well as performance resources, and hosting community based events. We could administrate a ***WholeLife Community Channel***, which would produce beneficial media for the community, and interface with Universities, Civic Departments, and other organizations whose purpose is complementary.
- We have unlimited numbers of pharmacies in Malaysia, but nary any apothecaries. Apothecaries specialize in herbal remedies. The WCC would house an impressive selection of affordable herbs, tinctures, growing mediums, seeds, etc. Let's dream a little further and have a respectable sized community garden.
- Business Incubators and Worker Owned Co-operatives, managed by the Community.



## **Final thoughts**

This author has introduced a holistic and integrated philosophy, and model of a Community Center, that can address the challenges of SUD and other mental illness. It embraces the need for the Community to be involved, and to be empowered. It provides an opportunity for the hoi polloi to take control of several aspects of their future, and it celebrates the human spirit. As envisioned by this writer, the WCC can provide a world of opportunity and communication to the community. In addition to its function as a mental health center, there can be ongoing classes, events, programs, videos, music, concerts, video channels, community get-togethers, and recreational opportunities available to the community. Having connections with colleges or universities would furthermore network students as well as provide up-to-date news and education. There are abundant areas for funding, generating revenue, and self-sustainability in a WCC. These include:



- Fee income from classes, workshops, conferences, concerts, lectures, honorariums, production services, production assets, events, and memberships;
- Corporate benefactors, spiritual partners, and government partners;
- Income from professional services from our mental health component;
- Income from the administration of business incubators and Worker-owned Co-ops;

Obviously, such a project like the **WholeLife Community Center** is not without its detractors and challenges. It will take capital, organization, community involvement, and champions who understand the enormous potential and possibilities that could occur after the first one is opened. The obvious job ahead will be to build an initial model, in a welcoming part of an urban or suburban center. With the help of Allah, Jesus, Yahwah, The Mystic Force, and Karma, perhaps all things are possible.



## **And last but not least.....my shameless plug--**

For a complete copy of my paper, appendices, the ***WholeLife Assessment form***, and the ***WholeLife Manifesto*** go to my website:

[www.alkomusic.com/wholelife](http://www.alkomusic.com/wholelife)

And if there are any interested parties in getting involved in a great music project, I am seeking collaborators, writers, musicians, sponsors and a couple of partners to help produce: **Recovery: The Musical**. Samples can be heard here:

<https://alkomusic.com/recovery-the-musical>