



Fireside Project

Providing Real-Time Support When
Time Doesn't Seem Real

Joshua White and Hanifa Nayo Washington

A landmark event in the history of the psychedelic movement occurred on April 14, 2021. Starting on that day, any person in the midst of a psychedelic experience or integrating a past psychedelic experience now has a number they can call or text to receive free, confidential peer support. The number is 6-2FIRESIDE. That's (623) 473-7433.

On the other end of the line are kind, understanding, well-trained volunteers who are devoted to providing compassionate peer support. To listening deeply and from the heart. To connecting. To helping callers minimize the risks and fulfill the potential of their psychedelic experiences.

Just let the implications of that sink in for a moment: so long as a person has their phone with them, they'll never have to be alone with a psychedelic experience. Ever again.

Say a person consumes a psychedelic substance while home alone. They reach down and feel their phone in their pocket. Even if they don't actually dial 6-2FIRESIDE, they feel reassured just knowing that a peer support volunteer—someone who gets it—is waiting to support them. Or, say someone had an intense mushroom journey last week. Since then, reality doesn't seem to fit quite right, like clothes left in the dryer for too long. Then they remember 6-2FIRESIDE. They call the number, and hear, "Fireside Project. This is Hanifa. How can I help?"

The Psychedelic Peer Support Line is an offering from a nonprofit we founded called Fireside Project. As our tagline says, we provide "real-time support, for when time doesn't seem real."

We see the support line as a mycelial web of connection and community, beginning first in the United States and eventually germinating across the globe and realizing our vision of a world where every person feels safe, supported, and seen during and after their psychedelic experiences.

Our first six weeks of operation highlight the need for this vital risk-reduction tool. We've had 308 conversations total, which have been evenly split between phone calls and text messages. Our volunteers de-escalated 82 people from psychological distress. In response to our post-call survey, 29 people told us they would have called 911 or gone to the emergency room but for Fireside Project. 88 percent of people expressed that they felt heard, understood, and supported during the conversation, and would recommend Fireside Project to others.

Beyond just the numbers, testimonials paint a vivid picture of the beauty and necessity of this life-saving service. One person expressed: "Sometimes just one rock to cling to can keep you out of the tide before it sweeps you away." Another caller shared this story: "I reached out to Fireside to help me process what had been a very intense and confusing psychedelic experience the week before. The person speaking to me reassured me that what I had experienced was normal and provided a lot of perspective and anecdotal experience sharing to help me grapple with my own experiences in a relatable way. I felt so much better after our call and I appreciated all of the empathy exhibited by the Fireside Project. I came out with a much greater appreciation of my own experience and psychedelics."

We chose the name Fireside Project in part because it evokes feelings of openness and connection, of coming in from the cold to join a community around the fire. But also, at a deeper level, a return to the fireside is a reconnection to a primordial ritual. As long as humans have been humans, we've gathered beside the fire to connect and share stories. To dance and sing. To build community and be in ceremony. To heal together.

Fireside Project's arrival has coincided with a wave of psychedelic decriminalization. We launched on October 28, 2020, only five days before a watershed moment for the psychedelic movement. At the November 3 election, Oregon decriminalized small amounts of all drugs and required the state to develop a regulatory infrastructure for psilocybin-assisted group therapy. On the same day, Washington, D.C. decriminalized all plant-based psychedelics. The following week, California State Senator Scott Wiener announced that he would be introducing a bill to decriminalize psychedelics in California, SB519. We see the Psychedelic Peer Support Line as a risk reduction tool that will play a foundational role in a post-prohibition landscape.

One of the things we've noticed in our conversations about Fireside Project is that people often refer to us as a "hotline" or a "crisis line." But those terms don't quite fit. Yes, we help people having psychedelic crises. But what we offer is much broader. We support people on their journeys of integration. We support people who need real-time support tripsitting others. And we support tripsitters who themselves need to decompress. All of that said, we're not a substitute for pre-trip preparation; it is imperative that people educate themselves about the best risk-reduction practices before they begin their trip.

We hope volunteering on the support line will be one of the most enriching volunteer opportunities ever to exist in the psychedelic movement. Our volunteers work at least one four-hour shift per week and commit to one year of service. That's over 200 hours per year per volunteer. During our pilot year, we'll offer approximately 11,000 hours of psychedelic peer support! Each volunteer has completed a training program curated by our Co-Founder and Support Line Director, Adam Rubin. The training included experiential components as well as presentations on topics such as the art of holding space, understanding psychedelics, creating a culture of belonging, and integration.



Joshua White is Fireside Project's Founder and Executive Director. With experience serving as a crisis counselor on a helpline and a psychedelic peer support volunteer at the Zendo Project, Joshua has seen firsthand the role that compassionate peer support can play in community mental health. Before devoting his life to the psychedelic movement, Joshua spent 11 years as a Deputy City Attorney at the San Francisco City Attorney's Office, focusing on suing businesses exploiting vulnerable communities. In that capacity, he co-taught a nationally renowned clinic at the Yale Law School, where he helped students generate and litigate public interest impact litigation lawsuits.

Hanifa Nayo Washington is Fireside Project's Cultivator of Beloved Community and is a contributor to several other emerging psychedelic enterprises including the Equity in Psychedelic Therapy Initiative. Hanifa Nayo is an award winning cultural producer and sacred activist. For 20 years she has radicalized her gifts and talents as tools for liberation, healing, and community building. A Detroit native, Hanifa Nayo is a certified Usui/Holy Fire Reiki Master Practitioner, a masterful heart-centered group facilitator, and prolific creative designer. In 2019, Hanifa Nayo launched One Village Healing, a BIPOC-led and centered healing and wellness initiative. She also currently works with Co-Creating Effective and Inclusive Organizations and is a leader of the New Haven Community Leadership Program.

The other founding staff members of Fireside Project are **Nicolai Lassen**, **Kenneth Jønck**, and **Adam Rubin**. Kenneth and Nicolai are software engineers who will design Fireside Project's software console, website, and forthcoming mobile app. Adam is a psychedelic harm reduction activist and crisis counselor who developed Fireside Project's training and will oversee the Psychedelic Peer Support Line.

In addition to minimizing cost barriers to psychedelic and integrative support, we intend to harness the potential of the support line to help create a more diverse psychedelic movement. Starting in 2022, our Fireside Equity Fund will provide scholarships to volunteers from communities that have been underrepresented in the psychedelic movement so they can pursue or deepen their careers in psychedelic healing.

The Psychedelic Peer Support Line currently accepts calls from within the United States only, and is open for limited hours (Thursday through Sunday from 3:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. PST and Monday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. PST). But we have plans to expand to Canada in the next few months, followed by other countries. Our long-term goal is to be open 24/7 and available in every country in the world in multiple languages.

Like so many new nonprofit organizations, our central challenge is fundraising. Just as local public radio stations are listener-supported, we too are supported by our community. Our hope is to keep the support line free for everyone. Forever. With the support of our community, we have no doubt we can make that dream a reality.

