



  
**Calmer Choice**  
Cultivating Awareness • Living Mindfully • Enhancing Resilience

2020 - 2021  

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ANNUAL REPORT

*A Message Of Gratitude*

# FIONA JENSEN

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Founder & CEO

To the amazing community that makes up Calmer Choice...the staff, the instructors, the donors and funders, the volunteers, and all those who simply love and believe in what we do!

This will be my last letter in an annual report as the CEO of this remarkable organization. What a tremendous honor it has been to lead this organization for the last 12 years.

One of the things that feels most important for me to do as I close this chapter of my life is to try acknowledge all the pieces that that went into the creation of Calmer Choice. Much of this are the people that I have connected and have connected to me. Certainly these relationships are some of our greatest gifts.

The last 12 years has been this daily process of throwing my “keys over the fence” and then moving into action. If I hadn’t thrown those said keys over that fence it would have been to easy to succumb to the anxiety and fear I had over being the “right” kind leader for this organization. And yet, each time we said YES and moved into action, as has been the miracle of Calmer Choice, we had incredible groups of people stepping up, showing up and doing what was needed. And this year has been no different!!

It’s been year like no other! A year where I announced my retirement and the Board of Directors did a remarkable job with a full-on nationwide search, finding my replacement. A year where the programming team created more programs than ever before. A year where we gathered as a small but mighty crew of people and just kept on rowing the boat.

In this final letter from me, I wish to say thank you. Thank you to the incredible people that have been part of this magical and miraculous creation. Thanks to the staff, thanks to the donors, thanks to the volunteers, thanks to the instructors, thanks to the schools that said yes when we were not exactly sure what we were up to way back when. And of course, most important a HUGE thank you to those that are carrying on this most important work! The staff, the board, our volunteers and donors and of course Emily Smalley our new incoming CEO!

If it was not for all of you saying YES, Calmer Choice would not be where we are today. Much love and deep respect always.

XO

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fiona Jeng". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Emily Smalley, COO

## *Walking Towards Light*

There's a saying I heard once from a friend, paraphrasing the author Joseph Campbell, that has guided me through the troubling and messy parts of my life: "the treasure you seek is on the other side of the cave."

The pandemic has been the metaphorical cave for many of us, uniting us in our collective humanity. As challenging as it has been, at Calmer Choice we have kept our eye on the sliver of light at the other end of the cave, and have marched toward that light, even when it felt like the cave was closing in on us. We became the lifeline we needed to be for ourselves and the community.

It has been a year of giving ourselves and others the grace to be human as we make our way through the cave, leaning into our shared experience with compassion and permission to ask for help, with forgiveness and patience when we don't get it just right, and with new dreams and visions for ourselves as we get closer to the light.

Part of that new vision for ourselves at Calmer Choice started to form in January, when our incredible founder and CEO Fiona Jensen announced her retirement after 12 years of serving our community. With uncertainty surrounding such a transition, what has kept us confident and held is that Fiona's vision for Calmer Choice, the vision that carried her through our creation in crisis in 2010, is the same vision that is lighting the way through this pandemic cave—a world in which people treat themselves and others with kindness and compassion.

In a year of uncertainty, we found another purpose – honor Fiona's legacy as our bold and loving founder and keep her vision alive and burning to be our beacon for what comes on the other side of this cave. It has been a year marked by celebration, planning, anticipation, grief, resilience, awareness and lessons – you will read about many of these in the pages that follow. We are shaping the future of Calmer Choice and the future of mindfulness alongside you all, our beloved community, who have walked with us through this cave, and will do so with a deep reverence for what came before us and a fierce promise that we will work every day to emerge as an organization you will continue to be proud to be a part of.

With gratitude,

*Emily Smalley*

# Reflections From An Uncharted Year



John Fulone, Board Chair

As our world starts to slowly open back up, it's important to pause and reflect on what's happened over the last 12-18 months. Everyone has a story to tell and one thing's certain...our lives changed. At Calmer Choice, we found innovative ways to deliver our programs during a time when they were needed more than ever before. We used our Strategic Plan as a guide and shuffled things a bit to accommodate the ever-changing landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a silver lining by forcing us to accelerate our technology plans and enhance our capabilities. It provided the opportunity for us to expand our reach beyond Cape Cod and offer our programming to broader audiences like businesses and first responders in addition to our core programming for kids and schools.

Calmer Choice had an exceptional year during the most uncharted year in our lifetimes. Our success was driven by two incredible groups - our amazing and dedicated team of instructors, staff and volunteers, and our wonderful and generous supporters. With the unwavering commitment from both we were able to continue and expand our programming and deliver our services like never-before.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank our Calmer Choice Team. You're the best and we're grateful for your commitment and dedication to our mission. I also want to thank our friends and supporters - the individuals and businesses who so generously give to Calmer Choice. We're grateful.

With my warmest regards,

*John Fulone*

# ERIN O'BRIEN

## *Mindful Motherhood*

After the birth of her daughter, Saylor, Erin O'Brien moved to Cape Cod for a fresh start closer to family. "My life fell apart when Saylor was 2 months old- I was suddenly a single mom and wracked with the guilt and shame of relapsing after having years of sobriety - I was exhausted and so fearful", says Erin. "I felt like I had two choices - freak out and run away or change my entire life and blossom." At first, trying to balance motherhood, recovery, and paying the bills (all during a global pandemic) seemed completely overwhelming.

"I was constantly living in the pain of my past or the fear of the future- there was no space for the present and my life suffered," Erin explains. "I had heard about mindfulness through my recovery but was not sure where to begin until I found Calmer Choice. After taking their 8-week course, my entire understanding of mindfulness changed." She went on to say, "I used to get so frustrated because I thought mindfulness meant I had to sit and clear my mind of everything, but instead I learned to embrace all the thoughts and try my best to compartmentalize each one to access later."

Not only has Calmer Choice given her the tools to help her with her recovery, but it has also given Erin a better sense of what is truly important when raising a child. "Sometimes, as Moms, we hold ourselves to these crazy standards of perfection, but does my daughter care if I empty the dishwasher? Does my daughter care if all the laundry is put away? No. She cares that I'm here. She cares that I'm loving, supporting, and present. We often put such a high value on things that don't really matter and that is something that Calmer Choice has taught me. Perspective. The most important thing to me as a mother and a woman in recovery is to be present at the moment with what is right in front of me, and I hope to be able to pass that along to Saylor."

One of the important lessons that Erin reports she has learned through her recovery is that her life doesn't always look perfect. Each day can bring a new challenge, and it's different for each person depending on their support groups. Erin is grateful to have a strong support system with her family, with Saylor, and now the people at Calmer Choice that encourage her daily with their ongoing programs.

Erin says she has grown as both a person and a parent and loves to share what she has learned with others. "Practicing mindfulness isn't always easy but it is the greatest gift I've ever given myself. I am no longer paralyzed by the shame of my past or the fear of my future, I am simply here, and I am so grateful."



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## *A Family Affair*

# THE BOWES

When Abbey and her sister Jacqui were freshmen in high school, one of their very close classmates committed suicide. It was devastating for both the kids left behind as well as their parents. Five years later, in the summer of 2009, two more friends from this very same peer group, took their lives within a 2-week period. These three young deaths in such a short period of time, completely shook their community to the core. These tragic events were part of the beginnings of Calmer Choice, as Fiona Jensen, who also had children from the very same high school, sought something that could help manage the overwhelming stress these teens were experiencing.

Jacqui and Abbey's mom, Betsy, a longtime friend of Fiona's, recalls being invited to a meeting to discuss getting some sort of a group or class into Barnstable High. Betsy didn't know much about it, but when she heard it would be about reducing stress and teaching them strategies around making healthier choices, she thought, "Okay, this is what these kids need, I am in!"

Twelve years later, Calmer Choice has become much more than a single program in a single school. And, the young women who participated in that first program for young people, continue to use mindfulness and the strategies around managing stress in their daily lives.

Abbey, who is a clinical manager of the medical/surgical ICU at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, recently brought Calmer Choice to her workplace through a virtual, 8-week mindfulness course. "With the pandemic, we're going through something so traumatic all over again," she says. "What I've been seeing with the staff is that they're just overwhelmed, they just don't have the tools, they can't step away from it. The Calmer Choice program really has helped."

Jacqui feels that while mindfulness is beneficial at any age, it's huge to start early. As a mom herself now, she wants her son to have the tools to be able to say, "I'm angry, and this is how I can deal with it."

Betsy shared how powerful it is to witness the impact Calmer Choice has had in the community. She emphasizes that while starting out as a grassroots effort, the studies that have been done in the last several years validate the science behind mindfulness, proving its efficacy. She says. "At the end of the day it's the most important thing I have done in my adult life!"



**This is the most important thing I have done in my adult life.**

# MANNY MA

Shortly after graduating from Taconic High School in the Berkshires, Manny Marrero enlisted in the the U.S. Marine Corps and served two tours of duty from 2001 to 2009. Only one week after starting boot camp, the 9/11 terrorist attacks rocked our nation, and Manny, forever.

Once he returned home, Manny knew that combat had changed him. He was having trouble sleeping, was on constant alert and could not seem to turn it off. Over time he realized he realized he needed help. He needed to help himself find ways to train his body to feel comfortable being relaxed again. From there he found yoga, meditation and mindfulness.

Now an occupational therapist at Cape Cod Healthcare and board member of Calmer Choice, Manny says that before he found mindfulness, he was overwhelmed by stress and trauma from his service – and hadn't learned how to respond to it in a healthy way.

He says, “mindfulness was the thing that allowed me to thrive, to live healthy, to not turn to drugs and alcohol and self-medicate.” Today, he teaches many, including first responders, the basics of mindfulness and how to incorporate it into their work and everyday lives. “With mindfulness, people are more aware of how stressors affect them, and how they can learn to cope. Mindfulness gives you the great skill of living in the present moment.”

Aside from teaching mindfulness for Calmer Choice, Manny also works with clients and co-workers at the hospital. He says that teaching and practicing mindfulness “decreases that ‘fight or flight’ reaction, and fosters kindness and compassion.” He loves to help in any way he can, and loves how enthusiastic his colleagues are about joining him for his mindfulness sessions.

While Manny works primarily with adults and sees first-hand how mindfulness is beneficial at any age, he believes that learning about mindfulness at a young age can create a stronger start for kids. “I think of my life, when I was a kid... and mindfulness would have made a profound impact. To teach kids about social emotional intelligence, about coping with stress and anxiety – it allows them to thrive.”

Manny is a mindfulness ambassador from his real-life experience. He also is sure to emphasize the science behind mindfulness and how recent studies done with MIT, Yale and others have proven its efficacy. “Calmer Choice teaches the community about mindfulness and backs it up with the evidence. It’s a natural coping strategy that’s simple, doesn’t involve a medication, and doesn’t cost anything to practice. It can truly make a difference for everyone in our mental, physical and overall health.”

*Responding In A Healthy Way*

**RRERO**

**Mindfulness  
gives you  
the great skill  
of living in the  
present moment.**



## *Breathing Through Feelings*

# SILVI & ELLIOTT

Elliott Johnson's introduction to Calmer Choice was during his kindergarten year at Station Ave. Elementary. But, according to his mom Silvi, neither of them realized how beneficial it was having Calmer Choice in his life until the COVID-19 pandemic took hold – when it wasn't a part of their remote learning plan.

Virtual instruction was particularly difficult for Elliott, and Silvi shares that she just didn't know how to help him regulate his feelings and in turn his behavior. As a result, Elliott struggled with increased anxiety and challenges with listening and paying attention in class. He had a hard time calming himself down when he was upset, and problems getting to sleep at night.

In April, Elliott went back to in-person learning and he truly changed. Not only was the social aspect important for his growth, but Elliott had once again had access to the Calmer Choice strategies in the classroom. He was learning how to regulate and manage all his emotions with greater ease.

One day, when pulling out his homework for the afternoon, there was a paper in his folder that said, "What makes you mad?" Elliott had drawn a picture of himself angrily stomping up the stairs to his room with his fists clenched at his sides. He wrote: "I get angry when I have to go to sleep." The next question was, "What can you do to calm yourself down?" His response was, "I practice my breathing, taking deep breaths and counting and then I can play or read some books in my room. It just makes me feel better."

Now in third grade, Elliott has continued with his social-emotional learning journey and Silvi and her husband Mark are so proud of how far he has come. She says, "I have seen the impact of Calmer Choice for my son (and our family), and I will always be an advocate for the incredible service Calmer Choice provides for our community."

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair and a young boy with short brown hair, both smiling warmly. The woman is wearing a colorful patterned top, and the boy is wearing a grey and blue baseball-style shirt. They are outdoors with a blurred green background.

# JOHNSON

I will always  
be an advocate for  
the incredible  
service Calmer  
Choice provides for  
our community.

”

*a Calmer Classroom*

**TRACEY  
DEEG**

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# AN

A 5th grade teacher at Eastham Elementary, Tracey was once reluctant about Calmer Choice's programs. Calmer Choice came into her life about 7 years ago, and honestly, she says her first reaction was: "Not interested. I don't have time in my day to teach this... it's not my responsibility but, I quickly discovered that it made a world of difference for my kids. I embraced it and love it not only for the work that I do with my students but for my personal life as well."

Tracey began to see the benefits of Calmer Choice through the connection she made with the first instructor who taught mindfulness in her classroom. She recalls how easy it was to let her know what was going on with her students, and how those issues or concerns became part of the lesson.

This past year, Tracey had an opportunity to bring Calmer Choice to her virtual classroom. She asked her students how they felt about doing Calmer Choice in this new way (over Zoom), and they voted a resounding YES, sharing as a group how much they wanted it to be a part of their day. Tracey says, "Mindfulness is so important for kids today. With social media, political unrest – and now the pandemic – kids are exposed to many things they may not be able to explain. Then you add on all the big emotions they have at this time in their lives, and it can just be too much."

Through practicing mindfulness, herself and actively participating in the Calmer Choice program, Tracey has seen big changes in her students. She sees them able to talk more freely and share their feelings with one another. "One of the greatest gifts mindfulness gives my



**Mindfulness gives my students is permission to take a breath, permission to be themselves, permission to know that what they are feeling is ok.**

students is permission to take a breath, permission to be themselves, permission to know that what they are feeling is ok, permission to know that not everyone has to agree with them. It doesn't diminish what they're feeling, and they can do so in a safe space."

Over these past 7 years, Tracey has continued to help her students practice these mindfulness strategies within the classroom. It is a tool Tracey values, and has said of her journey: "Calmer Choice helps me remember to take a breath, too. To be able to back up and say: 'You know what? They're humans; they're kids.' It helps me be a better teacher for them."

# Calmer Choice Close Up: 2020-2021

## 2020-2021 Partners

The silver lining of the pandemic has been our ability to expand our footprint and increase access to our innovative programs by going virtual.

### School Districts

Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School  
Dennis-Yarmouth  
Falmouth  
Hartford Public Schools (CT)  
Mashpee  
Nauset  
Old Rochester  
Sandwich  
Provincetown

### Community Programming

Aging Life Care Association  
  
Alzheimer's Family Resource Center of Cape Cod  
  
Boston University School of Social Work  
  
Cape Cod Museum of Art  
  
Children's Advocacy Center of Plymouth County  
  
Community Health Center of Cape Cod  
  
Drug Endangered Children Initiative of Plymouth County  
  
Duffy Health Center  
  
Family Center of Brockton  
  
Homeless Prevention Council  
  
Office of Joseph D. Early, Jr. – Worcester County District Attorney  
  
Office of Michael D. O'Keefe – Barnstable County District Attorney  
  
Plymouth County Outreach  
  
To the Moon & Back  
  
Tufts University School of Occupational Therapy  
  
Wellstrong

## Supporting Students and Teachers



Our mindfulness programming for children was delivered in creative new ways, reaching students through recorded video lessons and “virtual” Calmer Choice instructors in classrooms. Although it may have looked different than our usual in-person programs, we have provided programming to more than 70 classrooms across the Cape and Southeastern Massachusetts this year, reaching nearly 1,000 students.

We supported teachers with their own self-care with online mindfulness offerings. Dozens of educators earned Professional Development credits through our Mindfulness for Educators course, and 25 educators earned graduate credit through our partnership course with Dominican University, which began this year. In addition, we hosted numerous workshops both on the Cape and “over the bridge.”

## Reaching Our Community

Our community collaborations tripled in response to the pandemic! Meeting the expressed needs of those we serve, we hosted dozens of virtual workshops and courses throughout the year and granted more than 25 scholarships to participants who needed them.



## Organizational Highlights

- ✓ Founder & CEO, Fiona Jensen, announces retirement at the end of 2021
- ✓ Four new members join Board of Directors: Nancy Ashworth, C. Patricia Fater, MD (returning), Anne LeClaire, Dan Richards
- ✓ Launched a comprehensive Anti-Racism training initiative for board, staff & instructors
- ✓ Staff fully settled into new office space that was secured the day of the pandemic shut down in March 2020.

# Ways to Support Calmer Choice

## Participate!

The best way to support what we do is to join our community mindfulness programs -in person and now available virtually. Our website lists our full array of offerings for you to take advantage of throughout the calendar year including workshops, 4 and 8-week courses and mindful family classes.

## Volunteer!

Our origins stem from community rallying together. Volunteers drive our mission from our board of directors, event fundraisers and organizers, down to our friends who come in to help with office tasks. We are always open to discuss how your talents might help us make impact.

## Become a Donor!

Calmer Choice relies almost entirely on contributions from individuals and businesses, grants and fundraising events to support our vital services. Financial support multiplies the efforts of our dedicated and passionate team, allowing us to deliver crucial life skills to thousands of students and community members each year.

We offer giving options through our monthly, recurring Champion donor program, a Business Alliance Partnership program and special seasonal appeals.

*Capacity Building*  
*Increased Access*  
*Innovation*



The fund's three guiding pillars will ensure sustainability for years to come.

Calmer Choice began in 2010 with Fiona Jensen's vision, passion and a small but mighty group of committed community members. Since then, the organization has earned the respect of global thought leaders in the world of mindfulness and education. Under Fiona's direction, Calmer Choice was created and nurtured; earned scientific approval by researchers; and has grown to serve over 38,000 people across Cape Cod and Southeastern Massachusetts. Fiona has compassionately led a group of dedicated staff and volunteers and impacted the health and well-being of thousands.

In celebration of Fiona's well-deserved retirement and as the organization looks toward our next chapter, we invite you to be a part of the Fiona Jensen Legacy Fund. A donation to the fund bolsters Fiona's vision for Calmer Choice and ensures sustainability for years to come.

Please join our community-minded supporters below  
who established the Fiona Jensen Legacy Fund in 2021.  
Thank you for supporting Fiona's vision.



George Abbott	John and Marija Hauser	Wayne and Maureen Paddock
Nancy Ashworth	John and Sandra Higgins	Rob Padgett
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\*We apologize for any omissions and errors and trust that you will bring them to our attention

\* Honorary

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\* Monthly, recurring Champion donors

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