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SOUTHERN SMOKE FOUNDATION

Southern Smoke Foundation Providing Access to No-cost Counseling to Maine Food and Beverage Workers

A nonprofit is launching its Behind You Mental Health Program in Maine this summer

MAINE—To kick off Mental Health Awareness Month, [Southern Smoke Foundation](#) (SSF), a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to providing emergency relief funds nationwide and access to mental health services for food and beverage workers (F+B), is thrilled to announce that it's launching its [Behind You](#) mental health program as a pilot in Maine this summer in partnership with University of Maine. SSF is providing a grant to University of Maine's Psychology Services Center to provide no-cost counseling to F+B workers across Maine through the Behind You program. A Behind You grant covers the cost of counseling for F+B workers who qualify through the SSF website and allows student clinicians to diversify their training by seeing a community of seasoned F+B workers with various backgrounds. A licensed clinical supervisor and the university program director supervise all student clinicians. In addition, SSF requires university partners to provide telehealth services to increase accessibility for workers with demanding schedules or living in rural areas with limited access to in-person services. The initial grant will be for a pilot program with hopes of expanding services in 2025.

"We are excited to be part of the Behind You initiative, which will create excellent training opportunities for students in our doctoral training program in clinical psychology," Jeffrey Hecker, PhD, Director of Clinical Training at University of Maine said. "Students in advanced stages of the program will hone their clinical skills providing teletherapy services. Tourism is a big part of the Maine economy, and food and beverage workers are the backbone of that industry. We look forward to supporting this important sector of the Maine workforce."

Southern Smoke Foundation is looking forward to increasing its impact in Maine by offering the opportunity to receive no-cost counseling through the Behind You program to Maine F+B workers. SSF has been serving the Maine F+B community through its Emergency Relief Fund program since 2017 and has distributed \$22,441 in grants to help lift workers out of crisis. In partnership with University of Maine, Southern Smoke Foundation is projected to provide access to more than 200 no-cost counseling sessions to F+B workers in this pilot year.

Since Behind You launched in 2020, SSF has provided access to more than 5,100 counseling sessions at no cost to F+B workers, and they're not hanging up the apron now. To drive awareness and funds to support Behind You, SSF is launching a "Million for Mental Health" campaign on May 1, in tandem with Mental Health Awareness Month. It will cost SSF roughly \$1 Million annually to sustain programs in California, Illinois, Louisiana, New York, and Texas, as well as expand to Massachusetts, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington D.C. and Virginia, in addition to Maine this summer. This nationwide campaign will directly support the continued growth of the program with the goal of raising \$1 Million by the end of the year. Local chef and owner Jordan Rubin of Mr. Tuna, Crispy Gai, and Bar Futo stands behind SSF and has been pushing to get the Behind You program to Maine for years.

"I've gotten the chance to work alongside the team at Southern Smoke Foundation for a few years now - whether that's cooking at their annual Southern Smoke Festival in Houston, TX, or connecting my staff and friends in the industry with them to apply for Emergency Relief Funding," said chef Jordan Rubin. "The fact that the Behind You program will now also be available to my team and other food and beverage workers across Maine to receive free counseling if they're interested makes me so happy."

Southern Smoke Foundation has been instrumental in providing more than \$11.6 million in emergency relief grants to F+B workers. SSF aims to alleviate the financial and emotional burdens individuals in the F+B community face due to unforeseen crises, medical emergencies, or natural disasters. F+B workers experiencing an unforeseen hardship can apply to receive an Emergency Relief Grant [here](#), and F+B workers residing in California, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington D.C who are interested in receiving no-cost counseling can apply for Behind You [here](#). Those who live outside of the Behind You service states can apply for financial assistance to cover mental health care needs through the Emergency Relief Fund. The Behind You program wouldn't be possible without Love, Tito's, Elijah Craig, Restaurant Giving Circle, and Athletic Brewing. To support SSF and learn more, visit <https://southernSmoke.org>.

About Southern Smoke Foundation

Founded in 2017 by James Beard award-winning chef Chris Shepherd and Executive Director Lindsey Brown, Southern Smoke Foundation (SSF) provides national support to the food and beverage (F+B) community through emergency relief grants and access to affordable mental health services. To date, SSF has granted more than \$11.6M to F+B workers experiencing an unforeseen crisis nationwide, and since 2020, has provided over 5,100 no-cost counseling sessions to F+B workers in California, Illinois, Louisiana, New York, and Texas through its mental health program, Behind You.

Southern Smoke Foundation Mission Statement

Southern Smoke Foundation's mission is to create a healthier and more sustainable food and beverage (F+B) industry by providing emergency relief grants nationwide and access to mental health services to F+B workers.

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