

Please provide a brief overview of the project. Please include amount requested and a justification for the project (5000 word limit):

Pink and Blues is a peer support group for Mental Health Consumers (any diagnosis) who also identify with a Queer lifestyle (any identity). The unique strength of our group is *weekly* Wednesday night meetings they are *free* to attend. Currently, members can attend either in person or via Zoom. Until the pandemic, we had been self-sufficient and never “passed the hat” to cover our expenses. The Covid-19 pandemic changed all that in many ways, several of those changes have been very positive. At this juncture the group has to enter the more complex world of operating as a nonprofit organization including the detailed work of obtaining funding and becoming a more formal organization. This grant application is our first in our 20-year history.

Founder Background.

Pink and Blues, like most support groups, provides a “safe space” for members to share any aspect of living life with their specific challenges related to mental health but where Pink and Blues differs is that we embraced the additional twist of being “Queer and Crazy too”.

On January 18th, 2003, Mark A. Davis held the first meeting for Pink and Blues in the Blue Room at the St. Luke's of the Epiphany church on 13th Street in Philadelphia. Initially Mark was the only member for several meetings however thereafter attendance grew quickly to a dozen members each week with at least one new person every week. Since then we have accommodated over 8,000 souls who were seeking help managing very serious mental health challenges.

Mark brought a unique and passionate history to Pink and Blues. By 2003, Mark had a full career of advocating for housing, HIV/AIDS, Suicide Prevention, Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer Advocacy were just a few of the many programs that Mark personally started. That was his profession. Personally, Mark was deeply impacted by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. He lost his partner Ted at the age of 33 to AIDS and Mark himself lived with being HIV positive for over a quarter of a century. Each of the over 1,000 meetings included discussions of HIV prevention or care. A large majority of regular members reported testing positive earlier in their lives and exchanged stories of those dark days when the pandemic was running rampant in the city. I personally am HIV negative and after attending over 900 Pink and Blues meetings, I attribute all of those test results to my peers who guided me to this success. Younger members whom are all HIV negative at this point are encouraged in each Pink and Blues meeting to take advantage of the free services for the prevention and testing offered in the City of Philadelphia.

Sadly, after nearly four decades of being a strong “Problem Crusader” in Philadelphia for HIV services and legal rights, Suicide Prevention and of course his favorite: Pink and Blues, Mark passed during the Covid-19 crisis on September 14, 2020. His advocacy survives his death, most notably in our case: Free Mental Health Peer Support.

Pink and Blues--Philadelphia

Pink and Blues provides very specific support to members’ facing the dual-challenges of having a mental illness diagnosis layered on top of the challenges of being queer in a predominately straight urban environment. While one might think all healthcare might be better tailored for an LGBT lifestyle, it is critical for a consumer’s therapist to be sensitive to the unique aspects of dealing with social stigma and a chemically imbalanced brain. Sharing these challenges with like-minded individuals can smooth over the gaps in the current healthcare system. Gaps that have closed during the past two decades but that are far from adequate.

A more typical mental health peer support groups do not prioritize Queer issues such as: discrimination in housing, in the workplace, the tricky part of coming out of the closet, the daily grind of being HIV positive, and what is common during the holidays: not being included family holiday plans.

To a much lesser degree, Gay support services can be ill-prepared to deal with the complexity of a serious mental illness while in group meetings offered throughout the city at William Way and other likeminded support services. This is a “duality” that Mark felt that was not being addressed at all several decades ago. The first group meeting was held in the LGBT in-patient psych ward at Belmont just before it was closed for good.

Pink and Blues 2.0

Currently, in what we are calling Pink and Blues 2.0, we include the added challenges of class (poverty) and race (discrimination) to our mix of sexual disparity and mental diversity. The wide cultural differences living in Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley have specific quirks when it comes to both gender and sexual identity and then completely different viewpoints about depression and anxiety. Current members, some of whom have attended over 800 meetings, have their gender identities and sexual preferences struggles behind them along with a much less hectic mental health routine. However, most are living disability paycheck yo to disability paycheck facing all the problems and hostilities associated with poverty.

A second group, we describe as Pink and Blues 1.0 will be located in Collingswood NJ and will meet on a Thursday night during similar hours. It is tentatively set to launch in January with a more basic program that new members might find more their speed. Unlike the Wednesday group, they might be just beginning their journey navigating the vast mental health systems or just beginning to discover their diverse feelings and attitudes towards sexuality and gender. This will be a separate organization seeking funding as a new project as well under a separate application.

After Mark's death (9/14/2020) during the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we found ourselves essentially starting the organization from scratch. There was no succession plan and simple access to resources like our phone number, our email and website were lost because we lacked the passwords or authorities to gain access. That has all changed and a succession plan is almost complete. The out of pocket expenses to “tread water” and keep the doors open was expensive.

During the quarantine we did not miss a single meeting. We kept the group going taking advantage of Zoom online capabilities. It took some time for all members to get online but in the end Zoom capabilities presented a whole new approach to getting members to participate. And we invented new services like “Pop Up” meetings when a member had a particularly tough day or crisis during the week. We even made an international outreach to England where they have similar LGBT oriented support group meetings.

The Zoom fees plus the new phone number and new printed collateral was funded with personal money. Assets like laptops and phone technology were purchased at a significant cost to bring our own screens and WiFi to wherever we need to hold meetings.

What was most complicated while the pandemic subsided was re-starting face to face meetings, for all the fairly obvious reasons that each organization faced. When St Luke's gave permission, we added a Sunday afternoon meeting to take advantage of getting together outside at outdoor restaurants and bar areas where it was substantially safe from virus spread. In fact, several members were not able to attend Zoom meetings at all because of their living situation. It was fantastic to have everyone finally back together. The permanent take-away from this experience was rediscovering the social aspects of the group and that getting together under social circumstances can be as beneficial or sometimes even more enlightening than the more formal structured peer group meetings. The first several years of Pink and Blues involved trips to the Westbury afterwards for food and beverages.

Pink and Blues 1.0

A particular tricky problem that pre-dates the pandemic is recruiting new members. This is not unique to our group. This is being addressed in two ways: more effective and comprehensive outreach and exposure but what might be even more important aspect that more subtle: tone. When new members attend their first meeting they are enthusiastic about finding us and seem to be prime candidates to benefit from what we have to offer. Unfortunately, two out of three never return. And another percentage do not return for a third meeting. We have discussed this dilemma over the course of a decade with no effective results. By launching a new group meeting in New Jersey on a different night may provide an better on-ramp to our peer support for new folks given that it will be new for everyone at the same time, similar to freshman moving into college their first day. We expect to accommodate New Jersey members and people who are busy Wednesday nights with this meeting as well. Collingswood is the primary target for this project because of history and access to the rail lines.

A completely new program of a “day-camp” prior to meetings on Wednesday is being tested with our limited resources. This is reported to be effective throughout the country for people that are disabled from Mental Illness to create opportunities for training and education. A meal will be served, a program element will be arranged and then more formal meeting will held as usual. The church has been very cooperative in our testing of this project but we need to work out a formal financial and logistical plan during 2023 and of course find a sponsor.

This application asks for \$12,500 total for two primary projects: Re-booting and operating Pink and Blues 2.0 in Philadelphia and launching the new Pink and Blues 1.0 in Collingswood NJ. There are two small projects: outreach to celebrate our 20 years of service and communicate the new mission of Pink and Blues 2.0 and further testing of our “Day Camp” in Center City. Some of the budget enhancements include transportation compensation and parking allowances that are provided by the church. Until now, the group has not compensated the church in any fashion for the use of the Blue Room for our meetings each week. St Luke’s has been the critical piece for Pink and Blues that has kept us operational for twenty years. We feel the extended use of their facilities for parking, cooking and other storage facilities merits some financial compensation. These two pilot projects and the establishment of a tribute video depicting Mark’s life and accomplishments will provide the moral center for our organization for a long time to come.

Financial Plan**Budget Summary**

Assets bought in 2022	\$1,950.00
Pink and Blues Philadelphia Operating Budget	\$5,290.00
Pink and Blues Collingswood Launch Budget	<u>\$5,100.00</u>
Total Budget for Calendar Year 2023	\$12,340.00

The “assets” are the computer hardware we purchased in order to have a hybrid meeting of in-person members sitting in the Blue Room at the church while bringing in Zoom participants that for whatever reason cannot attend in person. We can provide our own monitor loaded with our own graphics and we use the iPhone 14 for voice service and as a hotspot to provide Wi-Fi fast enough to support Zoom transmissions. St Luke’s was built in 1840 and is inherently tricky to find good service. We are finally pleased with our new setup.

Using these financial resources we expect to double our active membership both by adding new members from the New Jersey suburbs and new members in the local Center City neighborhoods. And its reasonable to expect similar growth in 2024 but we’d expect a certain amount of attrition as well. We are now experiencing meetings of 6-8 in total size, where there are 15-20 in our active “orbit.” We expect that to be 40-60 in the orbit and possibly 30 total for two meetings by the end of 2023.

Length of time the project has been in existence (or note if New)*(required)

Pink and Blues has been meeting every week since January 2003, except for a handful of snow days. In March of 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic forced the St Luke’s church to close it’s doors during the quarantine, we did not miss a week. We got everyone trained on Zoom and met every Wednesday night online. We are currently meeting in person at the church in a hybrid environment using technology to allow members to participate via Zoom.

Please provide a budget and timetable for the project (1500 word limit):

We are budgeting \$12,340 for 2023 to support two peer support groups that would meet every week. *Pink and Blues*—Philadelphia is the original organization that needs money to complete its recovery from the Founder’s death in 2020 during the pandemic. That money would go towards weekly operations and upgrades to include new technology to allow remote participation by members who cannot travel to the church for a myriad of reasons. Out reach and Social Media presence for the group is sorely lacking and would be revamped. A new group we are calling *Pink and Blues*—Collingswood NJ will be launched to provide three new services: 1.) easier access to an in-person experience in the New Jersey suburbs, 2.) a in person and online access on a Thursday night for folks that are busy on Wednesday night and most importantly, 3.) a new group where the tone will be set for persons new to their mental health diagnosis or their gender or sexual identity. We believe this new group will provide a more comfortable on-ramp to the services we provide at Pink and Blues.

Pink and Blues--Philadelphia

<u>Description</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Annual</u>	<u>One Time</u>
<i>Weekly Meeting Support</i>				
Parking Passes (St Luke's)	Weekly	\$15.00	\$780.00	
Web Site/Email/Backup	Annual		\$300.00	
Zoom/Phone/Answering	Monthly	\$30.00	\$360.00	
Professional Subscriptions	Monthly	\$5.00	\$60.00	

Out-Reach

Business Cards	Annual		\$100.00	
Mini Posters/Brochures/Etc	Monthly	\$35.00	\$420.00	
Facilitator Expenses	Monthly	\$35.00	\$420.00	
Social Media Presence	One time			\$1,000.00
<i>20th Celebration</i>				
Member Party	One Time			\$500.00
Founder Memorial Video	One Time			\$500.00
Eddie Memorial Leaf	One Time			\$50.00
<i>Day Camp Pilot Program</i>				
Kitchen and Food items	Twice a Year	\$200.00	\$400.00	
Speaker Fees	Twice a Year	\$100.00	\$200.00	
Kitchen and Room Rental	Twice a Year	\$100.00	\$200.00	
			<u>\$3,240.00</u>	<u>\$2,050.00</u>
				\$5,290.00

In the budget for 2023 is money that will go directly to the church that has supported us for virtually nothing during our first twenty years. In exchange, we will receive parking passes and gain use of the kitchen on special occasions. Parking can be a major obstacle for members attending meetings in person. We will start with a few weekly spots and see if that encourages more people to attend. The kitchen and a larger meeting room will be used in testing out our new “Day Camp” concept to provide meals and educational programs for our members who are permanently disabled. There is a large portion of the budget to complete the rebuilding of our internet presences and expand outreach within the city. Almost all of our printed matter and online tools were lost when Mark died in 2020. There is money slated for a twentieth anniversary celebration where we intend to seek even more outreach to former members and the press plus to augment our online presence is a memorial video content that salutes the achievements of our founder.

Pink and Blues—Collingswood

<u><i>Description</i></u>	<u><i>Frequency</i></u>	<u><i>Costs</i></u>	<u><i>Annual</i></u>	<u><i>One Time</i></u>
<i>Weekly Meeting Support</i>				
Transportation Passes	Weekly	\$15.00	\$780.00	
Web Site/Email/Backup	Annual	\$100.00	\$100.00	
Social Media Presence	One time			\$400.00
Zoom/Phone/Answering	Monthly	\$40.00	\$480.00	
Signage/Presentation	Weekly	\$10.00	\$520.00	

Out-Reach

Business Cards	Annual		\$100.00
Mini Posters/Brochures/Etc	Monthly	\$100.00	\$1,200.00
Facilitator Expenses	Monthly	\$50.00	\$600.00

Legal Fees and Start up Costs

Non-Profit Paperwork	One time		\$250.00
Lobbying NJ State	One Time		\$250.00
Local/County/State	Monthly	\$35.00	\$420.00

\$4,200.00 \$900.00

\$5,100.00

We are looking at a January launch of the new group in New Jersey. Most of the budget is for promotional purposes and the duplication of signage and props for the new group. The new group will require more presentation materials to orient a large number of new members to the rules and procedures of meetings. Promotion with the state is necessary including personal appearances by the facilitator at various groups and functions. Connections need to be made with current LGBT and Mental Health organizations. We will be reimbursing existing members who usually attend Wednesday meetings to help launch the new group, essentially train fare or tolls. None of the facilities have said they will charge us for the use of the rooms we are looking at. This could change as we get closer to the launch.

All of these projects will be completed by the end of the year. Because we have never had funding before we will work with what we have until the funding becomes available.

How many times a year does your organization's Board meet?*(required)

We currently have eight senior members that are regularly active with the group. I review issues facing the group every week during the announcements section of the meeting agenda. For special projects we meet outside meeting hours to discuss a specific topic and those interested attend. WE meet 52 times each year but have special meetings one a quarter on average.

Is this a fundraising Board?*(required)

No, we have no active fundraising effort underway for a number of reasons.

Do all members participate, and if so how? (500 word limit)*(required)

All members are invited to participate in meetings designed for steering the group. Most do and some do not, generally for logistical reasons. Each member contributes something to the group that usually fits their interests and talents.

Please describe any Board committees (500 word limit):*(required)

Outreach has always been an ongoing topic of concern. We have very enthusiastic people working on that issue.

Expansion is another issue that has been on and off the agenda through the past twenty years. There are several people working loosely on the NJ Expansion project this time around.

Smaller pilot projects like the 20th anniversary; founder memorial and “Day Camp” are just starting to be defined and gathering momentum. I am leading these efforts with weekly input from the whole group along the way.

Please briefly describe your key staff members, including qualifications relevant to this request (500 word limit)*(required)

David Neeff is the primary facilitator and leads the group. He has a Bachelor of Science degree from RIT (1980) and is currently a 4th year undergraduate student in Psychology at Rutgers Camden. He has participated in Pink and Blues for all 20 years and has been the informal group leader since 2016 and the formal leader since the Fall of 2020. He is retired from his profession in the newspaper business and devotes much time on managing the group and playing poker.

Troy Scott is long time member of Pink and Blues who spearheads our social interactions: interacting with local arts programs in Philadelphia and various social activity programs in the city. Troy also is a chef and is the talent that allows us to test the “Day Camp” test program. Troy has had the most success recruiting new members during our re-building process.

Heather Abbott is a 20 year member of Pink and Blues and has started up new Pink and Blues groups in Bucks County and other cities. She has had training and experience in facilitating Mental Health Peer support groups and building new organizations.

List the top five (at most) sources of funding in the last fiscal year for the organization (other than Federal or State funding) and the amounts from each source (500 word limit):

Pink and Blues does not “pass the hat” asking members to donate their funds to be put towards running the group. This is a founding principle.

All expenses for the operation of Pink and Blues for the past year (2022) came out of personal funds. It amounts to over \$4,000. There are assets and collateral that will be used during the foreseeable future such as the laptop used for Zoom functions, the iPhone used for Wi-Fi and printed business cards and postcards that are still viable. The basic design of the website and other social media projects will carry forward as well. Saint Luke's has never charged us for the use of the Blue Room or parking privileges. Members have donated copying or logo services in the past.

We are breaking from our past traditions because of the requirements of new technology in meetings and of the requirements of Social Media for out reach. None of this technology existed in 2003.

Do you have a Strategic Plan? If so, how would the Grant help you achieve your plan's goals? (500 word limit)

Pink and Blues is still reeling from the death of its founder Mark A. Davis in the Fall of 2020. We have completed 50% of the rebuild of basic infrastructure lost because we were lacking succession plan. Much of this money will go towards rebuilding our internet presence and re-establishing connection to the public.

The second project is simply and bread and butter drive to improve our reach. This is both physically with printed matter distributed in the Gayborhood in center city Philadelphia, sent to providers' offices throughout the Delaware Valley and also to support organizations operated by the city of Philadelphia.

The primary focus of our outreach project, is to stimulate traffic to the website and telephone service and then to convert these inquiries to new members coming out to a meetings. The plan includes a re-vamped internet presence using the new www.pink-blues.com URL that is currently operational. This site will be built out with much more functionality and relevant content and then circulated on the Worldwide Web. And for the first time Pink and Blues will have a presence on Facebook along with all the major Social Media sites like Instagram, TikTok, etc.

Most of the work on the website is already finished but the final portion requires the most amount of talent, which we will have to buy on the open market. We have budgeted \$1,000 for these services for the year. To date have only spent \$500 so far on our web site design and it shows. There has not been any money spent on social media development and that is obvious as well.

Significant funding has been allocated to celebrate our 20th anniversary of offering free peer support to Mental Health Consumers in the Delaware Valley. That is a significant accomplishment and certainly worthy of a celebration. The date is Friday, January 18th, 2023. This project will boost morale with active members as well as an excuse to rekindle relationships with former members who haven't attended meetings in a while. We will also seek out media coverage using our anniversary as a human-interest, success story.

Almost half the budget is allocated specifically to test of our *Day Camp* project. This project, if successful, could grow to be a weekly event if we can find sponsors to fund it directly. The pilot project would offer members a once a month program of two meals, a light lunch and a full dinner, along with an educational or recreational program leading up to short version of a Pink and Blues Meeting followed up with a social outing in the Gayborhood.

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The last strategic project involves all of the projects by developing a short video recapping our founder's Mark Davis' memorial service held on Zoom back in November 2020. This refined video will be offered on our website for everyone to visit. We then expect to use this video as a basis to pursue for a more formal documentary on Mark's life. There is money allocated for post-production services to get the memorial posted to our website. Then we will use this video to solicit seed money to get a single chapter formally produced in a more formal documentary format. We all believe Mark's life achievements are worthy of this effort and it is his bold crusading, his many achievements and persistent crusading that form the moral backbone of Pink and Blues and establish our mission. We believe we can seek public and private funding to complete this larger project by late 2024 or early 2025.

Please describe the mechanisms you have in place to evaluate the program (1000 word limit):

Given our choice of relying on minimal financial resources and not asking our members for money, our evaluation technique has historically been a simple head count at each weekly meeting. Over the 20 years this number has ranged as high as 16 at each meeting to a low of three with an average of 8 members at

any particular time. This is also heavily influenced by our choice to meet each and every week, while similar support groups meet either once or twice a month. Meeting each week can result in a smaller number of attendees each week because not everyone has the financial resources or the extra time to attend every meeting. Although, having the ability of attending online has helped some members who cannot physically attend at the church for various reasons.

Relevant historical data related to the number of folks served by *Pink and Blues* totals over 8,500 souls over 20,000 hours of direct face-to-face support. Half of the 8,500 can be accounted for by a dozen people coming to almost every meeting during the 20 year history, while most of the other half were literally 100's of people coming frequently for a much shorter span, coming frequently until they stopped. It's likely that 500-800 people came to one and only one meeting.

The group operates most capably at 9 members total, live or on Zoom. Fewer members and there is a smaller gamut of discussion, while more than 9 limits the time for each member to share their week completely. When there was large in-person attendance we would break up in smaller groups. In the current hybrid church/Zoom scenario we would likely break up after a brief combined discussion to online and in-person groups. Zoom has the inherent ability to break a large online group into sub-groups and then recombine them at the end.

The more accurate analysis figures are the numbers of people who are in the *Pink and Blues* orbit at any particular period of time. Maybe they attend a few times a month or even less but are in tune with what is going on day-by-day, essentially the group that is on the email list each week.

However, a membership issue that has been particularly challenging in recent years is the effort to gain new members. Outreach is a problem but even when someone somehow finds us and attends in-person at the church, they likely do not return. This happens 80% of the time. Even after exclaiming "it's the perfect fit for them", we generally never see them again. We would be happy to cut this in half.

After years of debate and discussion we have decided that a meeting of peers who are more recently diagnosed or out of the closet, "newbies" would feel more comfortable with the topics and people who are going if you will, can go through the discovery processes at the same time. This was true of the atmosphere with *Pink and Blues* during the first decade. It might be compared to the bonding that occurs amongst freshman college students versus the awkwardness they'd have at a Graduate Student mixer.

Our plan is launching a Thursday meeting, tentatively scheduled to be held in Collingswood NJ. The actual site will be a five-minute walk to public transportation (PATCO Hi-Speedline train station) to easily enable members from Philadelphia, students at Rutgers Camden, Collingswood and Westmont plus the eastern part of the New Jersey suburbs. Current locations under consideration offer ample parking, which can be cumbersome for members driving in from New Jersey to the center city church location.

At that juncture, we will offer two evenings and two locations for meetings. The content will be tailored slightly but we will finally offer an on-ramp more appropriate specifically for new members and that will be on Thursday. Zoom participation would be offered in both locations.

Other than attendance there is little else we can count. Because of the sensitivity of the mental health paradigm we generally do not record or access progress or any other datum. Confidentiality is paramount to creating a safe place for people to share their inner most thoughts and feelings. We do ask for email addresses to share logistical information however, we broadcast this information using a blind carbon copy system.

The reality is that in dealing with people with severe mental health issues, group members are implicitly (by walking through the door) and explicitly (when sharing) providing the other group members the most basic assurances of their mental and physical well being. Our goals have to be very, very basic: survive

another week. Frankly, and this was especially true during the pandemic, it was extremely rare when *all* members were food, shelter and emotionally “*safe*.”

It is common, albeit disconcerting, that members walk into the meeting food insecure. This state of mind of food distressed is unbearable for the healthiest of minds, a mind faced with other challenges and then food stress layered on top of an already struggling lifestyle is exponentially harder.

It is far too common, albeit severely upsetting, when a member is suddenly near homelessness. While this has been common throughout the history of Pink and Blues, with Mark’s passing we have lost our foremost expert in resolving these issues most efficiently. During Mark’s long career advocating for housing and mental health care within the city structure, most of the resources he would recommend were ones that he started from scratch. A simple phone call and dropping his name expedited member’s progress and kept the wait to a minimum. At this point, we have six members (45%) that are housing insecure and it seems like navigating Philadelphia Housing system is more complicated and stressful than dealing with our mental illnesses themselves. Having the stress of both is mostly unmanageable.

It is also common, albeit woeful, when a member loses an emotional connection (Case Manager, Social Worker, Therapist and/or a Psychiatrist) after expending enormous amounts of time and emotion into building a long time, trust-based relationship based on candidness and understanding. It is common over the past twenty years where members completely breakdown crying at meetings when a provider is removed from their case for any of a number of reasons and excuses. When the system fails to respond, then the burden of care falls onto the peers. Eventually that becomes untenable.

All of these issues were amplified ten-fold during the pandemic. Although, from what we understand, Pink and Blues fared significantly better than other support groups in many different categories of assessment. However, most of our resources (money and effort) were exhausted simply by keeping the group together and healthy. Basically treading water. Virtually nothing was accomplished in the area of outreach and new membership.

With a more focused effort on outreach, and new members spilling over from the Thursday launch, we should easily see face to face church attendance on Wednesday double for each meeting while Zoom participants seeing even more growth. Publishing Zoom particulars (Room IDs and Passwords) in the public domain has been a tricky issue given the ability for anti-gay factions to barge in and disrupt meetings. We seem to have a better handle on those new tools at this point and view this as less of a threat.