BEYOND THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Transforming Online Learning Experiences into Sustainable Digital Communities

PREPARED FOR iSCHOOLS AND ALISE November 2026

The opportunity

Online education has expanded access to information, learning, and professional development. Yet connecting people through technology does not automatically create meaningful relationships, collaborative learning, or sustainable communities.

An online course can deliver information, facilitate discussion, and assess learning while leaving a vital question unanswered: **What happens to the relationships, knowledge-sharing networks, and collaborative potential once the formal experience ends?**

CARES Learning Partnership helps institutions design intentional relational experiences that move participants beyond attendance and information exchange toward meaningful engagement, shared learning, and community ownership.

Our central premise: Sustainable digital communities grow through consistent opportunities to listen, share experiences, develop trust, and assume responsibility for the collective experience.

Experience in practice: Morning Restoration

For more than five years, CARES founder **Cliff M. Wright Jr., M.S.**, has developed and facilitated *Morning Restoration*, a virtual community grounded in restorative practices and guided by three principles: **Listen, Share, Grow.** It meets Monday through Friday for 30 minutes each morning.

5+	MON-FRI	10–13	4
YEARS	30 MIN / DAY	AVERAGE ATTENDANCE	COUNTRIES

The community began with approximately four to six participants per gathering. Sessions use structured reflection, affirmations, restorative listening, and dialogue about past experiences, present perspectives, and future possibilities. In recent years, seven-week thematic series have helped participants explore subjects progressively.

After the first year, participants asked to keep meeting even on holidays. Every participant has taken a turn facilitating for a week, building confidence and shared responsibility before the founder stepped away from regular facilitation in October 2026.

FROM ATTENDANCE TO OWNERSHIP

When participants become the community

Morning Restoration offers descriptive examples of how relational consistency can support belonging, agency, and collective responsibility. These are lived experiences, not claims of experimentally proven outcomes.

01 FROM SILENCE TO LEADERSHIP

One participant spent her first eight months attending without speaking, appearing on camera only long enough to wave goodbye. As participation grew, so did confidence. When Wright left regular facilitation in October 2026, she became the first participant to assume ongoing leadership.

02 LEADERSHIP IS NOT LIMITED TO LONG-TIME MEMBERS

The participant currently facilitating has been a regular member for only three months. Her willingness to lead illustrates how newer participants, as well as established members, can assume responsibility for the community.

03 RELATIONSHIPS EXTEND BEYOND THE SCREEN

After a participant died in 2026, her family asked the Morning Restoration community to host her memorial, saying this was what she would have wanted. They wanted to meet the people she had come to regard as family.

Why this matters: Conventional participation metrics may miss perceived belonging, relational attachment, individual agency, and the willingness to assume responsibility for others. Today the community continues under participant leadership, with members bringing their own approaches while preserving *Listen*, *Share*, *Grow*.

Extending learning beyond the gathering

The experience also inspired *Morning Restoration: Restorative Affirmation Journal*, a 365-day guided reflection resource developed by Wright. With weekly themes, affirmations, reflection on past experiences and present perspectives, envisioning future intentions, personal affirmation development, and intentional rest, the journal translates community practices into something people can use independently.

The larger objective: Not simply to facilitate a meaningful gathering, but to equip people with practices they can continue applying independently and collectively.

Connecting community practice to higher education

Wright has also applied restorative and relational engagement principles in online Conflict Resolution teaching at La Sierra University. CARES draws on restorative leadership, relational engagement, conflict resolution, and organizational development to help learners become active contributors rather than passive recipients of information.

THE CARES APPROACH

Designing for community continuity

CARES works within existing digital platforms, adapting relational practices to each institution's learners, mission, and learning environment. Our approach integrates five interconnected design commitments.

01	**Establish relational foundations**	Develop shared expectations, respectful communication norms, and meaningful opportunities for participants to be heard.
02	**Design intentional engagement**	Use structured reflection, restorative dialogue, narrative exchange, and progressive thematic learning.
03	**Cultivate belonging and agency**	Make room for authentic contributions, choice, and recognition of diverse perspectives.
04	**Develop shared leadership**	Prepare participants to facilitate, mentor, collaborate, and support one another rather than only receive information.
05	**Support community continuity**	Create practical ways for relationships, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative learning to extend beyond a course or program.

Partnership opportunities for iSchools and ALISE

CARES invites collaboration with library and information science educators, researchers, universities, and professional learning organizations. Potential applications include digital-course redesign, faculty and facilitator development, research cohorts, professional learning communities, participant leadership development, and continuity planning.

DISCOVER

Review goals, participant experience, and existing engagement patterns.

DESIGN + APPLY

Integrate relational practices and strengthen facilitator capacity.

TRANSFER + LEARN

Support shared leadership and evaluate sustained engagement.

Collaborative pilots could examine participation patterns, perceived belonging, peer relationships, participant agency, shared facilitation, and voluntary engagement after completion. The Morning Restoration examples are descriptive; pilot measures and outcomes would be established jointly.

AN INVITATION TO COLLABORATE

What if an online learning experience were valued not only for what participants learned during it, but also for what they continued to learn, share, and build together afterward?

CARES Learning Partnership • Consideration / Agency / Restorative / Education / Service

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