

# EVALUATION OF THE DREAM KEEPER COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM AT HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK

2023-2024  
EVALUATION FINDINGS

REPORT PREPARED BY INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER



FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK



HOMELESS  
CHILDREN'S  
NETWORK

# GRATITUDE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## TO OUR ANCESTORS...

“We honor the gifts, resilience, and sacrifices of our Black ancestors, particularly those who toiled the land and built the institutions that established the City of San Francisco’s wealth and freedom, despite never being compensated nor fully realizing their own sovereignty. We acknowledge this exploitation of not only labor, but of our humanity and through this process are working to repair some of the harms done by public and private actors. Because of their work, we are here and will invest in the descendants of their legacy.”

~ San Francisco’s Reparations Plan Report, 2023



## MORE GRATITUDE...

We express deep gratitude to the Dream Keeper Initiative and San Francisco Human Rights Commission whose generous funding made this evaluation possible.

Thank you to the entire Homeless Children’s Network community. This has taken a collective effort, and everyone has come together seamlessly to bring it full circle.

Thank you to **HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program** partners and client caregivers who contributed to this evaluation through surveys, data collection, and interviews. Thank you for being integral to this evaluation and being responsive partners throughout this process, HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health staff who carefully tracked and provided data, and the parents and caregivers who responded to feedback surveys. Your experiences are the valued knowledge we seek to uplift. Thank you for so graciously sharing your expertise, time, energy, vulnerability, and wisdom.

You helped us truly see the sense of community and cohesion within and among the Black community(ies) of San Francisco and inspired us with your model of what meaningful services by and for the Black community could be like.

Thank you to Rio Holaday for the vibrant, customized art work. Your process of getting to know the program and the data not only make this report more meaningful, but this process helped us understand the data and the work at HCN in more expansive and integrated ways. To learn more about Rio’s work, please visit: (@rioholaday on Instagram) or ([www.rioholaday.com](http://www.rioholaday.com)). Thank you to our very own, Krystle Canare, for the fabulous design of this report.

Thank you to our amazing Indigo Cultural Center team for their assistance and amazing attention to detail in gathering, entering, managing and analyzing various aspects of the vast amounts of data for this evaluation. And for all the additional administrative and emotional support required to move this work to completion in such a short amount of time.



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# INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In 2024, Homeless Children’s Network (HCN) engaged Indigo Cultural Center to conduct an external evaluation of the **HCN’s Dream Keeper Initiative (DKI) Community Mental Health Program**. The Dream Keeper Initiative supports HCN’s transformative work for Black communities in San Francisco. HCN’s DKI Community Health Mental Health Program is grounded in an understanding that Black community mental health has been and continues to be impacted by historical systemic racism and oppression in the U.S., and an acknowledgement that mainstream therapeutic approaches have failed to take account of the harms done to the descendants of enslaved Africans. For Black people in this country and around the world, community and interconnectedness – **ubuntu**<sup>1</sup> – is and always has been a vital part of our existence and healing. HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program strives to reject mainstream approaches to mental health by harnessing the potential of healing that can take place when community is integrated into healing approaches.

There are three (3) main components to the way HCN has conceptualized the HCN DKI Community Mental Health Program: 1) Community Mental Health and Wellness; 2) Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health; and 3) Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation & Training Support. The latter two populations are often overlooked and under-served when it comes to mental health in the Black community.

This report begins with a description of the broader context and background for **HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program**. Then for each of the three (3) **HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program’s** components (listed above), we will present:



A description of **HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program’s** featured components,



The key services and scope of **HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health Program’s** reach,



Feedback about experiences and impact from **HCN’S DKI Community Mental Health Program** participants, and



An exploration of the factors and conditions necessary to deliver this service to the Black community in San Francisco.

<sup>1</sup> Ubuntu is a term that originates from the Bantu people in South Africa. Ubuntu encapsulates a set of closely related value and belief systems throughout the continent of Africa and throughout Pan-Africa (including the U.S.) that emphasize interconnectedness and humanity towards others. This value system ultimately comes down to the following, “an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world” (Mugumbate & Admire, 2020).



## INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER: A NOTE ABOUT THE AGENCY & PEOPLE CONDUCTING THIS EVALUATION

The Institute of Child Development Research and Social Change at Indigo Cultural Center is an action-research firm that specializes in infant and early childhood research and evaluation conducted with an anti-racist lens. Indigo Cultural Center (a predominantly BIPOC-staffed organization) is led by executive director Dr. Eva Marie Shivers who identifies as an African American cis-gendered woman. Dr. Shivers led this current evaluation with a small team that consisted of a bi-racial Black and Mexican American woman, a Black woman, two Filipina/Filipina American women, and one white woman.

Indigo Cultural Center’s mission is to conduct rigorous policy-relevant research on mental health, education, and development by partnering with community agencies and public agencies that are dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth and families in BIPOC communities. Since its inception, Indigo Cultural Center has employed the use of **community based participatory research** in all our evaluations.

What this means is that we use a collaborative model and working style that involves our clients - who we prefer to call ‘partners’ - in the planning, implementation, interpretation, and dissemination processes of evaluation. We recognize the strengths that our partners bring to each evaluation project, and we build on those assets by consulting with our partners initially and at key milestones throughout the project, integrating their input and knowledge into all aspects of the project, asking for feedback on a regular basis, and seeking consensus on key issues and outcomes.



# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

We begin this evaluation report by including a description of several background factors and the context in which **HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program** took place. Over the past several years, there has been a call to decolonize the field of mental health. One important way we can do this is by expanding the construct of wellness to include a more explicit focus on community mental health in Black and Brown communities. It is increasingly imperative that we not perpetuate the mainstream pathology-narrative of people in our communities by failing to acknowledge the broader forces that impact the well-being of communities that have experienced historic and current marginalization and oppression. Community-based programs designed to promote healing, wellness, and positive mental health do not simply unfold in isolation. The work that Homeless Children's Network embodies is emergent work that will always reflect the time and space in which it is happening.

Indeed, African and Pan-African philosophy teaches us that "all things have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal" (Marumo & Chakale, 2018).



## VOICE AND TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS REPORT

The authors of this report employ the use of feminist methodology and use of first-person voice (e.g., 'we', 'us')

(Leggat-Cook, 2010; Mitchel, 2017).

- Throughout this report we use the terms Black and African American interchangeably.
- We do not capitalize white but capitalize Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to challenge the power of whiteness, decenter it, and elevate Black and BIPOC perspectives.
- We use LGBTQIA+ as an acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual" with a "+" sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.
- We use queer to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities.
- We use gender rather than sex as an inclusive term that acknowledges that gender is socially and contextually constructed and is a multidimensional facet of identity.



*All things have an impact on each other, and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal.*

*Marumo & Chakale*

## **BLACK COMMUNITY IN SAN FRANCISCO**

The City of San Francisco is often lauded for its diversity and progressive values. However, after decades of structural racism, the Black population in San Francisco which was once 13.5% has eroded to 5%. The Black San Franciscans that remain are largely segregated in communities that have experienced marginalization, exclusionary policies, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. Once considered the ‘Harlem of the West,’ San Francisco has been home to a vibrant population of Black residents since the city’s inception. For one to fully comprehend the present circumstances and trends within the Black San Franciscan community, it is vital that we revisit the rich history of Black San Franciscans and their continued impact on the city’s culture and growth.<sup>2</sup>

### **WORLD WAR II**

During World War II, Black Americans from the South were recruited by employers to fill the need for shipbuilding labor and jobs left vacant by Japanese Americans who were forcibly sent to internment camps. While Black Americans were heavily recruited to San Francisco, they had few options for housing and were often funneled into what are now considered historically Black neighborhoods such as the Fillmore District, the Western Addition, and Bayview-Hunters Point.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent review of Black San Franciscan history, please see: “African American Citywide Historic Context Statement, 2024, Prepared for City and County of San Francisco, San Francisco Planning Department.” Retrieved on July 26, 2024: <https://sfplanning.org/african-american-historic-context-statement>





## POST-WORLD WAR II

During the Post-World War II period, Black Americans were faced with housing shortages as GIs and Japanese Americans returned to San Francisco and anti-Black discrimination in the private housing market left them unable to purchase homes. Black communities quickly became overcrowded and under-resourced. Moreover, competition from returning GIs, the closing of shipyards, and lack of representation from labor unions led to high unemployment rates among the Black community.



## 1960 - 1979

In the late 1960s, racial tensions continued to rise against the Black community. During this time, the 1949 Housing Act allowed the city to demolish and reconstruct neighborhoods considered “slums”. Thus, a significant number of homes and places of business in Black neighborhoods such as the Fillmore District were demolished (Whitney, 2024). This led to an exodus of Black-owned businesses and Black residents from the city. In 1970, there began a significant decline in San Francisco’s Black residents since the 1920s, when it was 13% of the city’s population.

## 1980-2009

By the 1980s, redevelopment projects were completed, but new homes were too expensive for the majority of former San Francisco residents to afford. Then, the 1990s-2010s brought tech booms which created a strong demand for skilled tech workers in the Bay Area and increased rates of gentrification of historically Black and immigrant neighborhoods in San Francisco, contributing to rising costs of living and further displacement of the Black community.







## 2010 - PRESENT

Looking ahead to the last decade, Black San Franciscans have been faced with even more challenges as they continue to experience rising police brutality and use of force compared to white people (Balakrishnan, 2023) and disproportionate rates of hospitalizations and mortality from COVID-19 compared to whites (Cho & Hwang, 2022). Now, the Black community makes up only 5% of the San Francisco population and continues to decline as Black Americans face the lasting impacts of gentrification, discrimination, and anti-Blackness.

Since the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the City of San Francisco has begun to acknowledge historical racist policies that have disproportionately impacted the Black community. The city has made more direct efforts toward revitalizing Black communities (Health Commission City and County of San Francisco, Resolution No. 20-10; Office of the Mayor of San Francisco, 2021; San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2020, 2023).

The overall vision and goal of one of the biggest revitalizing initiatives is the Dream Keeper Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to address and remedy racially disparate policies within the City of San Francisco so that the dreams of young African Americans and their families are no longer deferred, and they have the needed resources and support to thrive in San Francisco. The first round of funding and grants focused on nine (9) impact areas such as: economic mobility; narrative shift; capacity building; education and enrichment; art and culture; and health and well-being.<sup>3</sup>

With continued, targeted, and intentional support for the Black San Franciscan community, we may look to a future where Black families can live and continue to nurture their legacies in San Francisco.



<sup>3</sup> The City of San Francisco Dream Keeper Initiative: Funding the Dream  
<https://www.dreamkeepersf.org/funding>



Mural by Serge Gay Jr at Polk Street and Larkin Street



## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

The Black community has made significant and lasting impacts on the civic, cultural, and economic conditions of San Francisco. San Francisco is home to many Black community leaders and civil rights activists who worked diligently to combat racism and discriminatory practices. One example of community leaders who left a lasting impact on San Francisco is the “Big Five,” a group of Black women and mothers whose goals were to improve conditions in Black neighborhoods experiencing severe poverty and discrimination, such as Bayview and Hunters Point. These Black women worked to overturn wrongful evictions and secured funds for infrastructure projects in Bayview-Hunters Point.

In December 2022, HCN’s Afri-centric Community Mental Health model, exemplified by the Ma’at Program, was featured in a new evidence-based guide from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. The guide on Adapting Evidence-Based Practices for Under-Resourced Populations is part of SAMHSA’s evidence-based resource series and focuses on tailoring care, programs, and services to the cultural, social, gender, and demographic contexts of the people served to yield positive outcomes.

Another example of the Black community’s impact on San Francisco can be seen in their long-standing support for the intersectional LGBTQIA+ community. Acknowledging racist practices within the white LGBTQIA+ community towards queer people of color, queer Black leaders often held leadership positions in LGBTQIA+ organizations and established the Third World Caucus which was specifically open to BIPOC LGBTQ members of the community. Despite the longstanding history and significant contributions to San Francisco, Black residents and the Black community are often overlooked and forgotten. Community organizations like Homeless Children’s Network exist to uplift and preserve the rich history of Black San Francisco by attending to the holistic well-being of its residents.



HCN staff at 2023 HCN Retreat in San Francisco, CA



# HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK HISTORY

Since 1992, Homeless Children's Network (HCN) has empowered toward a brighter future for children, youth, parents/caregivers, and families in San Francisco who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, formerly homeless, or in generational poverty. HCN was founded by the directors of six homeless and domestic violence shelters to establish a standard of care for San Francisco. Now, HCN is the hub of a Provider Collaborative of over 60+ service agencies and community-based organizations in San Francisco.

Their mission is to decrease the trauma of homelessness and domestic violence for children, youth, and families through direct mental and behavioral health services as a response; to empower families; and to increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts among service providers by unifying a city-wide collaborative to end homelessness and poverty.

Three notable and distinguishing factors that describe HCN's work include: a 32 year-long history of building trust-based relationships with both community members and providers; the integration of a strong Afri-centric framework that guides their approach to their clinical mental health and their community mental health services; a committed focus on amplifying the voices of marginalized communities; and the integration of an Afri-centric approach to providing services that includes engaging Black communities in the design and implementation of solutions, including the evaluation of HCN's impact.

4 For more history about Homeless Children's Network, please visit: <https://www.hcnkids.org/history>

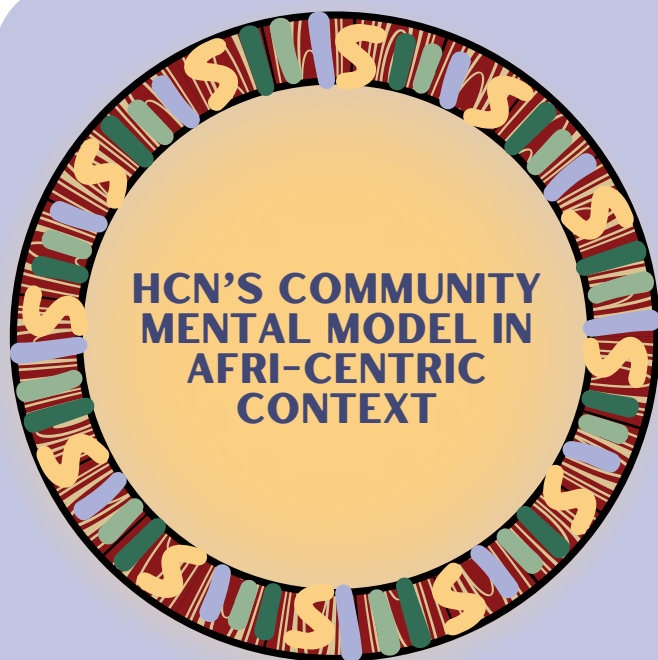
# AFRI-CENTRICITY IN HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK'S PROGRAMMING & APPROACHES

**Ubuntu is the essence of HCN's Afri-centric programs.** For Black people in this country and around the world, community and interconnectedness – **ubuntu** – is and always has been a vital part of our existence and healing. **Ubuntu** is a term that originates from the Bantu people in South Africa. Ubuntu encapsulates a set of closely related value and belief systems throughout the continent of Africa and throughout Pan-Africa (including the U.S.) that emphasize interconnectedness and humanity towards others. This value system ultimately comes down to the following, “an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world” (Mugumbate & Admire, 2020).



All the programs at HCN and the organizational culture (including who is hired to do Black community mental health work) are influenced and based on an Afri-centric worldview. ‘Afri-centricity’ refers to a way of considering social change and human dynamics that are rooted in African-centered intellectual and (pre-colonial) African philosophies. The main values and concepts that ground an **Afri-centric worldview** include the “interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings; the collective / individual identity and the collective / inclusive nature of family structure; the oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships” (Graham, 1999, p. 258). Regarding mental health, Afri-centric theory is used to help explain and understand African-centered therapies and ‘treatment.’ HCN’s Afri-centric framework is presented below.

# AFRI-CENTRICITY IN HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK'S PROGRAMMING & APPROACHES



- Affirms Blackness
  - Is trauma-informed
  - Is love-informed
  - Focuses on self-acceptance
  - Focuses on resilience
  - Identifies unique areas of strength
  - Normalizes clients' experiences
  - Reframes the stigma of mental health among the Black community
- Acknowledges a range of spiritual practices within the Black community
  - Encourages clients to believe in their capability and choice to engage in their own healing
  - Integrates family and community members into services
  - Offers space to process collective grief and fear without judgment
  - Addresses barriers to accessing resources and basic needs
  - Facilitates difficult conversations



Amidst periods where the construct of “Black Psychology” had trouble breaking ground in mainstream academia, many Black psychologists agreed there were incompatibilities between African people (including their descendants) and Western psychology (Baldwin, 1986). The uniqueness of Black mental health comes in response to the historical and ongoing repression and segregation that levies an unprecedented level of racism at the African American community. In a strengths-based view, the idea of community carries the notion of how people connect and how those connections manifest. A collective identity can be formulated around whatever mechanisms strengthen the community, ultimately forming mainstays of a communal identity (Schultz, 2019).

Historically, African mental health is intrinsically tied to the lineage of African communal identity (Nobles, 1980). Continuing to survive and thrive amidst the ever-present backdrop of racist pressures and collective and intergenerational trauma has demanded great resilience and faith. These challenges created an opportunity for adaptive responses and have reformed the collective African American identity into what it is today.

Afri-centric modes of healing and attending to well-being are focused on removing African descendants from the Eurocentric context and instead, co-creating spaces of affirmation. Attuning the mental health in culturally affirming spaces encourages self-esteem and promoting mobility in all aspects of life with the given support (Mullan, 2023).

In addition, implementing Afri-centric approaches to healing promotes coping skills that avoid health risks (Neblett & Carter, 2012). Findings like these support HCN’s mandate to use flexible funding for mental health in a manner that is not dependent on a family’s Medi-Cal status in order to authentically connect and engage with the Black community and serve the mental health needs of San Francisco’s Black community. HCN’s Dream Keeper Initiative Community Mental Health Program pursues the healing of the Black population dedicated to specifically supporting the city’s African American residents. The intent behind this specific funding for community mental health is that healing, well-being and mental health are most impactful when one’s identity (personal identity, intersectional identities, and communal identity) is reflected back to them throughout the services and activities that are offered (Murray-Browne, 2021).



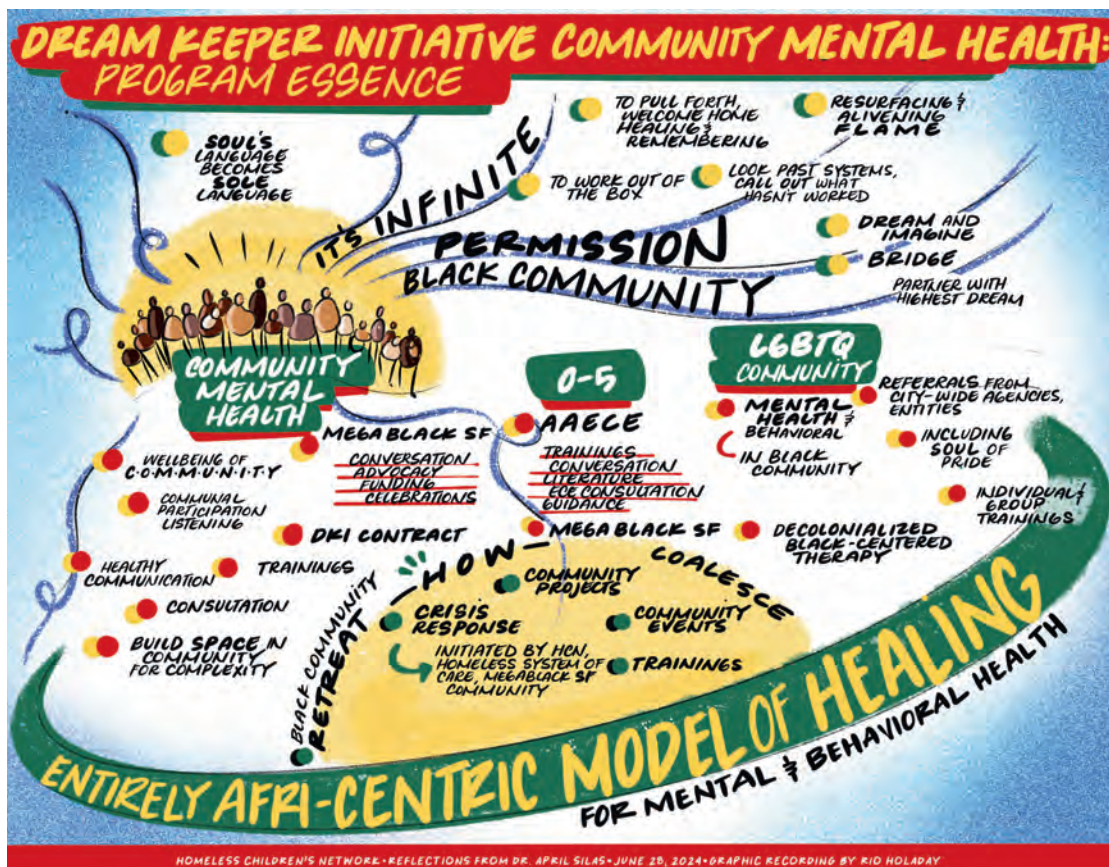
# HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program endeavors to build a collaborative network between Black clinicians and the greater community networks of San Francisco. HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program is essentially a 'mobile model' that supports with mental health outreach to individuals, groups, and the community as a whole. The community mental health model also allows for a specific focus on care providers and families with children aged 0 to 5 and on the Black LGBTQIA+ community.

HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program strives to first build the capacities of in-house clinicians, case managers and program managers to intricately understand the strengths that they have. HCN works to elevate the strengths of their staff to, in turn, create a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship with community partners. HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program embodies accountability in-house first by building the capacities of the team who will carry the torch of program deliverables.

## COMPONENTS OF HCN'S 2023-2024 DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

Funding for DKI supports HCN's transformative work for Black communities in San Francisco. There are three (3) main components to the way HCN has conceptualized their DKI work: 1) Community Mental Health and Wellness; 2) Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health; and 3) Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation & Training Support. These latter two populations are often overlooked and under-served when it comes to mental health in the Black community.





# HCN'S DREAM KEEPER COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM EVALUATION

## PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 Were HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program objectives met?
- 2 How do HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?
- 3 How does HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program team at HCN describe conditions and approaches that enabled them to meet their objectives?

## METHODOLOGY

### PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

Since 2007, Indigo Cultural Center has built a strong reputation as a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) organization with partner-clients across the country; whereby evaluation design, implementation and dissemination activities are closely aligned with our partner's ongoing service delivery to establish and maintain continuous quality improvement.

HCN leadership and the DKI Community Mental Health Program team collaborated with us on the following phases of development: evaluation design, focus group and survey development, data collection outreach, and interpretation of findings.

### PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation for HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program had three phases.

**Phase one** involved reviewing the progress of service goals and performance measures set by the funders and HCN leadership.

**Phase two** involved the distribution of a survey that included rating scales and open-ended questions.

**Phase three** involved the DKI team's participation in a focus group to explore the approach(es) and conditions necessary to make this program a success.

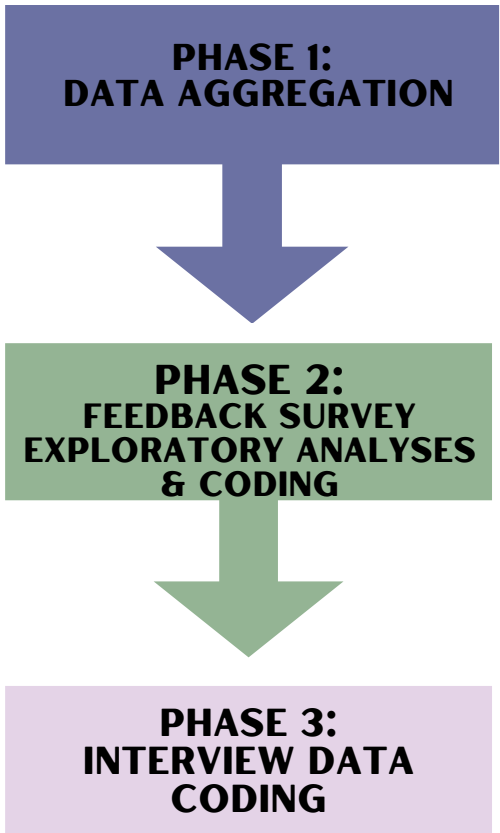
In Phase Three, we relied heavily on the methodology of storytelling in the qualitative aspects of our data collection. Inspired by the work of S.R. Tolliver (Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research, 2022), we were interested in uplifting alternative ways of knowing that foregrounds Black narrative traditions.

Here at Indigo Cultural Center, we are also on our journey of decolonizing our ways of gathering data and conducting community evaluations by decentering more mainstream, white-centered qualitative methods.





# FINDINGS



## ANALYSIS APPROACH

### PHASE ONE:

To track performance measures, we simply aggregated data points from HCN’s administrative database.

### PHASE TWO :

To analyze the participant feedback survey, we conducted exploratory analyses on the rating scales. For the open-ended questions, we coded responses using a priori and emergent coding.

### PHASE THREE:

To analyze interview data from HCN staff, we utilized two main types of coding the interview transcripts. The first was a priori coding, because some of our codes emerged based on the questions that came from our focus group script. The other type of coding process we used was emergent coding (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Because our questions were broad and exploratory, we aimed to capture concepts, experiences, and meanings that surfaced from the words and stories in the transcripts. Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the worldviews of research participants themselves.

## FRAMING THE FINDINGS FOR THIS REPORT

Research questions will be explored and organized according to the components of HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program. There are three (3) main components to the way HCN has conceptualized the Program: 1) Community Mental Health and Wellness; 2) Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health; and 3) Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation & Training Support.

### COMPONENT #1: COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

**RQ1.** Were HCN's DKI **Community Mental Health and Wellness** Program objectives met?

**RQ2.** How do HCN's DKI **Community Mental Health and Wellness** Program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?

### COMPONENT #2: BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH

**RQ1.** Were HCN's DKI **Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health** Program objectives met?

**RQ2.** How do HCN's DKI **Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health** Program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?

### COMPONENT #3: BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION & TRAINING SUPPORT

**RQ1.** Were HCN's DKI **Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation & Training Support** Program objectives met?

**RQ2.** How do HCN's DKI **Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation & Training Support** Program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?

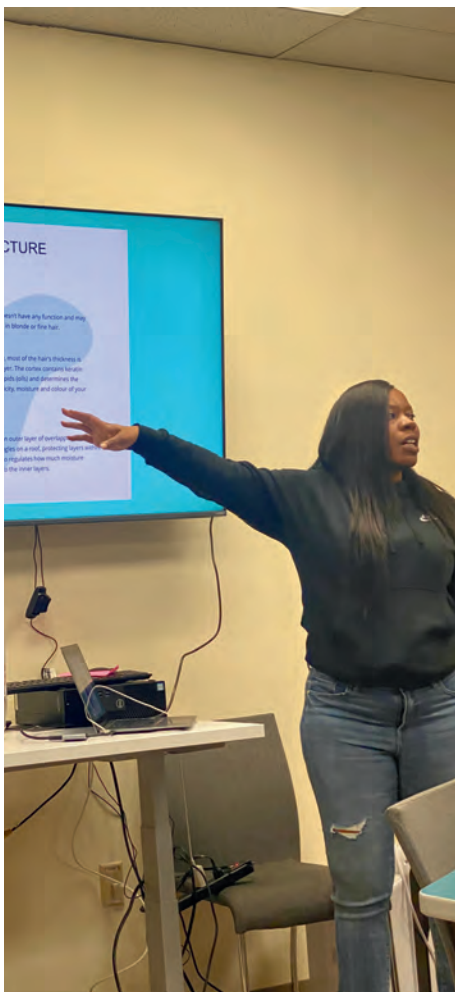
**RQ3.** What are the conditions and approaches that enabled HCN's DKI team to meet their objectives across all three (3) program components?



## BLACK COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past four years, the field of mental health has been undergoing a shift in paradigms that involve bringing community mental health frameworks and initiatives in from the margins of discourse and into the light as many BIPOC mental health advocates march more urgently toward liberation and decolonization (Mullan, 2023; Murray-Browne, 2021). One of the key pillars of understanding Black community mental health is to acknowledge and accept the impact of historical systemic racism and oppression in the U.S. and how mainstream therapeutic approaches have failed to take account of the harms done to the descendants of enslaved Africans. This neglect has resulted in a mental health paradigm – employed by most therapists in this country – that focuses on the pathology of individuals and virtually ignores the dynamics of community (Mullan, 2023).

## HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM DESCRIPTION



The HCN DKI Community Mental Health team provided support to any individual of any age on an individual or group basis. Support could be either brief or longer term. Support was also reflective of and responsive to the immediate needs of the community member(s). The intention of this approach was to offer culturally responsive care and accessibility that caters to the unique need of the Black community in San Francisco. Under this model, the HCN team promoted community conversations highlighting the well-being, healing, and mental health needs of the Black community.

It is also important to note HCN's DKI community mental health model is shaped and informed by their executive leadership team along with their program directors. What this means is that there is a simultaneous executive level of community mental health that is happening at any given time. For example, HCN's Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Silas, receives calls and requests almost every week from Black community members and leaders who want to discuss something having to do with their wellness or lack thereof and their desire to receive support from Dr. Silas. HCN's expansive definition of Black community mental health encompasses this sort of relational support. This is a distinct version of community wellness support that the directors at HCN offer to the community as a whole.

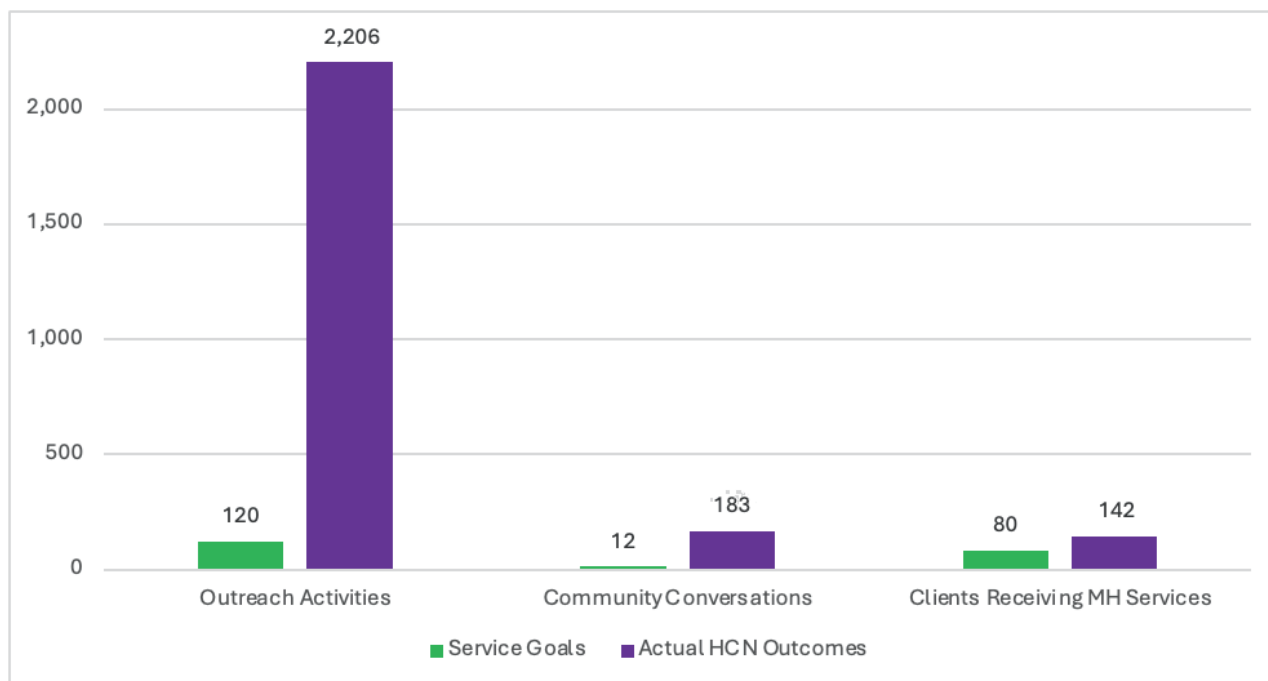
# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



## RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WERE HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?

The table displayed below demonstrates that the HCN Dream Keeper Initiative Community Mental Health Program team **significantly exceeded** their original expectations and contract objectives for the Community Mental Health component.

### HCN'S DKI: COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 – HCN’S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



## HIGHLIGHTED EXAMPLES: HCN’S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL AND WELLNESS OFFERINGS

HCN’s DKI Community Mental Health and Wellness approach included supporting Black community members who could be served directly either individually or by way of groups; wellness support; case management; hybrid support via phone; and/or telehealth. Highlighted examples are organized according to service delivery goal and described in the paragraphs below.

### OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In November 2023, forty (40) individual food boxes were packed and hand-delivered to Black community members around San Francisco. A pivotal role in this planning effort involved the implementation of a landscape analysis. HCN’s DKI staff spent time vetting community needs as it pertained to nutrition and needs regarding the Thanksgiving holiday. This process involved community meetings with various families and exploring their dietary restrictions along with exploring how the community felt about receiving complimentary food services. DKI staff inquired about what Black community members had access to as well as the barriers that prevented them from feeding their families in the ways that were reflective of dignity.

They identified that some families did not have access to quality protein sources. The team then collaborated and partnered with a local organization “Project Open Hand” in an effort to be intentional about working with vendors with shared values. The team wanted the funds to uplift and support other organizations who leveraged community service work for the greater community. The team also strove to increase capacity and accessibility by creating recipe guides based on the individual food boxes assembled for families’ unique dietary needs.





## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Throughout the entire 2023-2024 fiscal year, HCN's CEO facilitated over 100 community conversations throughout the Black community in San Francisco. One notable example involved **facilitating the mental health portion of the MegaBlack retreat**. Other examples include offering feedback during MegaBlack that centers and **integrates healing and a strong mental health perspective**; attending city Board of Supervisor meetings to **advocate for wellness in the Black community**; etc.

These examples illuminate the numerous and expanded ways that HCN's leadership team steps into a greater **advocacy and community wellness methodology**. The grounded intention behind stepping into this level of support from HCN's leadership is to create space for folks to express themselves and **foster a healthy environment with mental health principles guiding conversations**, for example, paying attention to intent and impact. All this support is offered by HCN while anchoring into respect and commitment to move forward together, as one aligned community.

## CLIENTS RECEIVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

In September of 2023, twenty-one (21) San Francisco County Juneteenth Planning Committee members from various Black-led and Black community-serving organizations in San Francisco attended a **restorative healing circle** facilitated by HCN's DKI program leader.

Throughout November (2023), December (2023) and January (2024) an HCN DKI clinician offered a **series of community healing circles**. Staff created a transformational service whereby they responded to community needs in real-time in an effort to foster long-lasting impact. For example, at the beginning of December 2023, a healing circle was requested because of a community violence encounter. Several staff at a partnering organization experienced a traumatic shooting and required tools on how to work through the trauma. HCN's DKI staff **educated the community on Afri-centric principles** such as honoring our ancestors and calling on them for guidance. Additionally, the healing circle facilitators offered sound bath healing amongst **other sacred practices**.

During April and May of 2024, HCN's DKI staff offered a 6-week group series to students at a local middle school. This service was community informed as the HCN DKI team responded to a recent surge of racial disparities, racial tensions, and racialized microaggressions taking place within the school. **Support groups with the students** were centered on understanding the dynamics of race (including positive racial socialization) and teaching effective strategies to **support Black youth to advocate for themselves when confronted with racial slurs and other microaggressions**. Additionally, the DKI team worked to **build capacity within the school** by supporting school staff and administration with tools to continue the work beyond the six weeks.



# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



## RESEARCH QUESTION #2: HOW DO HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS RATE AND DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH AND THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?

### HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS: COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

For this section of the evaluation, we conducted individual interviews with community leaders (n = 15) who also included a broad cross-section of DKI and MegaBlack SF community organizers - referred to in this section as 'Griots' (term for poets and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa). We coded responses to capture relevant themes that are aligned with the broader, city-wide Dream Keeper Initiative framework.

After listing the main themes, we included direct quotes from Black leaders and community organizers in San Francisco.





## FRAMEWORK GUIDING THIS ANALYSIS:

The larger, city-wide Dream Keeper Initiative – directed and coordinated by the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in San Francisco – created and disseminated a framework to help guide and align the work of various DKI grantees. The main elements of this framework are listed below.

## 7 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE (SF HRC)

- 1 ALTRUISTIC**  
Showing a selfless concern for the **well-being of others**; unselfish.
- 2 COLLABORATIVE**  
Accomplished by **working together with others**; cooperate, or join forces, with other people. **Leverage expertise of others**, where necessary.
- 3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
Process by which economic **opportunities of a community, or individual**, are improved according to targeted goals and objectives.
- 4 TRANSFORMATIVE**  
Causing or able to cause an important and **lasting change in someone, something or an entire community**.
- 5 COMMUNITY INFORMED**  
Strategies designed and informed by **community input and desired outcomes**. Collect research data.
- 6 LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS**  
Highlights strengths and resources, as well as **gaps in the services ecosystem**. **Offer recommendations for services based on community needs**.
- 7 MEASURABLE**  
Able to be measured, with **numbers and/or narratives**, both short and long-term.

Indigo Cultural Center used the seven (7) elements within this broader DKI framework to help organize and make sense of the findings and data we explored from HCN's DKI components.





# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



## COLLABORATION THEMES

San Francisco's Human Rights Commission DKI team defines the value of Collaborative as "accomplished by working together with others; cooperate or join forces with other people. Leverage the expertise of others where necessary."

From the Griot data (e.g., interviews with Black community leaders who are also story holders), Indigo identified the following themes that arose to describe how HCN embodies the idea of Collaboration:

Collaboration Themes	
Community organizing with MegaBlack.	Holding a healing stance with the movers and shakers in the Black community.
Bringing a community mental health perspective in community organizing efforts.	Bringing community mental health services to individual organizations that serve the Black community.
Provide resources and help other organizations create resources for individuals and families.	Resources for individual leaders and their own families.

**The following quotes were shared by Black community leaders. These quotes showcase the ways in which HCN embodies Collaboration:**

"Whatever [HCN's CEO] was doing, I was in support of her. Whatever I was doing, she was in support of me."

~Black Community Leader

"In the MegaBlack group [HCN's CEO] supports our mental, emotional, and spiritual health. She has taught us that we can't serve from an empty vessel. Then [HCN's CEO] brought other members of HCN to the MegaBlack calls who hold the same perspective."

~Leticia Erving

"[HCN's] lens and focus is on helping the community with mental health resources. They've been a pillar of support to the community. Providing grants so that people can deliver workshops in the community. This makes their impact grow exponentially."

~Libah Shephard

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

## LANDSCAPE FINDINGS

San Francisco's Human Rights Commission DKI team defines the value of Landscape Analysis as "highlights strengths and resources, as well as gaps in the services ecosystem. Offer recommendations for services based on community needs."

From the Griot interview data, we identified the following themes that arose to describe how HCN impacts the Landscape:

Landscape Themes
HCN is changing the narrative about mental health in the Black community.
HCN provides funding to community members via HCN's Afro-Cultural Preservation and the Community Innovations Mini-Grants programs to help accelerate community impact.
HCN provides mental health services to the Black community and specifically the Black LGBTQ community.

**The following quotes were shared by community leaders. These quotes showcase the ways in which HCN influences the Landscape:**

"Their role is huge. I don't know of any organizations that provide the services they provide. I love that HCN is still focused on the Black community. They've [the City] pushed a lot of us out. HCN has been an amazing provider for the homeless population and families. They mean a lot to the community. When I speak about HCN, everyone knows of their reputation."

-Christiana Remington

"Their mini-grant offers helps people make their dreams come true especially in the LGBT community specifically. There are very few organizations who are focused on Black, LGBTQ, and arts. Having a safe space is really important. Most of the services are white-driven. At HCN there is a cultural attunement that's not always there in other spaces."

-Thomas Robert Simpson

"They are pillars in the community. Providing mental health services is very pivotal and crucial in our community. The #1 thing affecting our community is mental health. If we don't address it, our community will continue to suffer and be punished for our suffering."

-Black Community Leader

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

## ALTRUISTIC FINDINGS

San Francisco's Human Rights Commission DKI team defines the value of Collaborative as "Showing a selfless concern for the well-being of others; unselfish."

From the Griot interview data, we identified the following themes that emerged to describe how HCN embodies the idea of being Altruistic:

Altruistic Themes	
<b>Ubuntu</b> - I am because we are.	Reach people where they are. Be in the community. Hire people/staff from the community.
HCN provides compassionate care.	We must nurture the next generation of leaders.

**The following quotes were shared by community leaders. These quotes showcase the ways in which HCN is Altruistic:**

"[HCN's CEO] will want to pass the torch one day. While she holds the wisdom and care, she is very willing to open up opportunities for younger people on her team to lead. Let's face it, young people can go into places and spaces where elders often cannot. [HCN's CEO] understands this and lets them shine."

~ Leticia Erving

"The important thing is that [HCN's CEO] comes from a position of love. And love encompasses so much. There's a true love and compassion she has for people."

~Libah Shepard

"Their approach and stance is 'I know you, I see you, I AM you.' Their people at HCN come from the community."

~ James Spingola

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



## TRANSFORMATIVE FINDINGS

San Francisco's Human Rights Commission DKI team defines the value of Transformative as "Causing or able to cause an important and lasting change in someone, something or an entire community."

From the Griot interview data, we identified the following themes that emerged to describe how HCN embodies the idea of being Transformative. These themes are parsed into three (3) levels: **Individual Transformation; Organizational Transformation; and Community Transformation.**

### Transformational Themes at the INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Expansive Afri-centric approach to Black community mental health—it's more than therapy!

HCN people are authentic, real, and safe.

"They're gentle in their reach and their gentle understanding of situations dealing with all the struggles the population deals with. They're incredibly gentle with their approach. I can't say enough about the fact that once people find HCN - they've found their niche."

~ Christiana Remington

"They literally walk around and talk with folks. HCN staff will literally hold your hand and speak life back into you. When you watch them do this, you can see the physical change in that person's body."

~ Leticia Erving

### Transformational Themes at the ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Bringing community mental health services to individual organizations that serve the Black community.

Providing resources and helping other organizations create resources for individuals and families.

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #1 - HCN'S DKI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS



“Having an onsite clinician in our community center who can work with the young people is great. It really opened my eyes to what is needed. I can get you through the DAY, but who will get you through THE NIGHT AND THE NEXT DAY? HCN therapists and [HCN's CEO] do this.”

~ James Spingola

“Anytime [HCN's CEO] speaks, she encourages us and motivates us. How can we move this work forward while taking care of our own mental health? I don't know where we'd be without her.”

~ Black Community Leader

## Transformational Themes at the COMMUNITY LEVEL

Services must address the diversity WITHIN the Black community

Reach people where they are. Be in community. Hire people/staff from the community.

Continue to expand our understanding of what Black community mental health looks like and why this expansive approach is so effective.

“They open the doors for everyone. They open the door to ‘what community is.’ Community is our LGBTQ, mental health community, health community, and our Black community.

It's like a blanket and they've woven themselves into the spread. You need to be able to serve ALL communities in your work to be effective. We are a very diverse community.”

~ Black Community Leader

“[HCN] is open and willing to try new methods and processes. There is a limited knowledge in our community about what mental health means. Our collaborations with HCN help demonstrate what mental health really means. AND we give our people the message that mental health concerns are not that abnormal.”

~ Geoffrey Grier, Director of Recovery San Francisco Theater

“We have to keep seeing Black folks as a diverse body of folks. We're so vast. In San Francisco, we're only 5%, but we're so different. HCN sees us as a whole - as well as our individual selves. Their approach and programming show us that we aren't a monolithic group.”

~ Leticia Erving



### MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS AND SUPPORT AMONG QUEER PEOPLE OF COLOR: LITERATURE REVIEW

People who have intersectional identities as queer and BIPOC have high needs for mental health support, due not only to mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression, but also to intersectional layers of oppression and other forms of trauma (Calabrese et al., 2015; Dawes et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2020). Queer People of Color have long had painful experiences in the mental health system for a variety of reasons, including encountering bias and stigma among mental health providers and having aspects of their identity pathologized (Dawes et al., 2023). Queer People of Color have expressed a desire to have mental health providers who reflect their identities. Further, studies have highlighted the need to decolonize mental health care and rely more on non-Western approaches (Dawes et al., 2023). Finally, research indicates that belonging, or feeling part of a community, improves mental health among Black queer people (Watts & Thrasher, 2024).



### HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

HCN's DKI team worked with coalitions of Black LGBTQIA+ community members to provide and integrate mental health support during events, engagements, and gatherings. HCN's DKI team also provided individual support, direct responses to organizations' specific needs, and engaged in larger community conversations. Through the delivery of trainings, active participation in town hall meetings, referrals, the creation of written materials, facilitating retreats, and/or workshops, HCN's DKI team addressed themes related to challenges and triumphs in the larger Black LGBTQIA+ community.



# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



## RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WERE HCN'S DKI LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?

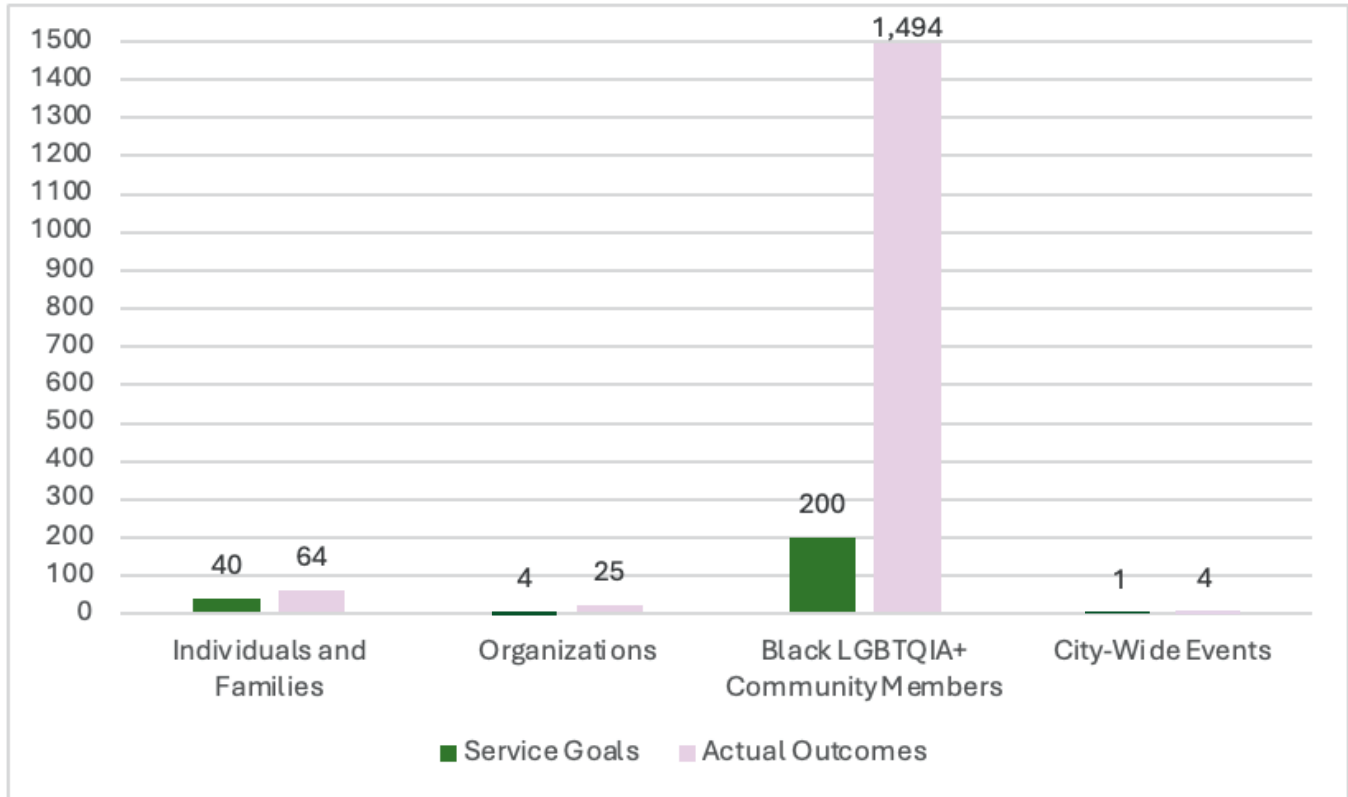


The primary contracted service goals included:

- Mental health services to individuals and families who identified as Black and queer;
- Meeting with various organizations throughout the community to reach a larger number of community members who identify as Black and LGBTQIA+; and
- Hosting city-wide events.

The table below demonstrates that HCN's DKI Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health team **exceeded expected contract goals**.

### HCN'S DKI: BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



## HIGHLIGHTED EXAMPLES: HCN'S DKI LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH OFFERINGS

Highlighted examples are organized according to service delivery goal and described in the paragraphs below.

### INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES RECEIVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

HCN's DKI LGBTQIA+ program gives space for Black LGBTQIA+ youth and adults to access a Black LGBTQ clinician.

Some of the individually focused Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health activities have included working with schools in SFUSD and meeting with wellness staff and administration to build different support teams for various youth.

During this process, each youth client is encouraged to exercise **agency** in their own process by being the leading vocal component of their team, their goals, and how they see this community-based model working for them. This way of working with youth clients has primarily taken place within schools (although there are also some online sessions for adults). This process at HCN has allowed for communication as needed with youth clients' caregivers, physicians, and school support teams.

HCN's DKI Black LGBTQIA+ services at HCN have also included drop-in sessions for Black LGBTQIA+ individuals who want to address a current situation without being in long-term therapy.





# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



## MEETING WITH ORGANIZATIONS ON BEHALF OF BLACK LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS

HCN's DKI Community Mental Health team members work hard to build connections with various community organizations that also focus on mental health and well-being. This took the form of giving presentations to organizations about "Decolonizing Therapy;" discussing with organizations how to implement policies and discussions that work to break cycles of white supremacy, homophobia, and anti-blackness; and discussing with new therapists what they can do to break out of the confines of colonization, imperialism, and anti-blackness within their sessions.

There are 44 community members who were able to advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community and celebrate pride by leveraging funding via HCN's Afro-Cultural Black LGBTQIA+ Preservation Mini-Grants Program. HCN staff were able to facilitate a two-part offering to Black San Franciscan community members that included artists, activists, mental health folks, etc. This type of integration throughout HCN and the leveraging of funding embodies a strong decolonizing stance regarding therapy, community healing, and entrepreneurial engagement.



## EVENTS

In addition to three City-wide events in San Francisco, in January of 2024, HCN served over 100 community members at the Annual Creating Change Conference hosted in New Orleans. HCN's DKI team presented a workshop to various LGBTQIA+ led organizations across the U.S. that focused on tools of liberation. The HCN DKI team shared with attending organizations about HCN's efforts to decolonize mental health services by removing barriers of finances and medical insurance that are traditionally required when applying for mental health services. HCN's team brought back to various San Francisco circles and LGBTQIA+ spaces the learnings from this conference.

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



**RESEARCH QUESTION #2:  
HOW DO HCN'S DKI LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS RATE AND DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH AND THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?**

## HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH: COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

For this section of the evaluation, we disseminated surveys to community partners. The surveys were open-ended in nature. We coded responses to capture relevant themes related to process, impact, and implications for continuing the work.

### TOP 3 'PROCESS' THEMES

What did partners appreciate the most about HCN's approach?

Co-creating **safe spaces** for Black LGBTQIA+ youth.

HCN's DKI **staff's authenticity and relatability** to students and trainees.

Expanding awareness of mental health in the Black community - **going beyond individualized pathology.**

"[Our HCN DKI Therapist] brings her real self to the work and has the ability to motivate and inspire through her own passion for transforming and expanding the definition of the mental health field"

-HCN Community Partner

"[Our HCN DKI Therapist] embodies radical authenticity and through her regular presence."

-HCN Community Partner

"It's so beautiful to have [a space for our students] for them to see folks who look like you, but also to be around adults who also talk like you. The students got to see professionalism in a culturally specific way. They were fun, silly, they used Black vernacular AND they were also professional."

-HCN Community Partner

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



## TOP 4 'IMPACT' THEMES

What has shifted or transformed as a result of a partnership with HCN?

Partners now feel more confident in **balancing targeted individualized support and addressing the larger systemic issues.**

School staff's views of the students shifted in a positive way, which led to **deeper connections and more authentic expression.**

Students felt **supported in managing microaggressions** and other experiences of racism and homophobia within their school.

The HCN team were **positive role models** for the students.

## Quotes from HCN Community Partners surveyed included:

"I see what [the students'] understanding really is. I also get to hear their perspectives about their community, teachers, etc. I didn't know they were capable of going so deep with these issues."

"[Our HCN DKI therapist] has been instrumental with helping with my perspective on how we balance and approach targeted individualized supports for students while also thinking about addressing the larger systemic issues within the school."

"The biggest thing I noticed was a drastic drop in the students roasting each other and using mean rhetoric."

"[The HCN team] also provided our students with positive Black role models who are really good at what they do and are authentically Black and queer. Authentically themselves."

# FINDINGS: COMPONENT #2 - HCN'S DKI BLACK LGBTQIA+ MENTAL HEALTH



## TOP 2 'CONTINUING THE WORK' THEMES

What are the most important take-aways as you seek to continue this work?

Continued expansion of awareness of how mental health can be conceptualized and practiced more expansively, with more inclusion, and with a shift away from a deficit lens.

Imperative to increase affinity/identity-based matching in mental health services - including clinical therapy and beyond.

**“After the pandemic, we saw a real decline in the way children got a long with each other. After our work with HCN, we see a more willingness to get along. Our partnership with HCN helped students to open up in ways we don’t usually see cognitively at this age. They can understand, grow, and make it a part of who they are. It can contribute to their success.”**

**~HCN Community Partner**

**“The opportunity to work with folks like HCN needs to be there for each and every student. These skills - like opening up, getting through depression - are needed through life.”**

**~HCN Community Partner**



## **MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR BLACK FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Supportive, culturally relevant mental health care for Black families with young (birth to five) children is not easily accessible. Decolonizing mental health care for young children and families involves addressing the ways in which white supremacy has shaped the systems with which families interact, including early education settings, child protective services, family support services, and mental health care (Legha & Gordon-Achebe, 2022). A recent model (Ofonedu et al., 2023) that de-centers the Western therapeutic framework and approaches treatment from the family's perspective rather than the provider's expertise moves away from assumptions or immediate diagnoses that serve to pathologize instead of support. Very little research is available on Black community mental health support specifically for families with young children. An examination of Black-led, community-based mental health support for families with young children could address a significant gap in the literature.

## **HCN'S DKI BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION & TRAINING SUPPORT: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

While community mental health services through HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program offerings can be provided on an individual and family basis, much of the focus in a Black community mental health approach is on serving larger communities and systems. Services and offerings for this component of HCN's DKI often included: individual or group consultations, workshops, referrals and linkages to services, trainings, support groups, and regular awareness outreach. For this component of HCN's DKI work, the team aimed to focus their efforts on supporting classrooms, child care centers, teachers, licensed family child care providers, and other individuals and community members that support Black/African American children aged 0-5 years old.

HCN is one of the most well-known and highly regarded agencies in San Francisco, acting as the collaborative centralizing referral response agency for early childhood mental health, mental health consultation in early care and education settings, and early intervention services in the Black community and beyond. HCN operates as a comprehensive support organization for African American individuals, families and communities for city-wide resources. HCN's collaborative model allows for efficient and thorough outreach, promotion, sharing of resources, coordination of referrals, and advertisement of activities. In addition, each collaborating agency has information posted on site in client gathering areas. Regular outreach through community meetings with families also promotes HCN's services.

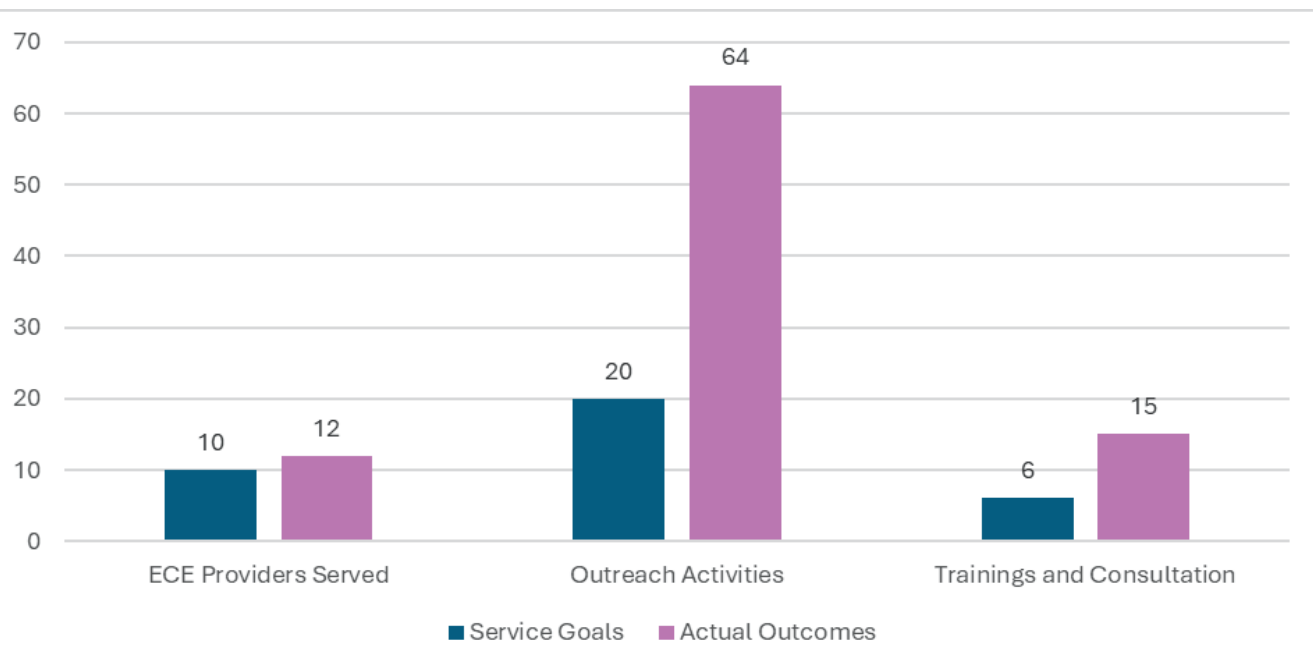


## RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WERE HCN'S DKI BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION & TRAINING SUPPORT PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?



As the chart below demonstrates, HCN's DKI Black Early Childhood team **exceeded** their deliverables regarding outreach, trainings, and the number of individual early care providers served.

### HCN'S DKI: BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION & TRAINING SUPPORT





## HIGHLIGHTED EXAMPLES: HCN'S DKI BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH OFFERINGS

Highlighted examples are organized according to service delivery goal and described in the paragraphs below.

### ECE PROVIDERS SERVED

HCN's support specifically to Black Early Childhood Education and Black Family Child Care sites, included HCN's therapists **providing resources** for Family Child Care providers including articles and informational newsletters regarding child development interventions. HCN's staff also answered questions and **provided support for the staff of ECE sites, shelter sites, and substance use disorder (SUD) programs.**



HCN's staff was regularly consulted regarding the needs of Black children ages 0-5 including for guidance on **how to understand and respond** to different stages of change in the child's development, mood, and how to recognize when a child is stressed. The team also supported providers **in how to respond to community violence when their children or they were exposed.** This effort leverages HCN's extensive experience and staff's expertise in Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and works in collaboration with HCN's dedicated ECMHC initiative which is funded by the Department of Public Health and the Department of Early Childhood.

### OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

During September of 2023, HCN's DKI team **supported the advocacy of early childhood educators** during a city-wide rally where they fought on behalf of other Black early educators to maintain early education services as a part of the city's reparation agenda.

In December 2023, HCN's DKI team supported **20+ early childhood educators** at a San Francisco school district rally. This advocacy was in response to an urgent community need. An array of SFUSD schools – including their early childhood preschool programs – were under threat of closure.



## TRAININGS AND CONSULTATION

HCN hosted and facilitated a well-being community series spanning December 2023 – May 2024. This series focused on **communal identity of celebrating Black beauty and specifically Black hair**. The HCN DKI team created a workshop series and hired a hair care specialist from the community to teach various topics of haircare. During the first discussion, families with young children were invited to reflect on what they would like to learn about Black haircare. Based on community input, the HCN DKI team worked collaboratively with the community trainer to build out a curriculum that highlighted community interests.

Black hair care is pivotal in the Black community and studies are only beginning to explore how the **internalized stories in early childhood** about hair shape African American racial identity and racial socialization (Wilson, Mbilishaka, & Lewis, 2019). HCN's DKI team supported **Black families with young children** by designing a six-part series that explored Afri-centric principles connected to self-love, self-expression, Black beauty, and how we experience internalized oppression through negative societal messages we often receive about our hair. This series also served families with young children by **removing the barriers** of expensive cost of learning about hair care and furthermore providing them luxury service at the conclusion of the series. As long as participants attended one workshop, they were eligible for a free hair service. For this 'Hair Love' Series, HCN also leveraged funding from **Presidio Giving Circle hosted by Marin Community Foundation** and **Help for Children** to help maximize the reach of this offering to families with young children.





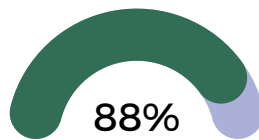
**RESEARCH QUESTION #2:  
HOW DO HCN'S DKI BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS RATE AND DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES  
WITH AND THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?**

**KEY FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPANT SURVEYS**

For this section of the evaluation, we analyzed participant feedback surveys (n = 17) from several community workshop series designed for families and caregivers of young children.



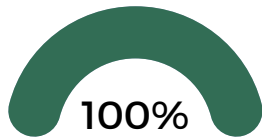
Agreed that HCN's DKI workshops resulted in **new knowledge and new skills.**



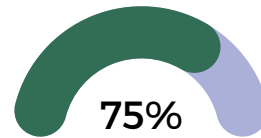
Agreed that the HCN DKI workshops **impacted internalized skills** - like coping.



Participants were **"extremely satisfied"** with HCN's services.



Participants responded that **they would recommend these support groups** and workshops (like Hair Love) to others in their networks and community.



Participants indicated that as a result of the HCN DKI workshops, **they had increased access to other HCN well-being support services** - like case management.

**RESEARCH QUESTION #2:  
HOW DO HCN'S DKI BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS RATE AND DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH  
AND THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?**

**“This is beautiful.  
They are helping us  
promote a healthy  
community.”**

**“The trainers and [the HCN  
team] were very  
supportive to myself and  
my family.”**

**“While we are displaced  
from our home, [the  
HCN team] have been  
very attentive to my  
kids and me.”**

**“This was the first time  
I’ve ever been taught  
about our hair. It  
helped me learn more  
about our background.  
I can continue to share  
that knowledge with  
my children.”**

## RESEARCH QUESTION #3: WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS AND APPROACHES THAT ENABLED HCN'S DKI TEAM TO MEET THEIR OBJECTIVES ACROSS ALL THREE (3) COMPONENTS?

The final section of our evaluation explored the HOW of understanding HCN's approach to implementing an expansive agenda for addressing Black community mental health across all three components of HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program. We felt it important to highlight this aspect of the work since there are still many gaps in the literature that elucidate the mechanisms by which Black community mental health can operate day-to-day in communities.

HCN's work as a whole - and especially regarding all three components of HCN's DKI offerings - is rooted in an Afri-centric paradigm. In the field of mental health and community mental health, it is widely accepted that theory drives practice. It is imperative that mental health practitioners who practice community mental health by applying an Afri-centric theory / paradigm document what those practices look like and why they are important in the pursuit of healing, well-being, and uplifting mental health in the Black community (Fairfax, 2017).

In order to learn about and document the application of Afri-centric worldview to community practice, we conducted a focus group with HCN's DKI team and multiple interview-story sessions with HCN's CEO. We heard stories about how the work is done and why these approaches matter. The themes presented below elucidate implications for the mental health field and specifically how to build, maintain, and nurture an effective workforce that can effectively apply an Afri-centric paradigm to community mental health.

To analyze interview data from HCN staff, we utilized one main type of coding for the focus group and interview transcripts. The primary coding process we used was emergent coding (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Because our questions were broad and exploratory, we aimed to capture concepts, experiences, and meanings that surfaced from the words and stories in the transcripts. Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the worldviews of research participants themselves - in this case - the HCN DKI team. In our emergent coding process, we found four (4) primary themes - each with aligned secondary themes. **The four primary themes are listed in order of the most salient and pervasive.**

- 1 **Expansive Approaches to Black Community Mental Health**  
**Make our Work Impactful and Transformative**
- 2 **HCN Workforce Dynamics**
- 3 **Impact and Transformation**
- 4 **Reducing Barriers**

# PRIMARY CATALYST THEME #1: EXPANSIVE APPROACHES TO BLACK COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH MAKE OUR WORK IMPACTFUL AND TRANSFORMATIVE



## SECONDARY THEMES

Listed in order of most salient and pervasive

We embody a holistic approach to well-being: We weave together mental health, African-centric principles, and ways of being with community.

We integrate wellness and mental health in everything we do.

We tailor our collaborations with community organizations.

We build on our authentic community knowledge – pre-existing relationships and networks.

We regularly practice walking with and talking to the Black community.

We interrogate and reject dominant, Eurocentric ways of ‘doing’ mental health.

“And it made me think of like, how ‘professionalism’ is rooted in white supremacy. This, and like, the ways that we are able to show up and really change the narrative of what therapy or community mental health is. In our jobs we really push back on the common idea that therapy can be you laying on a couch, or therapy can be me on the opposite side and we're just talking. And so I think we really push this idea. Like, when our work is truly transformative, it's not thinking about what would Freud do? What would all these theorists do, but like, what actually have our community and our ancestors done that we can bring into this space?”

~ HCN DKI Team Member

“We don't try to come in as experts. We do have our intellect and our clinical skills, but we also never leave a school without collaborating with the social worker, the principal, or the group facilitator. We don't just come in and try to create change without including the powers that may be there as well, because we think that alignment is important. And I think that connection and collaboration also creates trust in our services so they keep asking us to come back.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member

“It is that we don't just talk the talk, but we walk the walk, we believe in what we do, we have a passion and fire for what we do. So we don't just see mental health as a DSM diagnosis, but we know that mental health and wellness is embedded in every conversation that we have in every workshop, that we do, and every flyer that we design, we're always thinking about how it will speak to and address the mental health and wellness because we always get into health and wellness of the people we're trying to reach.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member



**SECONDARY THEMES**

Listed in order of most salient and pervasive

We want to shift how Black mental health professionals view community mental health.

We also collaborate a lot with other HCN programs and team members at HCN.

Our organization supports us to stay in the work of Black Community Mental Health.

We're not afraid to keep growing.

“...the barriers, I think it starts with us and what barriers get eliminated within ourselves, right? Like, we're not showing up to work, completely worried about rent being paid, right?”

~ HCN DKI Team Member

“In terms of my own professional development and longevity in the field, being at HCN provides a space where I have colleagues who look like me. Where we can consult with one another about our Black clients in a particular kind of way, because we are in the community with them. I think that that really makes a huge difference in the work that we do and the services that we can provide.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member

“The collaboration also exists within our HCN community of the way we staff our programs as we really try to push for cross collaboration with all of the Afrocentric programming. It's that interconnection that [one of our team members] was mentioning. With the different programs we're all intentionally trying to serve the same community, but in different shapes and forms. We maintain that interconnection by building off of each other's ideas.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member



**SECONDARY THEMES**

Listed in order of most salient and pervasive

We're [HCN mental health providers] being impacted, too!

We make an impact by serving as role models who are Black, educated, professional, and helping our community.

We leverage activities to diversify funding for longer impact in the community.

“We're really trying to encourage a change and a narrative shift in how we're approaching mental health, and how we're talking about mental health in our community and then even our own mental health and well-being. We are the community! So, like, “How do we care for ourselves in this space, as the health workers and the service providers and also as part of the community?”

~HCN DKI Team Member

“I think the impact is just being able to see another Black person continuously be in school. I think that has been a really cool thing. And has also allowed for additional community bonding. I ask, “Do you need me to come over to your house, and let's look at college locations? Do we need to look into volunteering for your application?” Just seeing us pursue and obtain these higher degrees changes that conversation among Black families. I think has been really cool.”

~HCN DKI Team Member

## PRIMARY CATALYST THEME #4: REDUCING BARRIERS



### SECONDARY THEMES

Listed in order of most salient and pervasive

We work hard to tailor intake and other policies to promote more ease and containment for our clients.

We address barriers within ourselves, too.

We offer incentives to attend events.

In through one door, and then get access to other resources from HCN.

“While people might just show up for food, it also shows that simply feeding people in our community is so important. We want to be seen as being a place where Black people feel comfortable to just like walk in and get a plate and then leave if that's what they need on that day.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member

“When it comes to policies and other ways of bringing in clients we're allowed to build that up in a way that doesn't 'out' our clients, right, like specifically for LGBTQ, my paperwork doesn't say that, but my clients know it. And so really, making sure that that barrier doesn't exist that like if my paperwork says LGBTQ, and their parents don't know, or it's not actually what they want to talk about in session, then we don't have to but then my clients know that like you're talking to a clinician who's also Black and gay, and you are who you are, and we get to like, connect on that level.”

~ HCN DKI Team Member



## DISCUSSION

### HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

The primary goal of HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program is to provide to the Black/African American community general mental health and wellness services, mental health services for LGBTQIA+ individuals, and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. This program applies a unique Afri-centric model of mental health service provision by supporting individuals and families of African descent to passionately and unconditionally affirm Blackness, in addition to helping them improve mental health and functioning, increase coping skills, and improve relationships with families, educational programs, peers and community.

HCN's staff exceeded the contracted service goals and provided services to community partners, such as educational program staff, who need assistance to better support and address the mental health needs of Black/African American families, youth, and adults. These partners participate in community conversations highlighting the needs of Black/African American communities, including the Black/African American LGBTQIA+ community and families of children ages 0-5 years. Additionally, staff engage with DKI and other Black-led and Black-serving San Francisco agencies to increase the efficacy of cross-referrals and community learnings.

Findings based on feedback from the community demonstrate that participants in HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program provided access to safe, healing spaces - individual, group, and community - to reflect on their experiences and emotions, thereby learning effective methods of coping and reflection.

Community members also shared that HCN's DKI staff were authentic and relatable. HCN's staff together with the community providers they trained were able to practice more expansively, with more inclusion, and with a shift away from a deficit lens.

Staff from HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program shared many catalysts for success. Notably, their model goes beyond individualized pathology, and instead balances targeted individualized support while addressing the larger systemic issues. Through this model, HCN is shifting how Black mental health professionals view community mental health and is undertaking expansive approaches to Black Community Mental Health to make the work more transformative. This includes embodying a holistic approach to well-being, where mental health and Afri-centric principles are woven together and exhibited in the ways of being with community. Their Black community mental health work is the embodiment of **ubuntu - I am, because we are.**



# HCN'S DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

AN EXPANSIVE, AFRI-CENTRIC APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS FOR THE LARGER BLACK COMMUNITY, BLACK LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY & BLACK FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGES 0-5

**INDIVIDUAL — IT'S MORE THAN THERAPY**

**MODALITY OF ENGAGEMENT**

**OUTREACH ACTIVITIES = 3,764**

**INDIVIDUALS SERVED VIA MH = 218**

**IMPACT**

**ORGANIZATIONAL**

**BRINGING COMMUNITY MH SERVICES TO ORGS THAT SERVE THE BLACK COMMUNITY**

**COMMUNITY**

**ADDRESSING DIVERSITY WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITY EXPANDING UNDERSTANDING OF BLACK COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH**

## HCN'S DEI COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

BLACK LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

BLACK EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION & TRAINING SUPPORT



## TRANSFORMING THE ECOSYSTEM

EMPOWERING

COLLABORATION

EXPANSIVE AFRICENTRIC APPROACH

NURTURE THE NEXT GENERATION

IN AND FROM THE COMMUNITY

HEALING STANCE

UBUNTU I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.

"THEIR APPROACH AND STANCE IS 'I KNOW YOU, I SEE YOU, I AM YOU.' THEIR PEOPLE AT HCN COME FROM THE COMMUNITY."

"THEY LITERALLY WALK AROUND AND TALK WITH FOLKS."

"I CAN'T SAY ENOUGH ABOUT THE FACT THAT ONCE PEOPLE FIND HCN — THEY'VE FOUND THEIR NICHE."

"HAVING AN ONSITE CLINICIAN IN OUR COMMUNITY CENTER WHO CAN WORK WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE IS GREAT. IT REALLY OPENED MY EYES TO WHAT IS NEEDED."

"THE #1 THING AFFECTING OUR COMMUNITY IS MENTAL HEALTH. IF WE DON'T ADDRESS IT, OUR COMMUNITY WILL CONTINUE TO SUFFER AND BE PUNISHED FOR OUR SUFFERING."



# DISCUSSION

## IMPLICATIONS

**Importance of expanded approach towards healing and wellness.** HCN's expanded approach to healing and wellness is fully embodied through HCN's DKI Community Mental Health Program. It is critical to have programs like HCN's that interrogate and reject dominant, Eurocentric ways of 'doing' mental health, instead providing transformative Afri-centric mental health programming. This expansiveness lives in increasing affinity/identity-based matching in mental health service recognizing the expansiveness of the lived experiences within the Black community, as well as the variety of spaces and areas in which HCN provides comprehensive, wrap-around mental health services.

**Nimble and flexible: Value of responding to community's needs in real time.** HCN's DKI Community Mental Health model was critical in bringing the community mental health perspective into community organizing efforts, into other organizations that serve the Black community, and into the schools, homes, and lives of San Francisco's Black community members. Through a wide range of activities that were responsive in real time to community needs, HCN provided resources, training, consultation and advice, healing circles, workshops, presentations, and individual case management and therapy services. The flexibility of this model allowed the organization to plan expansively to meet the needs of specific populations, while also being responsive to emerging needs throughout the year.

**Workforce development and support - Catalysts that ground and anchor Afri-centric community practice in mental health.** HCN's workforce development, as exhibited through the HCN DKI Community Mental Health Program is essential in building an Afri-centric Community Mental Health Program. The recognition that the staff show regarding the need to build on our authentic community knowledge, including pre-existing relationships and networks, to do the work is essential. They recognize that they are not only making an impact as a role model, but also being impacted as well, both in the way Black mental health professionals view community mental health, but also in the ways that they are continually growing and learning through their work.

*“Imagine with me a world where all therapists are trained in this [liberatory] way. A world where you ask the communities you serve what they need and then offer it, instead of presuming expertise on the lived experiences of others. A world where genuine connection to your local community mirrors back not only sameness, but difference—where you can be in relationship with colleagues who will draw you into the depth of this lifelong work, and you cultivate the endurance to stick with it.”*

*~Dr. Shawna Murray-Browne*



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