

EVALUATION OF THE BRIGHTER FUTURES 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 San Francisco Human Rights Commissions and Dream Keeper Initiative 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 the Brighter Futures program partners and community members who contributed to this evaluation. 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.

Thank you to Rio Holaday for the vibrant, customized art work. Your process of getting to know the programs 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).

Thank you to our very own, Krystle Canare, for the fabulous design of this report.

Thank you to our amazing Indigo Cultural Center team. Your assistance and amazing attention to detail in 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 January 2022, Homeless Children's Network (HCN) launched a new program to support Black fathers in San Francisco with therapy, case management, and group healing circles. HCN's **Brighter Futures** Program is funded through a partnership with the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (HRC) and Dream Keeper Initiative. HCN's program was started with the intention of providing culturally relevant and accessible mental health services to Black fathers and families to promote intergenerational healing and change.

The main objectives of this report are to:



Describe HCN's **Brighter Futures** program in a way that contextualizes it as one aspect of Black community mental health.



Demonstrate whether key service goals and objectives were met.



Share feedback about experiences and impact from **Brighter Futures** participants, and



Explore the factors and conditions necessary to deliver this service to the Black community in San Francisco.



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 this 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.¹

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.

¹ 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.²

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.



² 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 OF BLACK FATHERS 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. For example, the Fillmore district became known as the “Harlem of the West,” a place of rich artistic expression and thriving businesses owned by Black entrepreneurs.

Black fathers in San Francisco have been integral to community organizing and advocacy as they have historically and currently been reclaiming healing for themselves, their families, and for the Black community. One example is **Fathers to Founders**, an organization that has led workshops and groups that honors the importance of Black father engagement. HCN was sought out to provide mental and behavioral health services to Black fathers who were part of Fathers to Founders as well as other fathers throughout the City.

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.





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.³

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

BLACK COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

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.

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).

When we only provide mental health support in bifurcated, disjointed, and essentialist ways, we suppress the potential of healing that can take place when community is integrated into healing approaches.



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

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.



- 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



Paving a way for Black people to thrive is essential to remedying harms done by racism. Black people in America have constantly been faced with disproportionate rates of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual violence stemming from discrimination, social isolation, and long-term trauma, which has left lasting impacts on Black families. Black people's greater likelihood to experience PTSD is a testament to that ongoing harm (Lee et al., 2023). Challenging ongoing oppressive systemic factors and striving for progress is a challenge in and of itself. Culturally relevant mental health and case management services for Black people are crucial when trying to mediate trauma brought on by racism. These wounds are intergenerational, asking for a certain level of intimacy.

Narratives of the Black father have been harmful and inaccurate (Spencer, 2022). It is tantamount that Black fathers and families be recognized for their strengths and resilience (Martin, 1987). The Brighter Futures program at HCN acknowledges the various experiences Black fathers may have and asks to reject the "status quo" by meeting clients where they are - emotionally, physically, spiritually - and committing to their healing. The program embraces the interconnectedness and power of the community. It allows fathers to be themselves, free of definitions subjected to them by racist, deficient narratives (Stewart, 2004). This can foster stronger family bonds marked by parent-child communication, understanding, and bonding. The wounds Black therapists and Black community healers seek to mend require a deeper understanding of the person. Afri-centric modes aid in doing so (Chioneso et al., 2020). Implementing and embodying these Afri-centric principles require flexibility, patience, compassion, strength, and a rooted sense of oneself.

HCN seeks to provide care and healing for Black Fathers in San Francisco through the Brighter Futures program. The program is committed to progress in the Black community beyond western methods of healing. The services, including individual therapy, group healing circles, and case management, provide accessible consultations accepting any kind of insurance. Addressing well-being within the Afri-centric, community mental health paradigm serves to heal trauma that eurocentric methodologies have failed to support.

HCM'S BRIGHTER FUTURES PROGRAM

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to acknowledge that Black fathers are not a monolith and bring a wide range of backgrounds, experiences with parenting, and mental health needs; at the same time, research indicates that Black fathers receive relatively low levels of parenting support from mental health providers or mental health support in general (Doyle et al., 2012; McBride et al., 2023). Less is known about Black fathers' engagement in family therapy services. However, research exists regarding Black fatherhood initiatives, which tend to engage fathers as individuals rather than the whole family and tend to be more skills-based. Participating fathers reported that having a safe space to talk with other Black fathers was critical (Voith et al., 2024). One study found that fathers' mental health needs could be a barrier in engaging in fatherhood initiatives (Russell et al., 2024), thus attending to Black fathers' healing seems especially important. Scholars have suggested that support programs integrated in the community and those that address the trauma of racism as part of Black fatherhood could also offer necessary supportive components (Bockneck et al., 2017). Studies that examine Black-led, community mental health programs for Black fathers would contribute to a significant gap in the literature. This report aims to address this gap.

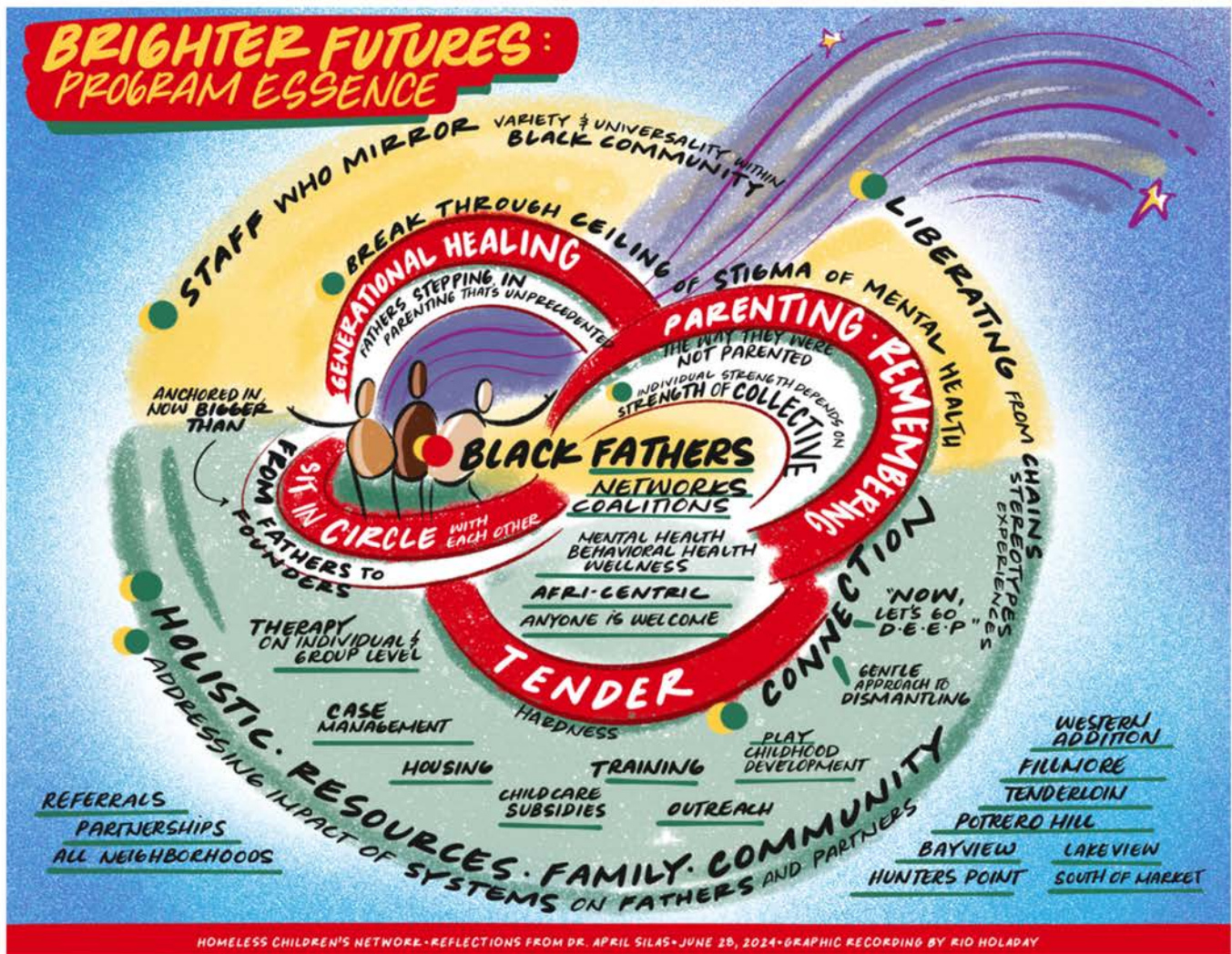


HCN'S BRIGHTER FUTURES PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Brighter Futures is a collective of organizations funded by the Dream Keeper Initiative (DKI) to provide culturally relevant economic, academic, housing and health services for the families within underserved communities in San Francisco. Homeless Children's Network's Brighter Futures program provides short-term and long-term therapeutic and case management services to fathers and their families. HCN's role in Brighter Futures is to promote intergenerational healing with Black fathers in San Francisco. By providing free, accessible, and culturally relevant services, HCN seeks to address trauma and lead fathers towards healing within themselves and alongside their families.

Services and activities for Black Fathers offered by HCN's Brighter Futures program include:

- Individual therapy
- Family therapy
- Short and long-term case management
- Group healing circles, known as Men's Groups
- Family event days





HCN'S BRIGHTER FUTURES PROGRAM EVALUATION

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1 **Were the Brighter Futures program objectives met?**
- 2 **How do the Brighter Futures program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?**
- 3 **How does the Brighter Futures 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 HCN's Brighter Futures program team collaborated with us on the following phases of development: evaluation design, survey development, data collection outreach, and interpretation of findings.

PHASES OF DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation for the Brighter Futures program at HCN 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.

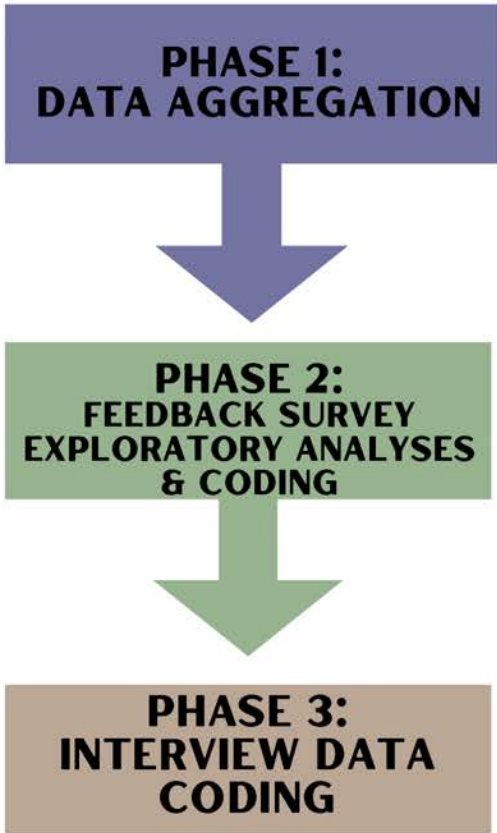
Phase three involved the Brighter Futures team's participation in a joint interview to explore the approach(es) and conditions necessary to make this program a success.

We relied heavily on the methodology of storytelling in the qualitative aspects of our data collection in Phase three. Inspired by the work of S.R. Tolliver (Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research, 2022), we were interested to uplift 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 descriptive analyses on the rating scales. For the open-ended questions, we coded responses using a priori and emergent coding.

PHASE THREE:

To analyze joint interview data from HCN staff, we utilized 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.

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WERE THE BRIGHTER FUTURES PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?

This section highlights the service goals that were exceeded by HCN's Brighter Futures team.

HCN's **Brighter Futures program is one of the only programs in the Brighter Futures City-Wide Collaborative in San Francisco using a revolutionary Afri-Centric framework that provides Black fathers with a free and accessible mental health service with fathers as the primary clientele.** HCN's Brighter Futures team exceeded the goals of fathers receiving therapeutic services and case management goals. However, it is important to emphasize that the intention behind the program is not to simply meet or exceed these deliverables. Rather, Brighter Futures aims to **make deep connections and intensive impacts** with the fathers and families they serve. By having lower case numbers, Brighter Futures therapists and case managers are able to provide individualized, specific care, and deeper connections with each client, ensuring that needs are met and support is provided to the highest standards.

PROGRAM DELIVERABLE	GOAL	ACHIEVED
Clients in therapy	5	8
Clients served through case management	40	42

In addition to therapy and case management services, HCN's Brighter Futures team partnered with Fathers to Founders to offer healing circles, known as Men's Groups. Finally, outside of traditional therapy and case management services, HCN's Brighter Futures program offered Family Event Days, which allowed fathers and their families to participate and attend events such as basketball games and group barbecues.

RESEARCH QUESTION #2: HOW DID COMMUNITY MEMBERS & PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM?

To explore fathers' experiences with the Brighter Futures program, the evaluation team utilized surveys to explore experiences, perceptions, and impacts of the program. Five (5) fathers from the Brighter Futures program were surveyed who participated in one or more of the program's offerings.

BRIGHTER FUTURES' IMPACT ON FATHERS SEEKING SUPPORT

Discussions with Brighter Futures staff revealed the significance of encouraging fathers to seek support when they need it, so we felt it was important to understand: what made fathers want to continue coming back to Brighter Futures for support? Additionally, we wanted to know what was shifting in their lives as a result of participating in Brighter Futures.

Using qualitative survey responses from the fathers, we identified several **key reasons why fathers continue to return to the Brighter Futures program for support:**

- Desire for personal growth
- Desire for tools to better manage one's emotions
- Desire to have a more supportive presence with their children
- Desire for a processing space

We then asked fathers to explore what was changing and shifting as a result of participating in the Brighter Futures program. We identified the following themes:

Fathers felt that Brighter Futures is having a positive impact on their...

- relationships with family members (e.g., their children, and their own fathers).
- capacities to be a responsive parent to their children.
- mental health.
- access to effective and supportive mental health services.

Finally, we asked fathers about their perceptions on seeking support in the future.

- **80% said that Brighter Futures helped them learn to be MORE COMFORTABLE asking for help when they need it.**

"I come back because of the support I've found and the help it's given me to be a better person all the way around."
~Brighter Futures father

BRIGHTER FUTURES' IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS

Fathers were asked about what IMPACTS they believe Brighter Futures had on themselves and their family.



Of fathers surveyed identified a positive impact on themselves and their family.



Of fathers expressed a positive change in their perceptions of themselves as parents.

Specifically, responses from fathers revealed the following themes:

- Improved communication with family members.
- Increased closeness with family.
- Improved capacity to handle difficult emotions and trauma.

Additionally, qualitative responses from fathers revealed the following changes in how they view themselves:

- Improved understanding of themselves and their feelings.
- Enhanced perceptions of themselves as a father.
- Optimistic and hopeful for their future selves.



“

“[Brighter Futures has] helped me to see that just because I haven't been the best father in the past, it doesn't mean I can't start to make the changes and be better today. The past is behind, so I work for today and tomorrow.”

~Brighter Futures father

”



“[The Family Days] helped me to get to spend time with loved ones and friends to help our relationships grow.”
~Brighter Futures father

THE POWER OF FAMILY EVENT DAYS

Outside of therapy and case management services, Brighter Futures hosted **free gatherings** for fathers and their families. This year, Brighter Futures fathers were invited to attend a Warrior’s basketball game and luncheon with their loved ones. When interviewing the Brighter Futures team, they emphasized the importance of these events for fathers to **build themselves up outside of the professional sphere**, to focus on **joy** and **being together with loved ones**.

Qualitative survey responses from fathers affirmed this sentiment from Brighter Futures staff. Responses from fathers highlighted the importance of the Family Event days.

Fathers reported that the Family Event days:

- Brought happiness to their children.
- Helped bring their family together.
- Facilitated the sharing of joyful moments with loved ones.

BRIGHTER FUTURES

VALUES & FRAMEWORK

FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY, BY THE BLACK COMMUNITY

BLACK EXCELLENCE

SHARED JOY

EQUITABLE ACCESS

TRUST

ACCESSIBLE & FREE

CASE MANAGEMENT

FAMILY EVENTS

"JUST BECAUSE I HAVEN'T BEEN THE BEST FATHER IN THE PAST, IT DOESN'T MEAN I CAN'T START TO MAKE THE CHANGES AND BE BETTER TODAY. THE PAST IS BEHIND SO I WORK FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW."
- BETTER FUTURES FATHER

DESIRE TO KEEP SHOWING UP

INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING

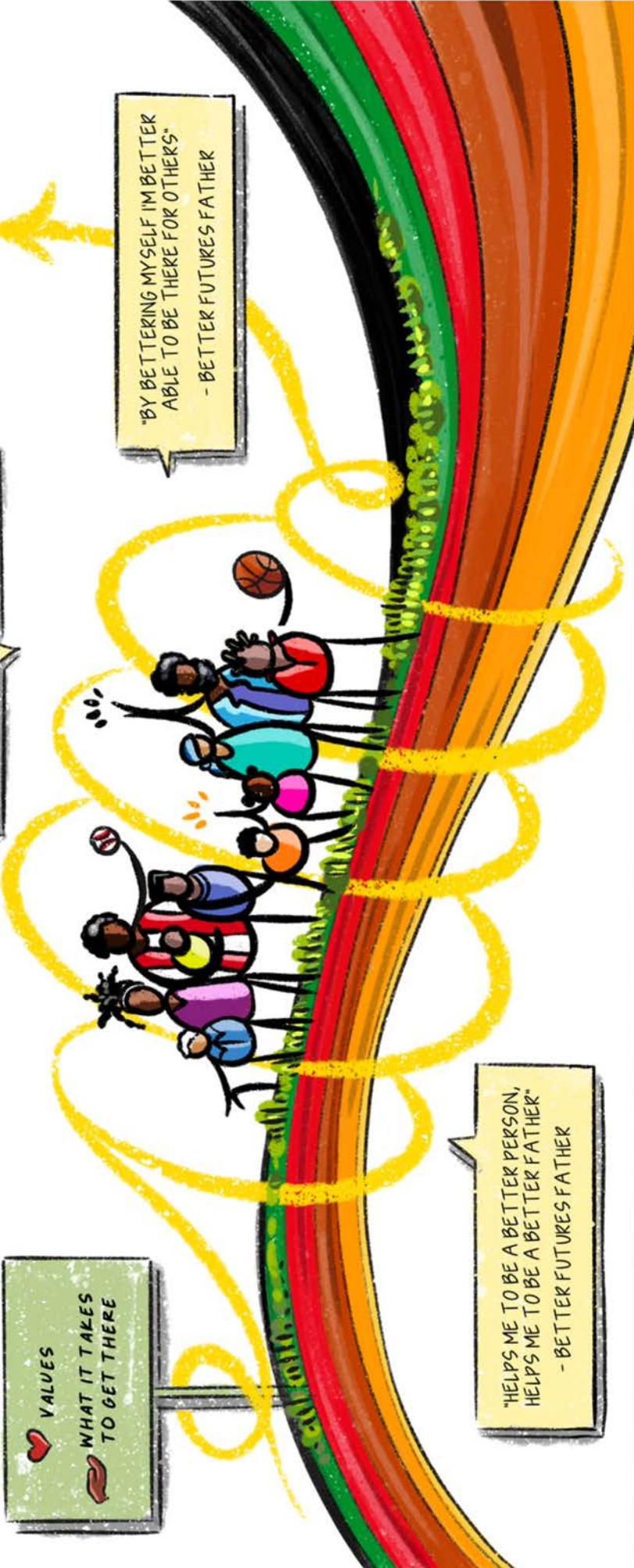
GETTING AT THE ROOT OF ANGER AND PAIN

HOPE FOR SELF, FAMILY, COMMUNITY & THE FUTURE

VALUES
WHAT IT TAKES TO GET THERE

"BY BETTERING MYSELF I'M BETTER ABLE TO BE THERE FOR OTHERS."
- BETTER FUTURES FATHER

"HELPS ME TO BE A BETTER PERSON, HELPS ME TO BE A BETTER FATHER"
- BETTER FUTURES FATHER



RESEARCH QUESTION #3: WHAT DID IT TAKE TO MEET AND EXCEED PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND IMPACT PARTICIPANTS' OUTCOMES?

The final section of our evaluation explored the HOW of understanding HCN's approach to implementing an expansive agenda for addressing Black fathers' mental health with an Afri-centric lens. 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 in communities.

HCN's work as a whole - and especially regarding Brighter Futures' 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 and 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 Brighter Futures team. We heard stories about how the work is done and why these approaches matter. The themes presented below elucidate implications for the community 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 services for Black fathers.

To analyze interview and focus group data from HCN staff, we utilized an emergent coding approach (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 Brighter Futures team. Through our emergent coding process, we found **four (4) primary themes:**

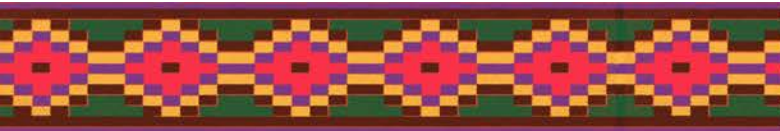
- 1 Integrating HCN's Afri-centric model and approaches.**
- 2 Use of storytelling as a healing methodology.**
- 3 Matching Black fathers with Black therapists and case managers.**
- 4 Uplifting Black fathers' agency to determine their own healing pathway.**

Brighter Futures is unique in that it is one of the only programs in San Francisco that provides free and accessible mental health service with Black fathers as the primary clientele. Brighter Futures therapists and case managers met and exceeded program deliverables by **supporting Black fathers' well-being in expanded ways that map onto HCN's Afri-centric framework** (e.g., focuses on self-acceptance and resilience; normalizes clients' experiences; reframes stigma of mental health in the Black community; integrates family and community members into services; etc.). For example, Brighter Futures integrates family and loved ones into services and at the Family Events. Family Events offer fathers and their families experiences (at no cost to them), such as sporting events and luncheons, that promote joy and offer relief from financial pressures of funding family activities on their own.

The use of storytelling is also a powerful methodology that is employed to help guide fathers towards getting to the root of their trauma and emotions, which in turn facilitates expanded awareness and openness to continue on their healing journey. Community healing and resistance through storytelling is gaining momentum as an important community practice in addressing mental health in Black communities (Chioneso, et al., 2020). **Emphasizing the power of storytelling**, Brighter Futures' staff help to normalize fathers' experiences, guide them towards self-acceptance, identify their areas of strength and resilience, and facilitate difficult conversations towards healing.

Integrating HCN's Afri-Centric approach towards mental health, the Brighter Futures therapists and case managers - **who are also Black** - uplift fathers' **agency** in their healing by recognizing their autonomy and ability to choose the method of care that would best facilitate their healing. Fathers can choose to participate in the men's group, individual and/or family therapy, and/or case management services. By encouraging choice, fathers are more likely to engage in care that is affirming to their identities. During services, the therapists and case managers utilize a trauma-informed approach, offering these safe spaces to process emotions, grief, and experiences without fear of judgment.

All these dynamics and catalysts for success positions HCN's Brighter Futures program to effectively address barriers to accessing mental health support. Through HCN's Afri-centric expansive approach towards community mental health, Brighter Futures is able to provide high quality and consistent support to Black fathers and their families in San Francisco.



DISCUSSION

HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

The primary goal of HCN's Brighter Futures is to help Black fathers heal from the impacts of racism and intergenerational, historical, collective, and individual trauma so that they can experience more fulfilling and harmonious relationships with others. Our findings demonstrate that fathers in the Brighter Futures program were able to co-create a healing space to reflect on their experiences and emotions, thereby learning effective methods of coping and reflection.

Findings from this report highlight the positive impact of Brighter Futures on Black fathers' help-seeking behaviors, perception of self, and relationships with their family. Through this process, fathers reported that they were better able to communicate, not just with their children, but with their own fathers, promoting the cycle of intergenerational healing and improved relationships within the family. Black fathers in this program were also able to practice and embrace critical help-seeking skills—or more specifically, fathers learned the importance of seeking help when needed and were able to identify sources of support that they could continue to access in the future, which in turn will have a ripple-effect of positive impacts for themselves, their families, and their community.



IMPLICATIONS

There are many implications that can be drawn from the findings shared in this evaluation report. We highlight three implications below.

Implications for Practice

A key element of the Brighter Futures program that contributed to positive experiences and positive impacts for the Black fathers who participated can be attributed to the accessibility of this program and to the integration of Afri-centric values in both the design and delivery of this program. For example, the Men's Groups offered fathers a space to process collective grief and fear without judgment. The Family Days integrated family and community members into the healing experience. And the therapy and case management services served to reframe the stigma of mental health that is prevalent in the Black community and especially among Black men (Stuart, 2004).

Implications for Community Mental Health Organizations

Recent narratives within the mental health and community mental health fields are questioning the demographics of our current workforce in community mental health. More often than not, clinicians and therapists are not culturally and linguistically matched with the communities they are serving (American Psychological Association, 2022).

These demographic trends beg the question – **Why don't more Black men gravitate towards the field of mental health?** Addressing past harms by the mental health industrial complex is a necessary place to start. We must be willing to address and confront the ways in which mainstream mental health worldviews have been extractive, pathologizing, and not aligned AT ALL with the Black community's more expansive understanding of healing (Mullan, 2023).

HCN has been a leader in blazing **new pathways for Black community healers and therapists to step into mental health roles and embrace an Afri-centric way of being** for themselves and for their clients. Important implications exist for continuing to understand workforce development issues such as – Who / how do we hire non-traditional healers – specifically, Black men – to do this work with community? How do we support them within our organizations? HCN addresses some of these concerns by coordinating other workforce programs, like the Amani Mental Health Training Program, that are specifically designed to build capacity within the Black San Francisco community to engage in healing and therapeutic work.⁴

⁴ For more information about HCN's Amani Mental Health Training Program, please visit: <https://www.hcnkids.org/amanimentalhealthtrainingprogram>



DISCUSSION



Implications for the San Francisco Community

One of the pillars of HCN's Afri-centric model that HCN staff cite the most in terms of being one of the most important catalysts for success includes **integrating the family and community into the healing experience for the individual**. HCN's Brighter Futures program accomplished this through Family Days as well as in various element of case management services. In fact, fathers who participated in Brighter Futures reflected that one of the most potent areas of impact as a result of participating in Brighter Futures was relationships with family members. **100% of the fathers we surveyed identified a positive impact on themselves and their family - including their own fathers.**

This type of intergenerational impact can reverberate throughout the community. Brighter Futures has contributed to healing and building relationships, not just within one's own family, but with one's community. Indeed, getting connected and being able to seek help mitigates the impact of trauma. These intergenerational dynamics that ripple out into the broader community deftly illustrate the concept of ubuntu. **"I am because we are."**

Implications for the Greater Field

There currently exists many negative narratives about Black fathers in the U.S. Fatherhood initiatives like HCN's Brighter Futures can help to combat harmful stereotypes and deficit narratives about Black fathers. Social workers, therapists, clinicians, and community healers who are well-versed in African and African American culture understand **the role of father, grandfather, uncle, and godfather as being crucial in conceptualizing and implementing successful community and family interventions in the Black community** (Fairfax, 2017).

Applying an Afri-centric worldview to this central tenet in Black community mental health elevates the importance of Afri-centric fatherhood initiatives like HCN's Brighter Futures. Findings from this evaluation and others are essential in influencing **how the broader mental health field begins to scale up Black fatherhood initiatives that embrace a strong Afri-centric worldview in service of healing and community mental health.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The design of HCN’s Brighter Futures and the findings explored in this present evaluation make a strong case for the scaling up of this program so that more Black fathers, their families, and their communities are impacted in ways that reverberate beyond individual impact.

Effective Black community mental health approaches must involve expansive community practices that address holistic well-being through the embodiment of Afri-centric principles. How do community healers and therapists ‘learn’ how to do this type of work when this approach is not widely modeled or available to Black communities? HCN is well-positioned to not only scale the Brighter Futures program, but to also serve as a hub or a ‘collaborative home’ that can support other agencies and organizations in delivering mental health wellness services that include – Black therapists who reflect the Black community in San Francisco; a community-based therapeutic model; and services that addresses common barriers to accessing services for Black families and specifically – Black fathers.

“
I think that [Black fathers] are critical to the conversation, that we need their presence, their insights, and that we need to talk to them more about what their dreams, their hopes and their wishes are for their children so we can help them get there.
”

~Bahia Overton
Executive Director of the Black Parent Initiative



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