EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI-GRANTS PROGRAM AT HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK

**2023-2024
EVALUATION FINDINGS**

REPORT PREPARED BY INDIGO CULTURAL CENTER

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 Commission (HRC) and Dream Keeper Initiative (DKI) 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 **Community Innovations Mini-Grants 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 July 2021, Homeless Children's Network (HCN) developed the **Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program** funded by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission and Dream Keeper Initiative to provide Mini Grants throughout the Black community. HCN is excellently qualified to give small grants to individuals and organizations and to advance social justice to create community innovations for marginalized populations within the Black community.

In 2022-2023, HCN began to focus on providing Mini-Grants to the homeless community. HCN provided this revolutionary funding model to support community healing. This program embodies HCN's Afri-centric model by integrating strategies that are trauma-informed, love-informed, focusing on resilience, and addressing barriers to accessing resources and basic needs in San Francisco's Black community of unhoused individuals.

Through intensive community engagement and outreach efforts, HCN collaborated with shelters, Black-led community organizations, and received referrals from the broader city-wide Dream Keeper Initiative to identify those needing support (i.e., individuals experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness). Grantees who were selected for a mini grant could receive between $500 and $5,000 to be used towards supporting their plans to achieve secure living conditions.

The main objectives of this report are to:

Describe the **Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program** in a way that contextualizes it as one aspect of Black community mental health,

Demonstrate whether key service goals and objectives were met, and

Share feedback about experiences and impact from **Community Innovation Mini-Grants** participants,

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.

Indigo Team at Homeless Children's Network in San Francisco, CA

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 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.

Additionally, San Francisco is home to the rise of 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.

Moreover, critically necessary programs are advancing racial justice and equity of access in funding environments in San Francisco. According to an Echoing Green and Bridgespan report, revenues of Black-led organizations are 24% smaller on average than white-led organizations. HCN's Mini-Grants Programs are overcoming these barriers and getting funding from SF HRC and OEWD directly into the hands of grantees—including Black-led and Black-serving community-based organizations and Black entrepreneurs serving marginalized communities, including those experiencing homelessness.

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. [3]

3 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 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).
HCN's Afri-centric framework is presented below.

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

HCN'S AFRI-CENTRIC APPROACH

- 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

HCN'S COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI-GRANTS PROGRAM

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most research on supporting the well-being of Black families has been grounded in deficit or problem-focused approaches, thus limiting our understanding of the impact of systemic issues and undermining possibilities that emphasize agency and self-determination (Lloyd et al., 2024). Pathologizing Black children and families at the individual level betrays the reality of the effects of systemic factors. Racism and its numerous correlates, including income inequality, significantly and negatively impact children's development and well-being (Shonkoff et al., 2021). When families are unable to meet their basic needs, parents and children contend with higher levels of stress and cognitive overwhelm, contributing to poor mental health and family conflict (Redd et al., 2024).

While therapeutic interventions can mitigate mental health concerns, other types of support are necessary to address the systemic harm. For example, programs guided by liberation and self-determination frameworks may include unconditional income or cash benefits as a component. Models of reparations for Black families are one possibility; their emphasis is on autonomy as the most critical priority, that is, an absence of paternalism and micro-management (Shanks et al., 2024).

A large body of research has examined the ways that anti-poverty efforts support child and family well-being (Redd et al., 2024). Providing parents with tangible resources allows them to have more emotional capacity for supportive parenting. Increased family income through governmental support is associated with improved child health outcomes, child academic achievement, and future employment as adults (Redd et al., 2024). Studies examining the benefits of such offerings rooted in liberation – reparations or otherwise – for Black families would contribute to a significant gap in the literature. This report seeks to fill that gap.

HCN'S COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI–GRANTS PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Funded by the Dream Keeper Initiative (DKI) and Human Rights Commission (HRC), HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program provides mini grants directly to Black individuals and families facing homelessness. This revolutionary program embodies HCN's Afri-centric model to support community healing by integrating strategies that are trauma-informed, love-informed, focusing on resilience, and addressing barriers to accessing resources and basic needs in San Francisco's Black community of unhoused individuals. The FY 23–24 Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program addressed the increasing challenges of homelessness and housing insecurity for San Francisco's Black communities. Through intensive community engagement and outreach efforts, HCN collaborated with shelters, Black-led community organizations, and received referrals from the broader city-wide Dream Keeper Initiative to identify those needing support (i.e., individuals experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness). Grantees who are selected for a mini grant could receive between $500 and $5,000 to be used towards supporting their plans to achieve secure living conditions.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Applicants had to meet the following requirements to be eligible to receive the mini grant:

1. Identify as Black or BIPOC.

2. Be experiencing homelessness or at risk for immediate homelessness.

3. Be willing to work with HCN's technical assistance in building a budget and have a shelter case manager that they are willing to work with to verify need.

4. Submit data and receipts for what was purchased/what funds were used for.

5. Commit to being part of an evaluation process that looked at the impact of the funds on addressing their immediate conditions.

During the application process, grantees were tasked with developing a budget for how funds will be utilized. After grantees were identified and interviewed, grantees engaged in regular one-on-one check-ins with HCN's grant coordinator. During these check-ins, the grant coordinator tracked the grantee's utilization of funds, connected them to needed resources, and offered a regular system of support to remind grantees that they are not alone in their journey towards achieving financial security.
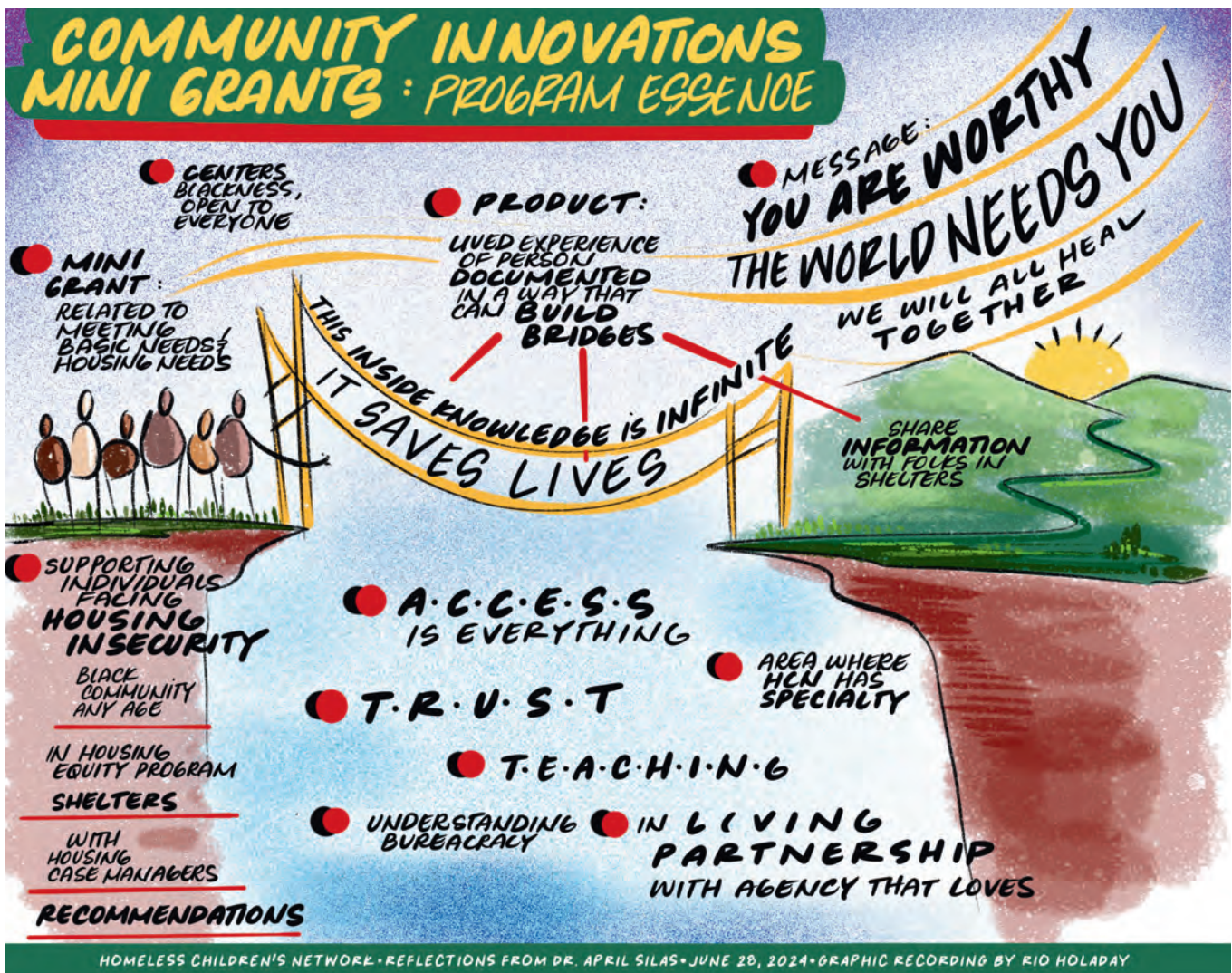
HCN'S COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI-GRANTS PROGRAM EVALUATION

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1 Were the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program objectives met?

2 How do the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program participants rate and describe their experiences with and the impact of the program?

3 How does the Community Innovations Mini-Grants 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 Community Innovations Mini-Grants 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 the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program at HCN had four phases.

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

Phase two involved the grantees' participation in semi-structured interviews. We also distributed a survey using the same interview questions to allow for accessibility.

Phase three involved the Community Innovations Mini-Grants team's participation in a joint interview to explore the approach(es) and conditions necessary to make this program a success.
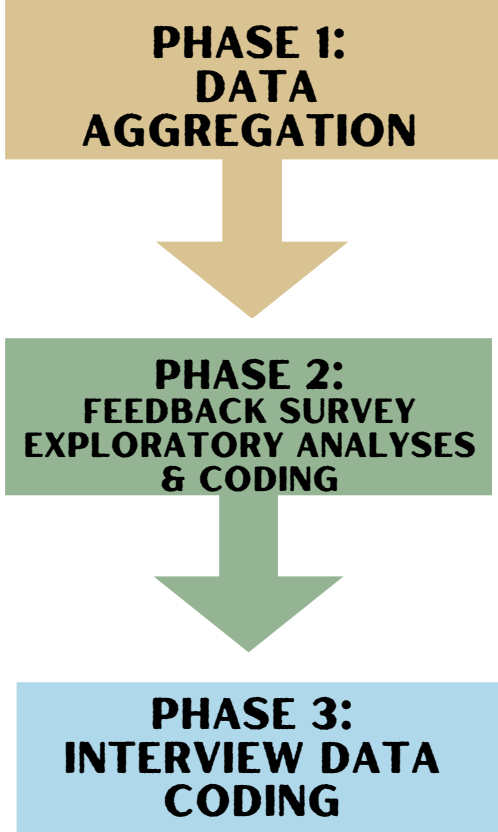
We relied heavily on the methodology of storytelling in the qualitative aspects of our data collection. Inspired by the work of S.R. Tolliver (Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research, 2022), we were interested in uplifting alternative ways of knowing that foregrounds Black narrative traditions.

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 1:
DATA
AGGREGATION**

**PHASE 2:
FEEDBACK SURVEY
EXPLORATORY ANALYSES
& CODING**

**PHASE 3:
INTERVIEW DATA
CODING**

PHASE ONE:
To track performance measures, we simply aggregated data points from HCN's administrative database.

PHASE TWO:
To analyze the interview and survey responses, 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 COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI-GRANTS'S PROGRAM OBJECTIVES MET?

This section highlights the service goals that were exceeded by HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants team. HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants team exceeded goals of number of grants disbursed and total amount disbursed.

PROGRAM DELIVERABLE	GOAL	DISBURSED
Number of grants given	30	87
Total community grants amount disbursed	$400K	$420K
Total emergency grants disbursed	$55K	$55K

FY 23-24 CYCLE	# OF GRANTEES
1, August - November '23	35
2. January - February '24	18
3. March - April '24	17
4. May - June '24	17
TOTAL GRANTEES:	**87**

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

To explore grantees' experiences with the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program, the evaluation team utilized interviews and qualitative surveys to explore experiences, perceptions, and impacts of the program. Twenty-three (23) grantees were surveyed and interviewed regarding their experience with the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program.

GRANTEES' EXPERIENCES

To explore grantees' experiences with the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program, the evaluation team utilized interviews and qualitative surveys to explore experiences, perceptions, and impacts of the program. Twenty-three (23) grantees were surveyed and interviewed regarding their experience with the Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program.

100%
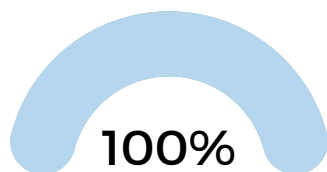
Grantees expressed having a positive experience with the grant program.

When explaining HOW they felt in the program, grantees expressed the following themes:

- Grantees felt **supported.**
- Grantees felt **welcomed** by Mini-Grants staff and in HCN facilities.
- The Mini-Grants team was **empathetic and non-judgmental** of grantees' situations.
- Grantees felt **heard.**

In addition to it being a positive experience for the grantees, many expressed that HCN's approach regarding implementation of program requirements and the support the HCN team provided was welcoming and easy. Grant recipients expressed that the HCN team's approach to facilitating the grant process and providing opportunities for regular check-ins contributed to their positive experience.

Grantees expressed the following themes when recounting their experience:

- Easy and **stress-free** grant process.
- **Clear communication** from Mini-Grants team.
- **Ease** of accessing funds.
- HCN team was **non-judgmental.**

COMMUNITY INNOVATION'S IMPACT ON GRANTEES

"It helped me feel safe and secure...the way that [the HCN team] comes off and the approach of the conversation... it goes back into me not having my guard up...In the past I know there are some people in these positions that have their nose up in the air. So, it makes people turn around and don't want to [ask for] help.... it's the tone...the way that they're [other charities] responding to you."

~Grant Recipient

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Not surprisingly, the grant supported most participants in accessing basic needs. **Of the 16 (70%) grantees who identified being able to use grant funds to access their basic needs (e.g., transportation, legal documents), 81% reported being able to fund necessities for their children and family members (e.g., food, school supplies, clothing).**

In addition to accessing necessities, 8 (35%) grantees identified being able to utilize funds towards gaining access to sustainable housing. Nearly **88% of grantees utilizing funds to access housing were able to secure a stable home (e.g., grant funds used as down payment, funds being utilized towards rent/building savings to pay rent for additional months).**

Other grantees shared that they were able to utilize funds for achieving a higher paying career which will help them maintain stable housing moving forward. Six **(6) of the 23 grantees interviewed were able to utilize funds towards paying for requirements for employment or continuing their education to get a better job.**

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

All interviews with grantees were full of **expressions of joy**. Each grantee was eager to share how the program helped them **emotionally** and **improved their well-being** during some of the most difficult times in their lives.

See the table on the following page for a full list of themes identified from the interviews with grantees. Below are the most discussed impacts of grantees' well-being:

- Felt sense of **RELIEF** from the pressures of insecurity
- Motivation to continue **HEALING**
- Felt sense of **HOPE**
- Felt sense of **EMPOWERMENT**

> "With a financial burden lifted, I felt more empowered to make plans for my future. Without the pressure of everyday life expenses, I was able to dream again. I also wasn't stressed out about the quality of life my kids are having. Even though the grant was a temporary fix, it was a pleasant one. It definitely made us feel secure for the time being."
> ~Grant recipient

ENHANCING CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

Related to the main program objectives of supporting individuals and their families facing homelessness, an additional impact theme that emerged from the interviews was that grantees expressed that this experience helped them feel **more CONNECTED to the community.**

Specifically, 45% of grantees shared that they are **MOTIVATED to "give back" to others in the future**, explaining that being helped during their time of need reminded them of the importance of helping others. Twenty seven percent (27%) of grantees explained that they feel like they have a better understanding of their community's needs, and fourteen percent (14%) shared that this experience with HCN helped them make more personal connections with others.

> "Because I have the lived experience [of homelessness], I'm able to advocate for people in the space, and to help people develop outlines, and how to overcome the challenges and just help to identify resources available. So, for me it just opened a different [world]. I was doing advocacy...it kind of shifted my perspective. I definitely want to focus on family and children in a professional setting...that's where it took me so I'm appreciative for the journey."
> ~Grant recipient

IMPACT ON COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS GRANTEES

Provided access to **basic needs for self AND family** (e.g., legal documents, food, clothing, transportation)

Felt sense of **relief** from pressures of insecurity

Motivated to **continue healing journey**

Felt sense of **financial stability**

Felt sense of **hope**

Felt sense of **healing** from trauma

Alleviated barriers to **accessing housing** (e.g., savings, budgeting, ability to pay rent for consequent months)

Achieved stable housing

Felt sense of **empowerment**

Felt sense of **security**

No longer feels alone/ Knows someone cares for them

More likely to ask for help when they need it

Better able to care for mental & physical health

Felt sense of **safety**

Felt sense of **dignity**

COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI GRANTS

ADDRESSING HISTORICAL AND CURRENT BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY
AND HOUSING SECURITY FOR BLACK FAMILIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

"IT JUST GAVE ME HOPE
AT THAT MOMENT".
— HCN GRANTEE

PROCESS

- RECRUITMENT
  - SHELTERS
  - OTHER ORGS
  - DIRECT
- APPLICATION
  - INTERVIEW
  - BUDGET
- DECISION MAKING PROCESS
  BY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
- FUNDS
  AWARDED
- COMMUNITY
  PROJECTS
- CHECK-INS ;
  ALLEVIATE
  BARRIERS
- REPORTING
  RESULTS
- IMPACT

"I WAS ABLE TO FINALLY
BRIDGE THAT GAP...
I COULDN'T CROSS ALONE".
— HCN GRANTEE

"IT HELPED ME FEEL
SAFE AND SECURE".
— HCN GRANTEE

IMPACT

87 GRANTS (30 WAS GOAL)

$420K IN COMMUNITY GRANTS ;
$55K IN EMERGENCY GRANTS

- STABILITY FOR FAMILIES
- BASIC NEEDS, STABLE HOUSING
- RELIEF
- HOPE, CHANCE TO BREATHE
- EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT CERTIFICATIONS
- LEGAL DOCUMENTS ; FEES
  (E.G. BIRTH CERT ; SS CARDS)
- SAVING PROPERTY
- STAY IN SF
- CONTINUE HEALING JOURNEY
- CONNECTION
- MOTIVATION

**NURTURING
VISIONARY
COMMUNITY-LED
INNOVATION**

VALUES

- COMMUNITY-
  INFORMED
- AUTONOMY ; SELF-
  DETERMINATION
- RESPECT
- DIGNITY
- TRUST
- EMPATHY
- DEEP LISTENING ;
  SUPPORT
- MORE INCLUSIVE
  FUNDING PATHWAYS
- SIMPLE APP PROCESS

"I WANT TO GIVE BACK
THAT HELP I GOT".
— HCN GRANTEE

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 homeless in the Black San Franciscan community with an Afri-centric lens. We felt it was important to highlight this aspect of the work since there are still several 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 its Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program 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 an interview with HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants team. We heard stories about how the work is done and why these approaches matter. The themes presented below highlight implications for the community mental health field, and specifically how to build, maintain, and nurture an effective workforce than can effectively apply an Afri-centric paradigm to community mental health among the Black community experiencing homelessness.

To analyze interview data from the 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 Community Innovations Mini-Grants team. Through our emergent coding process, **we found three (3) primary themes:**

1. **Integrating HCN's Afri-centric model and approaches.**

2. **Uplifting grantees' agency to determine their own healing pathway.**

3. **The importance of being part of the community in order to understand the needs.**

These three themes are explored in more detail in the paragraphs below.

HCN was able to provide 87 Mini-Grants to individuals and their families to improve their living conditions during their time of housing instability. Being one of the few programs offering grants to the Black homeless community, HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants staff met and exceeded program deliverables by supporting Black individuals and families facing homelessness in ways that map onto HCN's Afri-centric framework (e.g., Affirms Blackness; is trauma- and love-informed; focuses on resilience; normalizes grantees' experiences; addresses barriers to accessing resources and basic needs; etc.). For example, the HCN team regularly meets with grantees to listen and hear their stories. During these one-on-one meetings, the HCN team shows empathy for grantees' experiences, and reminds them that they are not alone in their journeys. The experience of homelessness can occur at any time to anyone, but HCN's goal is to uplift those in the Black community needing their support. HCN focuses on developing safe spaces and provides support rooted in **love, warmth, and a welcoming environment.**

Additionally, HCN's Afri-centric values involve being **part of the community.** During recruitment, HCN's Mini-Grants team made a significant effort in visiting and leveraging existing relationships with San Francisco shelters and community organizations who work closely with Black individuals and families who are unhoused. The goal of these visits was to make lasting connections, different from the traditional cold-calling or email models of outreach.

Feedback from grantees amplifies HCN's team efforts. HCN's strong infrastructure, efficiency, effective communication, and compassionate delivery contributed to their ability to build trust with community members and reach over 87 grantees. All these dynamics and catalysts for success positions HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program to effectively address barriers to accessing necessities to survive, making it possible for grantees to improve their mental health and create pathways towards healing. Through HCN's Afri-centric expansive approach towards community mental health, Community Innovations is providing high quality and comprehensive support to the Black community experiencing homelessness in San Francisco.

DISCUSSION

HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

The primary goal of HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program is to help Black individuals and families in San Francisco who are facing homelessness access necessities and secure sustainable housing. Our findings demonstrate that grantees in the Community Innovations Mini-Grants program were able to utilize grant funds in a variety of ways (e.g., legal documents, housing, accessing necessities for self and family, transportation, job requirements, etc).

Findings from the report highlight the positive impact the grant has had on those in the Black community experiencing homelessness and housing injustice, providing relief from financial insecurity. The Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program served as a pillar of hope for grantees. The mini grants did not just have individual impacts on grantees, but it also allowed them to provide security and safety for their loved ones by providing them with the means to access necessities and housing. Additional impacts on grantees included enhanced emotional well-being (e.g., feeling seen and heard; experiencing hope) and enhancing a felt sense of connection to the community.

DISCUSSION

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

Administering the mini grants is not merely dispersing funds and filling out paperwork. HCN's Community Innovations Mini Grant program **staff embodied a stance guided by HCN's Afri-centric values** and framework. Grantees' reports of feeling hope, empowered, and relief demonstrate the importance of community healing practitioners' ability to embrace an **approach with community members that is loving, affirming, and healing.**

Implications for Organizational Policies

The Mini-Grants team at HCN intentionally created policies and procedures that are transparent, accountable, and easy to understand. They built trust in the community by conducting **relationship-based outreach and removing typical barriers** that grantees tend to encounter in similar grant programs. Indeed, grantees reported that participation in HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program was an **easy and stress-free grant process.** There was clear communication from the Mini-Grants team, there was ease of accessing funds, and the HCN team – including the HCN office environment – **was loving and non-judgmental.**

DISCUSSION

Implications for the San Francisco Community

One of the key pillars of decolonized 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 resulted in a mental health paradigm that focuses on the pathology of individuals and virtually ignores the historical impact of systemic issues on development and well-being (Lloyd et al., 2024; Shonkoff et al., 2021). The findings in this evaluation of HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants Program begin to shed light on the impact of providing needed income to Black families in a manner that is rooted in liberation and healing. The mini grants facilitated access to basic needs in a time where the cost of living in San Francisco has skyrocketed and resulted in untenable housing options for many Black families and individuals. Indeed, when one's basic needs are met, they no longer need to constantly live in survival mode. They are able to move forward with their life, dream of more, and make plans towards achieving their dreams.

The overwhelming positive findings from this evaluation position HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grants to serve as an exemplar of the city's investment in combatting homelessness in San Francisco. These Mini-Grants support individuals and families in homeless shelters to successfully transition to independent and secure living conditions. Findings from this evaluation demonstrate that these Mini-Grants contributed to widespread impact that was not just beneficial to the individual grantees, but impactful for the children and families as well. The Mini-Grants help families to remain in San Francisco and not be forced out of the city. Efforts to support a thriving population of Black folks in San Francisco is key in supporting community vitality. The findings also demonstrate an 'indirect' positive impact on the community. That is, grantees are motivated to make positive change in their communities and give back in a way that is aligned with the values of ubuntu – **"I am because we are."**

CLOSING

"In a real sense all life is interrelated. All [humans] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. **Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly**. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the interrelated structure of reality."

~Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail

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