



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK

A YEAR OF DREAMING, COLLABORATING, AND HEALING: AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

2023-2024



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 funders of Homeless Children’s Network, including the City and County of San Francisco, private foundations, corporations, and generous individual donors. Your generous funding made programming and this evaluation report 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 Homeless Children’s Network’s program partners, community participants, youth, families, and caregivers who contributed to our evaluation through surveys, data collection, and interviews.

Thank you to Rio Holaday for the vibrant, customized art work. Your process of getting to know the work happening at Homeless Children’s Network 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 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	04
Background and Context	06
HCN History and Approaches	09
Communities Served	17
Overview of Programs	19
Additional Services Offered	29
Program Expansion	31
Supporting the BIPOC Workforce	34
Catalysts for Success	40
Discussion	43
References	46

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Shivers, E.M., Matriano, R., Byars, N. (2024). Homeless Children's Network: Agency Highlights 2023-2024. Prepared by Indigo Cultural Center for Homeless Children's Network.



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In 2024, Homeless Children’s Network (HCN) engaged Indigo Cultural Center to conduct external evaluations for HCN’s programs that serve Black and BIPOC communities in San Francisco.

The main objectives of this summary report are to:

- ✦ Provide background and context for Homeless Children’s Network as an agency;
- ✦ Highlight key findings from ten (10) of their programs over the 2023-2024 fiscal year;
- ✦ Share information about their newly funded programs and initiatives;
- ✦ Explore the factors and conditions necessary to support a predominantly Black mental health workforce; and
- ✦ Delve into the unique approaches and catalysts at work that make their programs successful.

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.

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).

BLACK COMMUNITY IN SAN FRANCISCO

The City of San Francisco is often lauded for its diversity and progressive value. 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

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>



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

Marumo & Chakale



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.

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

Redevelopment projects were completed by the 1980s, but new homes were too expensive for the majority of former San Francisco residents to afford. Then, the 1990s-2010s brought tech booms that created a strong demand for skilled tech workers in the Bay Area. Subsequently, rates of gentrification of historically Black and immigrant neighborhoods in San Francisco increased, 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 continue to face the lasting impacts of gentrification, discrimination, and anti-Blackness.

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.



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.



Dr. April Y. Silas, Ph.D., is the visionary and compassionate Chief Executive Officer of Homeless Children's Network (HCN) since 1992, with 30+ years of experience growing a mission-critical non-profit organization that serves at-risk homeless children, youth, and families. She has 40+ years of experience in strength-based work with low-income youth of color facing multiple barriers, including incarceration, substance abuse, mental health concerns, and abuse and/or neglect. She is the driving force behind HCN's groundbreaking Ma'at Program, Amani Mental Health Training Program, and Kuamka Community Healing Arts Program.

“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 Shephard



Embedded in HCN's mission is a commitment to raise the standard of care for young children and families in San Francisco. HCN has been providing Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) services for over three decades and is one of the original grantee agencies funded by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) when the City-wide community-based ECHMC Initiative began. Sites frequently request HCN's ECMHC services because of their long experience and reputation for delivering trusted, culturally responsive services.

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; a committed focus on amplifying the voices of marginalized communities; and the integration of an Afri-centric approach that guides their clinical mental health and their community mental health services and which includes engaging Black communities in the design and implementation of solutions, including the evaluation of HCN's impact.²

“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.”

~ Jon Henry

² For more history about Homeless Children's Network, please visit: <https://www.hcnkids.org/history>



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. Moreover, Homeless Children’s Network has made important contributions to the City of San Francisco for over 30 years, recognizing the mental and behavioral health needs of the most marginalized children and their families, including those experiencing homelessness.

HCN is recognized for its contributions in:

- ✦✦✦ Serving families facing inequities in the housing system of care;
- ✦✦✦ Coordinating efforts with community-driven coalitions such as MegaBlack SF; and
- ✦✦✦ Directing mental health support towards the Black community in San Francisco.

This has made it possible for HCN to anchor early mental health consultation in the Black community like never done before in terms of volume, quality of Afri-centric training modalities, and support for Black families, Black providers/providers serving Black individuals, and Black children and youth.



HOUSING INSECURITY: HCN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

A notable example of HCN's contribution to Black San Franciscan families facing inequities in the housing system of care is **HCN's Community Innovations Mini-Grant Program**. The main objective of this Mini-Grants program is to help Black individuals and families in San Francisco who are facing homelessness access necessities and secure sustainable housing. Recent evaluation 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 a recent evaluation highlight the positive impact the Mini-Grants have had on those in the Black community experiencing homelessness and housing injustice, providing relief from financial insecurity. The Community Innovations Mini-Grant Program served as a **pillar of hope** for grantees. The Mini-Grants did not just have individual impacts on grantees; the grants 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 enhancing **emotional well-being** (e.g., feeling seen and heard; experiencing hope) and **enhancing a felt sense of connection to the community**. Through HCN's thoughtful and Afri-centric delivery, grantees felt empowered to continue moving forward in their healing journeys.



“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



COMMUNITY-COALITIONS: HCN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Throughout the entire 2023-2024 fiscal year, HCN's Leadership facilitated over 100 community conversations throughout the Black community in San Francisco. One notable example involved facilitating the mental health portion of the MegaBlack San Francisco retreat. Other examples include offering feedback during MegaBlack community coalition sessions. The feedback centers and integrates healing and a strong mental health perspective. HCN leadership also regularly attends the City's Board of Supervisor meetings to advocate for wellness in the Black community. These examples illuminate the numerous and expanded ways that HCN's leadership team has historically embraced a greater advocacy and community wellness methodology. The grounded intention behind offering this level of community-coalition support is to create space for folks to express themselves and foster a healthy environment with mental health principles guiding community conversations (for example, how are coalition members 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.

"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



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT: HCN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

HCN's Afri-centric Community Mental Health Model, exemplified by the Ma'at Program, is a revolutionary contribution to the mental health field in San Francisco. In December 2022, **HCN's Ma'at Program was featured in an 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.

Over the past five years, San Francisco's Black community, with HCN's expertise, has increased recognition of the importance of mental health and wellness for the Black community. This has resulted in increased awareness and conversation, training, funding, and collaboration. HCN has been critical to growing the Black mental health workforce through peer-based training programs, such as **HCN's Amani Mental Health Training Program, Kuamka Healing Arts Program, and HCN's Clinical Internship Program.**

Specifically, HCN's Amani Mental Health Training Program has graduated over 97 mental health and peer support practitioners since 2021, offering an Afri-centric, trauma-informed, strengths-based approach to working with Black and African American children, youth, parents/caregivers, elders, families, and community members. In addition, this past year, HCN incorporated 13 college students into the Amani program, supporting engagement with the community mental health curriculum as college level interns.

“[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

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.

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.



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). 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.

“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

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. The expansive nature of HCN's Afri-centric framework is also beneficial for serving a wide diversity of BIPOC and other marginalized children.



- 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



SERVING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

HCN serves a **diverse community** in San Francisco, while maintaining a commitment to a central focus on the Black community. The Afri-centric principles elucidated and embodied by HCN are beneficial to all communities.

Below is a customized graphic by Rio Holaday, developed in collaboration with HCN to encompass the agency's values and essence.





HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK PROGRAMS

COMMUNITIES SERVED BY HCN

Homeless Children's Network is deeply connected to the San Franciscan community. HCN's programs utilize a Afri-centric community mental health approach, acknowledging the role of systemic barriers in community members' ability to access culturally responsive, culturally affirming, and trauma-informed care, thus providing services to address needs in multi-faceted and innovative ways. HCN's Afri-centric programs combat systemic barriers to education, mentorship, housing, and mental health care by providing culturally affirming services with providers and mentors whose identities match the communities they serve.

It is important to note that HCN staff and leaders reflect the clients and communities they serve both in demographics and lived experience. This encompasses those with first-hand understanding of issues related to economic insecurity and housing instability and reflective of the communities they serve, including Black and LGBTQIA+ community members.

The Black community is not a monolith. HCN attunes and attends to the diversity and intersectionality within the Black community and serves the following communities and more: Black youth; young Black children and their caregivers; Black fathers; Black healers; Black artists; Black LGBTQIA+ youth and adults; Black community stakeholders; Black leaders; Black families facing complex trauma; and Black families facing housing insecurity.

Finally, HCN also serves communities across racial groups. Programs such as HCN's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation offers mental health consultation to early childhood providers who make up systems of care in early care and education (ECE) programs; Family Resource Centers (FRC); Family Child Care homes (FCC); substance use disorder residential and outpatient treatment programs; and domestic violence and homeless shelters. HCN's General EPSDT clinical program also serves diverse San Franciscan community members.

The following table provides summaries of ten of HCN's programs from fiscal year 2023-2024. Each program (except EPSDT General Clinical Services) has a corresponding full program evaluation report, which can be accessed here: <https://www.hcnkids.org/impact>

“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.”

~Jon Henry

OVERVIEW OF HCN PROGRAMS

Program Name	Communities Served	Program Objectives	Highlighted Performance Numbers	Additional Program Spotlights
Ma'at Program	Children and youth aged 0 to 17 who identify as Black or of African descent and their caregivers	Provide culturally affirming therapeutic and case management services to children, youth, and families with clinicians who share cultural identities and community connections with the families they serve.	Provided EPSDT clinical mental health services to 59 unique children and youth and engaged in 160 contacts with peers and siblings as well as 3,984 contact engagements with parents and guardians, teachers, and other community members that care for, surround, and support the child or youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The depth of extensive, wrap-around support for each child resulted in families and caregivers noting that they felt supported, seen, and understood by HCN's staff. 100% of parents and caregivers appreciated the intentionality that HCN places on providing an Afri-centric model of mental health care to youth and their support systems by therapists and case managers that mirror their cultural identities.
General EPSDT	All populations and ethnicities with focused expertise to address the unique needs of youth aged 0 to 17 and their families that are experiencing homelessness, at risk for homelessness, or formerly homeless throughout San Francisco	Provide culturally affirming, strength-based mental health services focused on the specific needs of children, youth, and families living in emergency, transitional, and domestic violence shelters as well as those with a formative history with homelessness.	8 clinicians, 7 clinical trainees, and 1 case manager served 87 unduplicated children and youth , including providing over 1,753 hours of face-to-face mental health services and engaging clients' caregivers, siblings, peers, teachers, and other supports for comprehensive wrap-around care.	98% of clients maintained or improved at least 2 CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths) assessment strength ratings (e.g. resiliency, family strengths, educational, cultural identity, optimism). HCN staff provided culturally affirming care in Spanish, Mandarin, and English.

Program Name	Community(ies) Served	Program Objectives	Highlighted Performance Numbers	Additional Program Spotlights
<p>HCN's Dream Keeper Initiative Community Mental Health Program</p>	<p>Black San Franciscan community members, leaders, and stakeholders, the Black LGBTQIA+ community, and care providers and families with young children aged 0 to 5</p>	<p>Provide Healing-Centered Practices for Black LGBTQ+ and other Black/African American families/parents, adults, and communities.</p>	<p>HCN exceeded expectations for service goals and conducted 3,764 outreach activities, engaged in 183 community conversations, and provided mental health services to 218 individual clients.</p>	<p>Community Mental Health & Wellness: Community leaders agreed that HCN's staff are "authentic, real, and safe" and HCN's services continue to expand community understanding of Black community mental health in San Francisco.</p>
				<p>Black LGBTQIA+ Mental Health: Community partners appreciated HCN DKI Community Mental Health staff's authenticity, reliability, and the emphasis placed on expanding awareness of mental health and wellness among the Black community.</p>
				<p>Black Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation and Training Support: 100% of participants agreed that HCN's workshops resulted in new knowledge and new skills.</p>
<p>Brighter Futures</p>	<p>Black fathers and their families</p>	<p>Promote intergenerational healing among Black fathers and their families through free, accessible, and culturally relevant short-term and long-term therapeutic and case management services.</p>	<p>8 fathers received in-depth therapy services and 42 cases received comprehensive case management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fathers reported that involvement in the Brighter Futures program resulted in their increased ability to be a responsive parent to their children and improved relationships with family members. Fathers gained an increased positive understanding of their own feelings and self-perceptions. 80% of fathers reported that Brighter Futures has helped them learn to be more comfortable asking for help when they need it.

Program Name	Community(ies) Served	Program Objectives	Highlighted Performance Numbers	Additional Program Spotlights
Amani Community Mental Health Training Program	Black community members interested in pursuing positions in mental health, mental health adjacent, or community healing fields	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the number of professionals who can provide Afri-centric mental health services in San Francisco. 2. Further Black San Franciscans' careers in roles like Community Health Workers, Peer Support Specialists, and other health-based fields. 3. Provide an alternative entry point and training opportunities beyond traditional academic environments. 	<p>30 Amani participants completed the 8-month mental health workforce development program and 13 University of San Francisco students participated in the Amani curriculum as interns for a total of 43 graduates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amani challenged participants' own perception of Black mental health and expanded their knowledge of healthy coping skills. • Graduates reported an improved perception of their professional selves, increased confidence in their skills sets, and a strong sense of belonging.
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	Early childhood providers who make up the system of care in Early Care and Education (ECE) programs; Family Resource Centers (FRC); Family Child Care homes (FCC); substance use disorder residential and outpatient treatment programs; and domestic violence and homeless shelters	Provide mental health consultation to the people and providers who make up the system of care for young children and their families with the aim of improving social, emotional, and behavioral health and wellbeing of young children; Co-create with communities to internalize and externalize strong equitable practices to reduce disparities in communities of color and create equitable opportunities for young children and their families to heal and thrive.	HCN exceeded program goals and served a total of 54 ECMHC sites , 47 of which were early childhood education, FRC, and FCC sites; 3 SUD treatment sites; and 4 homeless and domestic violence shelters. Across these sites, HCN served 317 early childhood professionals and 513 young children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECMHC program consultants' engagement with consultee-partners led to an increase in the utilization of community mental health and family support resources, enhanced positive interactions between teachers and children, and increased capacity to communicate and engage effectively with families. • 100% of ECE Caregivers agreed that experiences with HCN's ECMHC Consultants were family- and child-centered, culturally-attuned, strengths-based, linguistically-aligned, skills-based, and collaborative.

Program Name	Community(ies) Served	Program Objectives	Highlighted Performance Numbers	Additional Program Spotlights
Afro-Cultural Black LGBTQIA+ Preservation Mini-Grants	Black LGBTQIA+ cultural producers and community organizers with deep roots in Black historic neighborhoods in San Francisco	Fund cultural preservation projects. Reclaim space and history in San Francisco. Empower event planners to produce a further demand for similar community-based events.	Successfully disbursed 42 grants (\$554,000 total) sponsoring events focused on empowerment, art, financial literacy, safety, mental health, and more.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community events sponsored by these mini-grants reached over 12,410 community members. Grantees were appreciative of the support the HCN program staff provided to be “fully equipped” to host their respective events.
Community Innovations Mini-Grants	Black individuals and families facing homelessness	Support community healing by addressing the increasing challenges of homelessness and housing insecurity for San Francisco’s Black communities.	HCN exceeded projected goals and successfully disbursed 87 grants (\$475,000 total) .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grants enabled families to gain access to their basic needs (e.g., food, transportation, schools supplies), but also aided some families in securing stable housing and continuing their education. Grantees appreciated the communicative and clear process employed by HCN.

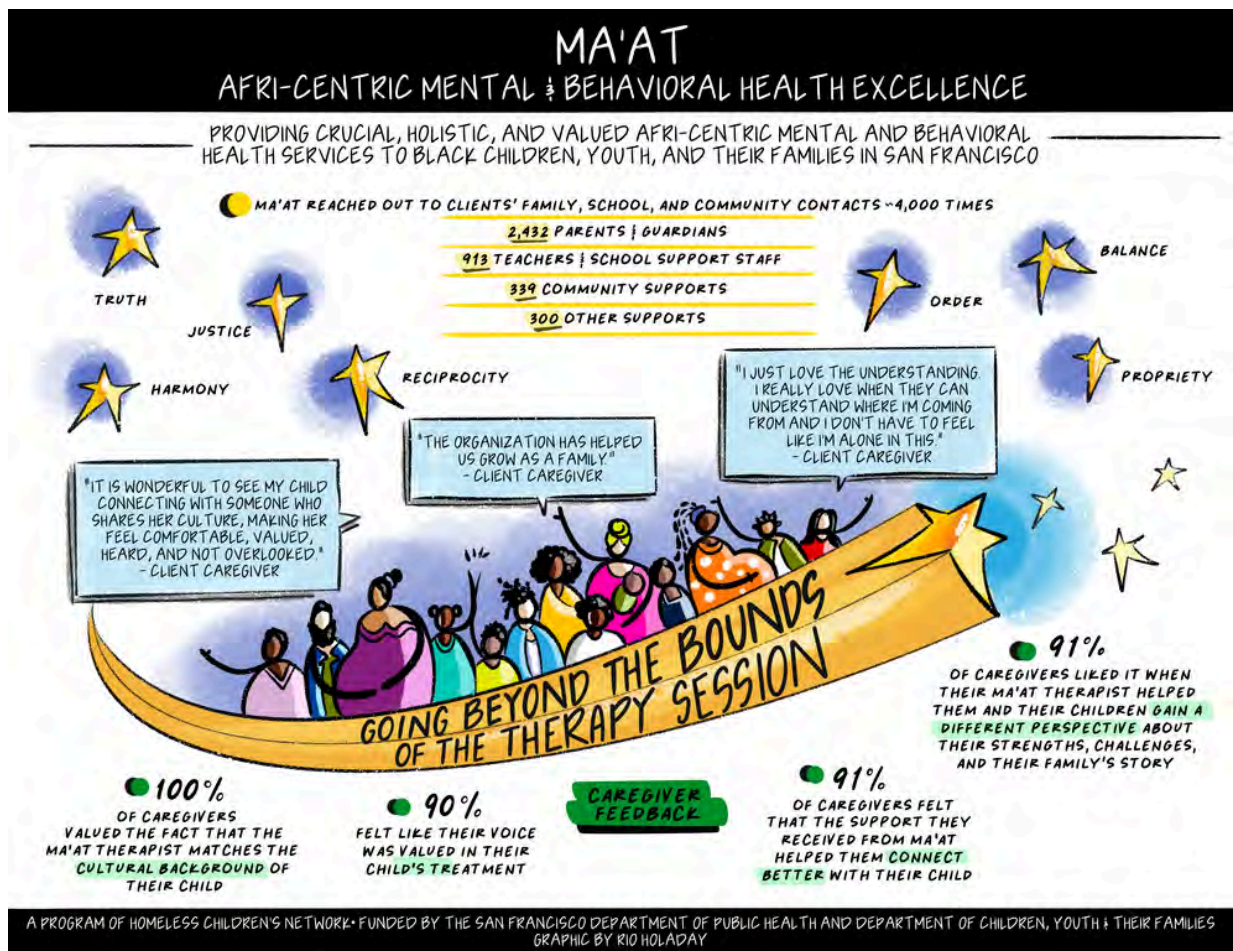
Program Name	Community(ies) Served	Program Objectives	Highlighted Performance Numbers	Additional Program Spotlights
Kuamka Healing Arts Program	Black artists in San Francisco	Provide expressive arts training and technical support for facilitating community-based workshops.	19 community members graduated from the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artists facilitated 45 workshops for the community on topics such as individual and collective healing using artistic mediums from poetry to acting. • Participants reported an increased sense of community, empowerment, and a sense of being “home”.
Ma’at Youth Leadership Program	Black youth aged 12 to 18 in San Francisco	Develop leadership and life skills of youth by creating a culture of wellness and healing through one-on-one support and group meetings focusing on civic engagement and advocacy, leadership development, college readiness, and personal development.	12 Youth Leaders gained 1-on-1 mentorship, peer mentoring experience, college readiness exposure and engagement, civic and community service experience, and networking opportunities.	Upon program completion, Youth Leaders gained invaluable personal and professional tools such as public speaking, time management, and financial literacy.

GRAPHICAL DEPICTIONS OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES

This year, Homeless Children’s Network and Indigo Cultural Center engaged with artist, Rio Holaday, who expertly customized artwork for each of the nine program evaluations conducted. Rio participated in multiple conversations with the HCN and Indigo Cultural Center teams to synthesize evaluation findings in vibrant, eye-catching, expansive, and meaningful ways. Each customized graphic describes the intentionality and thought behind HCN’s preparation and planning for each program, what participants experienced, and key findings from the evaluations. The graphics customized for each program evaluation can be seen in the following pages.

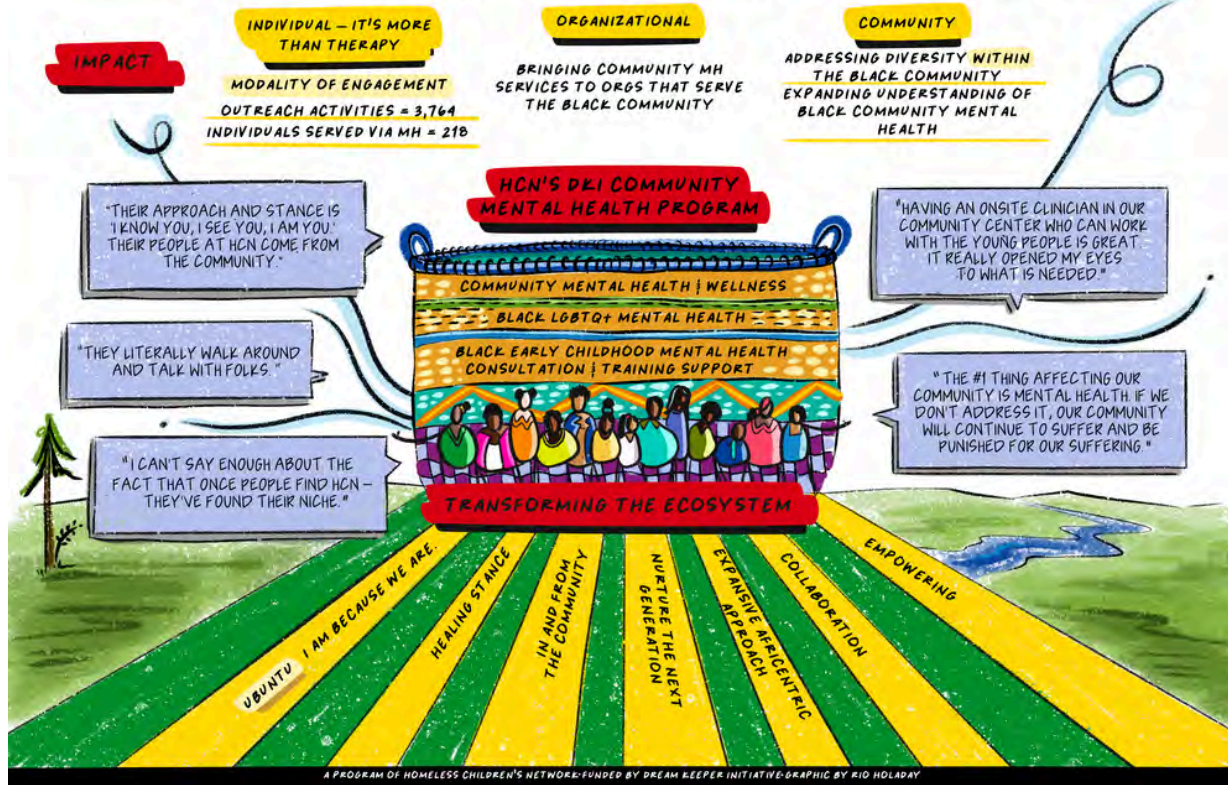
To read the full reports go to: <https://www.hcnkids.org/impact>

To learn more about Rio’s work, please visit: (@rioholaday on Instagram) or (www.rioholaday.com).

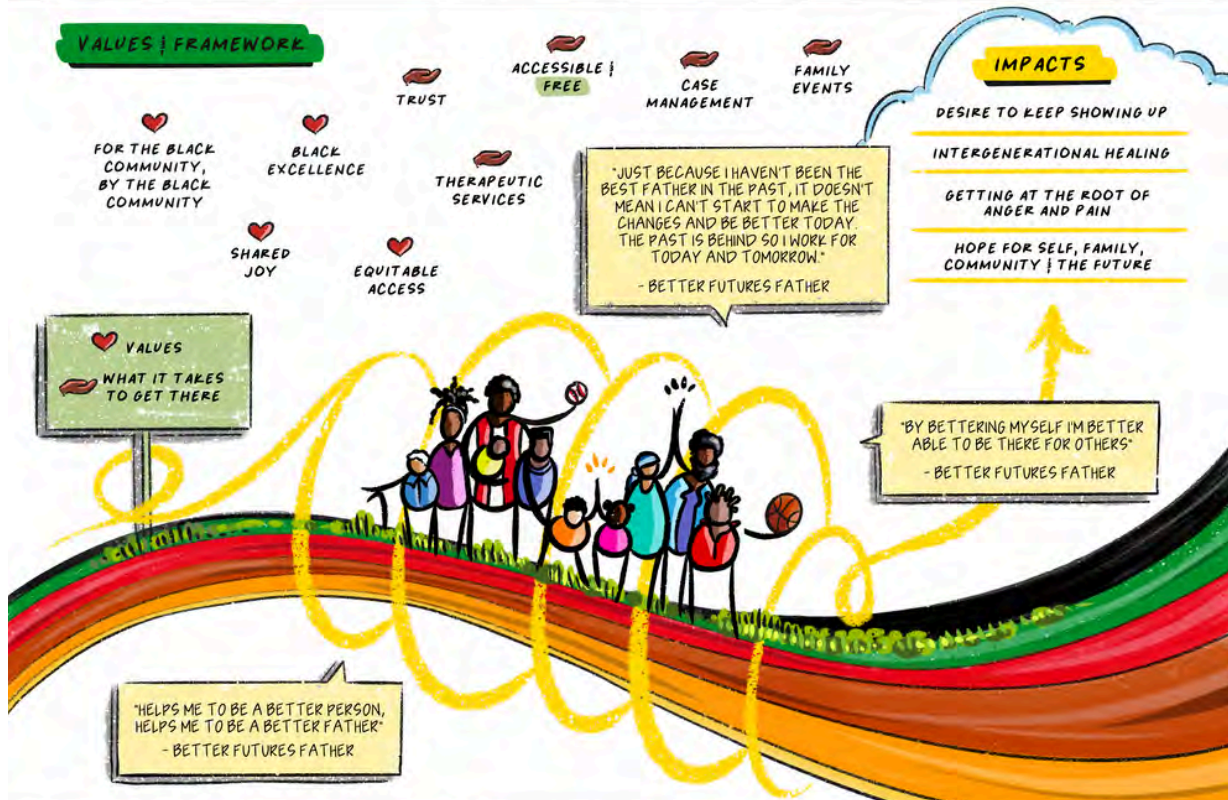


HGN'S DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

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



BRIGHTER FUTURES



HCN'S AMANI MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING PROGRAM

AN AFRI-CENTRIC APPROACH TO INCREASING THE NUMBER OF BLACK PEER SUPPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS THROUGH EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

SKILLS NURTURED ACROSS PEERS, PROFESSIONALS, AND INTERNS

TOTAL % OF AMANI PARTICIPANTS = 43

GRADUATES CURRENTLY WORKING AS:

PERSONAL

- REFLECTIVE CAPACITY
- COPIING SKILLS
- UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL TRAUMA, CULTURAL TRAUMA, AND OTHER FORMS OF COLLECTIVE HARM
- EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

AFRI-CENTRICITY

- COLLECTIVISM/COMMUNALISM
- CENTERING BLACKNESS
- EMBRACING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

JOB | CAREER

- GOAL SETTING
- INTERVIEWING
- RESUME/COVER LETTER
- CULTURAL HUMILITY

AMANI OPENS UP POSSIBILITIES

AMANI TRAINING STAGES:

- 1) INWARD JOURNEY
- 2) COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING
- 3) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- CASE MANAGER COORDINATOR
- BARBER
- DRUG OUTREACH SPECIALIST
- PEER COUNSELOR
- RESIDENT SERVICES MANAGER
- PEACE PARKS COORDINATOR
- HEALTH WORKER III
- UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (INTERNS)
- LONGSHOREMAN
- TECH LAB ASSOCIATE
- DRUG PREVENTION STAFF
- AUTISM SPECIALIST STAFF

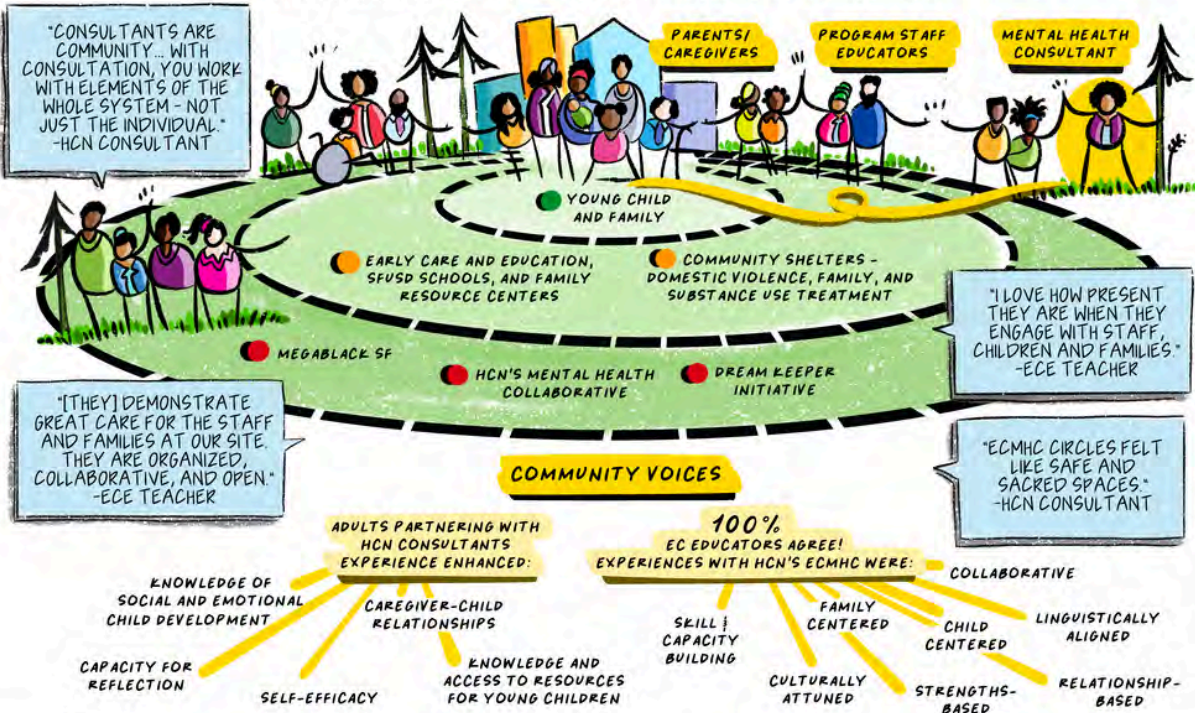
"EMBRACING MY CULTURE AND KNOWING WHERE MY PEOPLE COME FROM AND WHERE WE ARE GOING IN LIFE. WE'RE STILL NOT FREE, BUT I'M FREE IN MY MIND... I HAVE ALWAYS EMBRACED MY BLACKNESS AND WHERE I COME FROM."
- AMANI PARTICIPANT

"THERE IS NO OTHER FEELING THAN FEELING SAFE AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I FELT UPON ENTERING THE AMANI PROGRAM AND BEING CENTERED... JUST BEING ACCEPTED IN THAT SPACE FELT LIKE THE WORLD."
- AMANI INTERN

A PROGRAM OF HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK • FUNDED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE, AND SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION • GRAPHIC BY RIO HOLADAY

HCN'S EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION INITIATIVE "IT TAKES A VILLAGE"

54 SITES SERVED • ECMHC EQUIPS EDUCATORS AND CAREGIVERS TO FACILITATE CHILDREN'S (AGES 0-5) HEALTHY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



"CONSULTANTS ARE COMMUNITY... WITH CONSULTATION, YOU WORK WITH ELEMENTS OF THE WHOLE SYSTEM - NOT JUST THE INDIVIDUAL."
-HCN CONSULTANT

"I LOVE HOW PRESENT THEY ARE WHEN THEY ENGAGE WITH STAFF, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES."
-ECE TEACHER

"[THEY] DEMONSTRATE GREAT CARE FOR THE STAFF AND FAMILIES AT OUR SITE. THEY ARE ORGANIZED, COLLABORATIVE, AND OPEN."
-ECE TEACHER

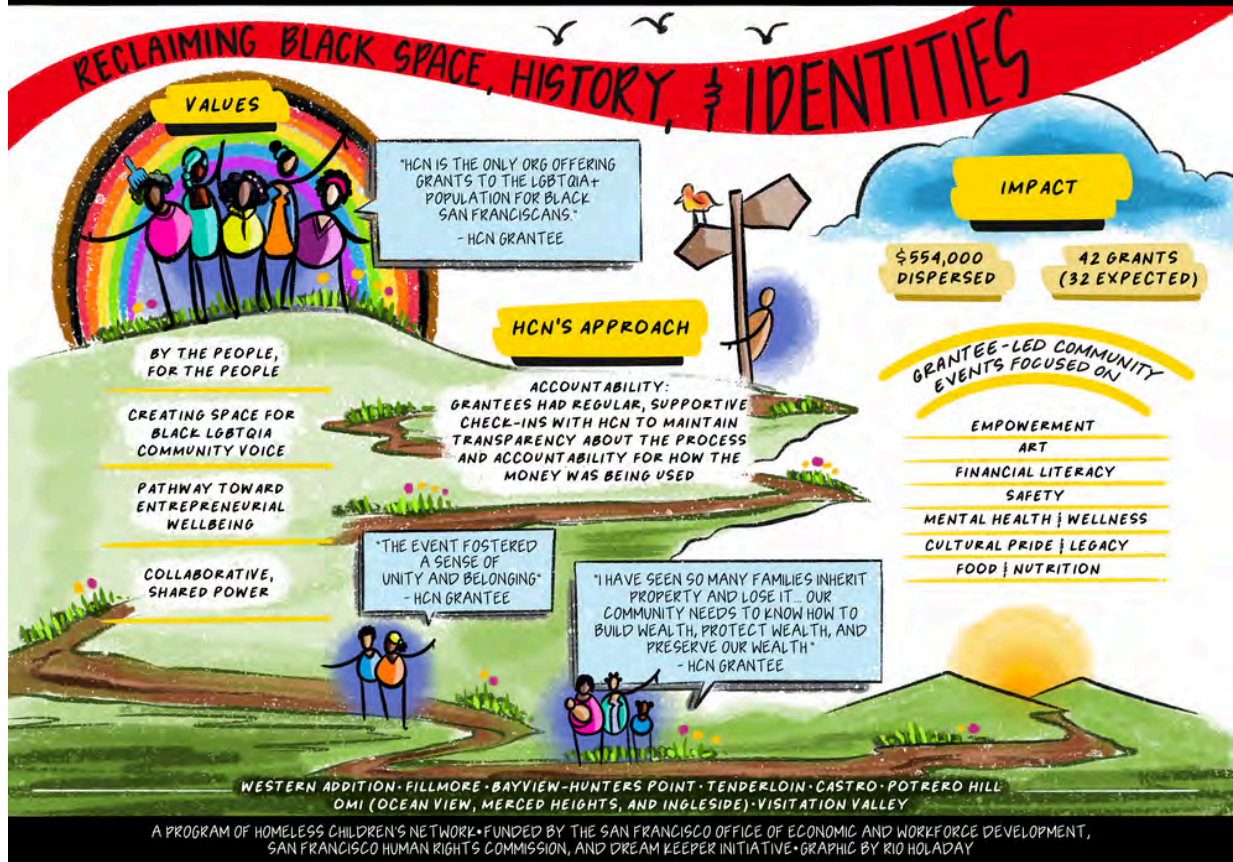
"ECMHC CIRCLES FELT LIKE SAFE AND SACRED SPACES."
-HCN CONSULTANT

COMMUNITY VOICES

- ADULTS PARTNERING WITH HCN CONSULTANTS EXPERIENCE ENHANCED:
 - KNOWLEDGE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT
 - CAPACITY FOR REFLECTION
 - CAREGIVER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS
 - SELF-EFFICACY
 - KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN
- 100% EC EDUCATORS AGREE! EXPERIENCES WITH HCN'S ECMHC WERE:
 - COLLABORATIVE
 - FAMILY CENTERED
 - CHILD CENTERED
 - LINGUISTICALLY ALIGNED
 - CULTURALLY ATTUNED
 - STRENGTHS-BASED
 - RELATIONSHIP-BASED
 - SKILL | CAPACITY BUILDING

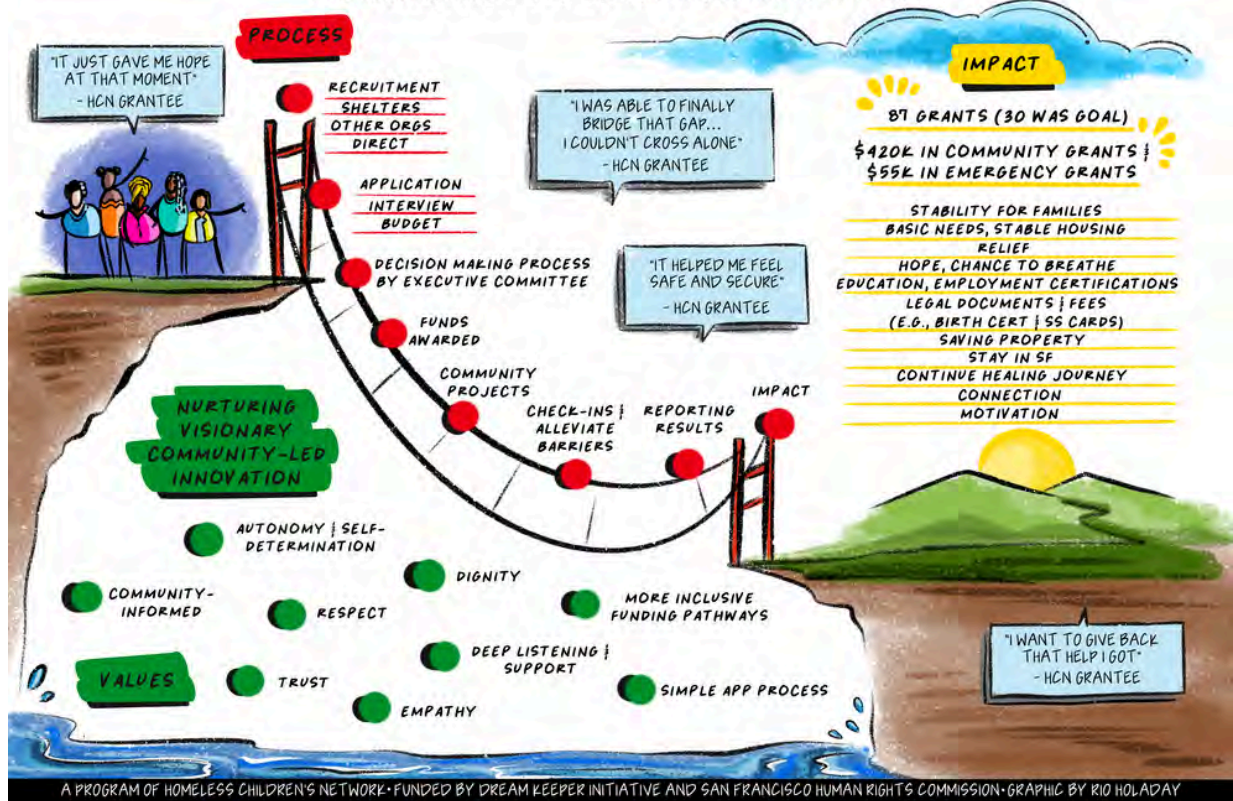
A PROGRAM OF HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK • FUNDED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT, DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & THEIR FAMILIES, AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY • GRAPHIC BY RIO HOLADAY

AFRO-CULTURAL BLACK LGBTQIA+ PRESERVATION MINI-GRANTS



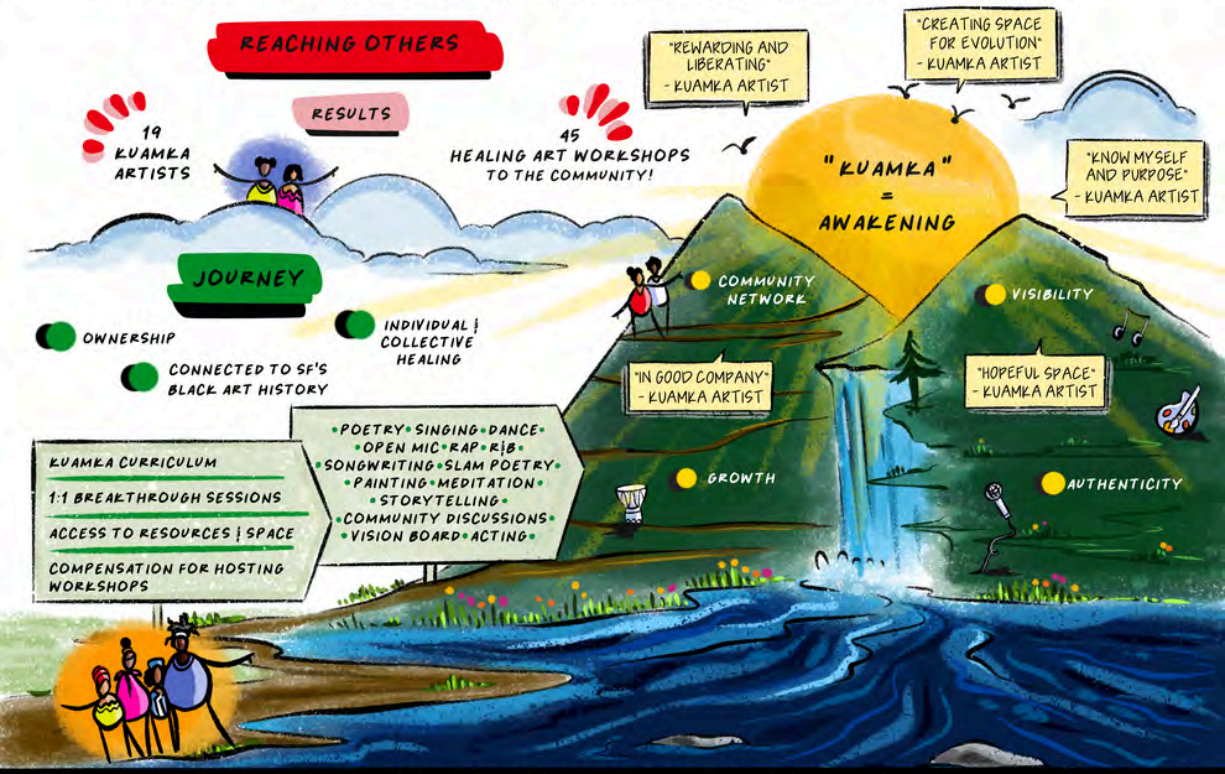
COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS MINI GRANTS

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



KUAMKA

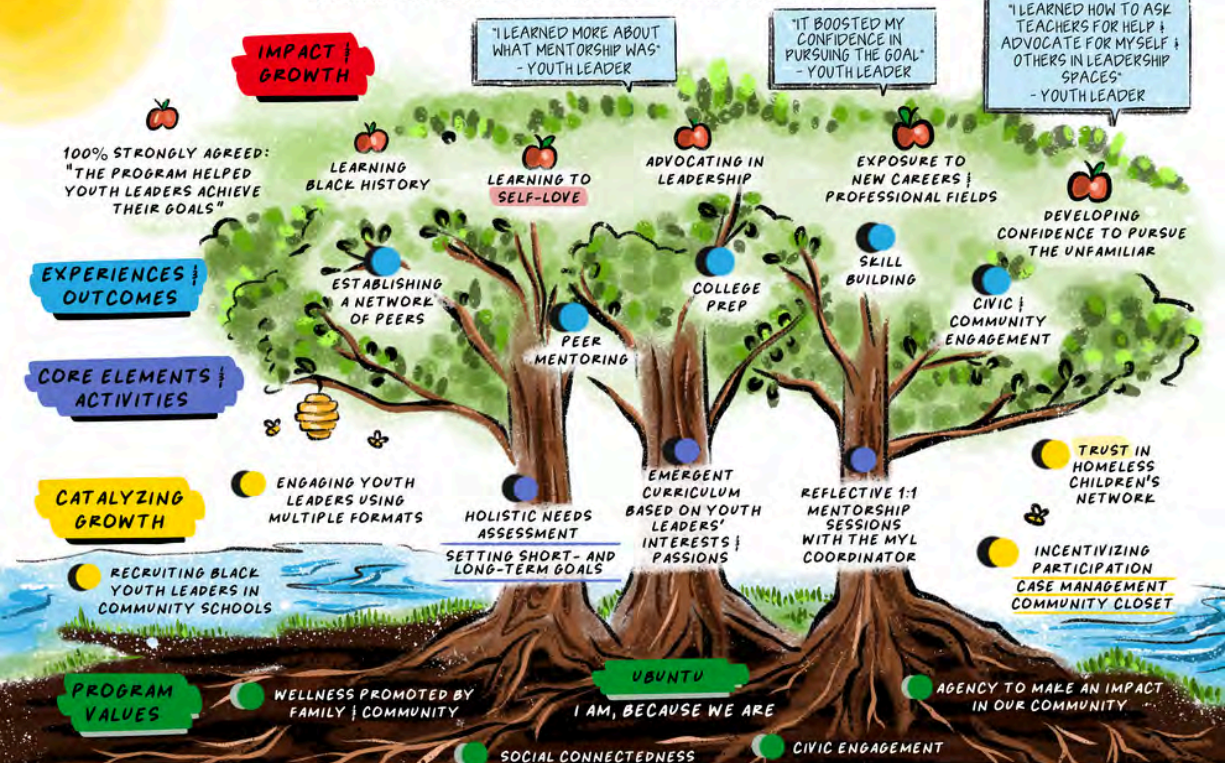
A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION & HEALING FOR SAN FRANCISCO'S BLACK ARTISTS & COMMUNITY



A PROGRAM OF HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK • FUNDED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DREAM KEEPER INITIATIVE
GRAPHIC BY RIO HOLIDAY

MA'AT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TO PROMOTE LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOR BLACK YOUTH IN SAN FRANCISCO



A PROGRAM OF HOMELESS CHILDREN'S NETWORK • FUNDED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO MAYOR'S OFFICE OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT • GRAPHIC BY RIO HOLIDAY

ADDITIONAL SERVICES INTEGRATED THROUGHOUT HCN PROGRAMS

CASE MANAGEMENT

In FY2023-2024, HCN's Case Management team served Youth, Families, and Adults in San Francisco to meet a variety of needs including access to basic resources such as housing, food, and applying for government assistance. The team started the fiscal year with two case managers with specialized focus serving the Brighter Futures and Ma'at Programs, General EPSDT, and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. Given growing demand for HCN's case management services, the team added three new case managers this year bringing in additional expertise in navigating housing systems, providing additional cultural competency for the black community, and language/cultural competency for the Spanish speaking communities with a planned focus for serving our new BBHI, Entre Nosotros, and CPP programs.



CLINICAL TRAINEESHIP

HCN offers a highly-regarded experiential Clinical Internship training program for graduate students in Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Psychology and volunteer post-graduate interns with California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, and University of San Francisco. During HCN's 2023-2024 Clinical Traineeship, HCN staff supported six trainee clinicians from SJSU and CIIS. Each trainee was introduced to clinical modalities, assessment, and navigating health providers. They were assigned to six SFUSD elementary schools, serving 3-8 clients at each site. All trainees completed the program in May - one joined HCN full-time after completing their Masters degree.



HCN'S CLINICAL TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HCN has a clinical training department that offers monthly clinical training on various topics, interventions, and models of care to consistently increase clinicians' capacity and ongoing professional development. HCN welcomes educators from the community to share their knowledge and ensure that the community at HCN is exposed to a diverse and expansive range of topics. HCN regularly updates and expands training opportunities during on-boarding and throughout employment.

Topics covered in FY 2023-2024 included:

- ✦✦ Engaging teachers, staff, young children, and parents/caregivers from diverse backgrounds in relation to race, income, English language comprehension, disparate access to services, and experiences of trauma and racially biased systems to the goal of increasing equity in the care provided;
- ✦✦ Engaging in Play Therapy;
- ✦✦ Client Care during the holidays;
- ✦✦ Providing culturally competent, trauma-informed, community-based mental health services;
- ✦✦ Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) (new program launched at end of FY2023-2024); and
- ✦✦ Developing a clinical lens with the work of self-introspection.

HCN'S PROGRAM EXPANSION

Homeless Children's Network has garnered respect and a positive reputation in the San Francisco community by remaining vigilant and responsive to the ever-changing needs of the community. In addition, leadership at HCN is committed to an emergent process of community healing. That is, as understanding of what is needed for community healing deepens and expands, HCN seeks resources to fund programs and initiatives that align with expanded awareness of community mental health. In the coming years, HCN plans to expand by offering four new programs in the community. These four (4) newly funded programs are summarized below.



THE JABALI PROGRAMS:

The Jabali Program is a substance use education, prevention, and treatment program that supports individuals and organizations serving Black/African American individuals and families, service providers, educators, and community members in comprehensive efforts to address substance use. HCN will continue to decrease the traumas inflicted on marginalized communities by violent structural systems/racism, community violence, homelessness, and poverty through a suite of Jabali programs. The word, 'Jabali,' symbolizes strength. This Swahili word means 'strong as a rock' and refers to someone in the community who is resilient, trustworthy, and positively influences others. HCN's Jabali programs present an opportunity for HCN to facilitate holistic, trauma-informed and culturally relevant substance use prevention efforts within the Black/African American community and among all San Francisco residents. The suite of Jabali programs (see descriptions below) centers holistic treatment, collaboration with community organizations, and community conversation and engagement as tools to build meaningful connections within high-risk, marginalized communities. Through the Jabali programs, HCN seeks to reduce the prevalence of substance use disorder (SUD) through primary, secondary, and tertiary methods such as prevention, education, early intervention, treatment, care coordination, community outreach and engagement, and youth and peer advocacy.

JABALI PRIME OBJECTIVE

To engage community stakeholders (individuals and organizations) that serve Black/African American families, substance use populations, and SUD service providers in comprehensive prevention and education efforts.



The Jabali Programs

Education & Prevention

Engages community stakeholders (individuals and organizations) that serve Black/African American families, substance using populations, and SUD service providers in comprehensive prevention and education efforts through campaigns, educational curriculum, and training.

Youth Advocacy

Empowers young voices to be heard and amplified regarding substance abuse and prevention by engaging youth leaders aged 14-17 in building advocacy skills, creating messaging platforms, and taking action to address substance use in San Francisco.

Early Intervention

Provides early intervention clinical services focusing on psychoeducation, assessment, care coordination, treatment planning, and counseling, serving youth ages 12-18 who are at risk of developing a Substance Use Disorder.

Youth Outpatient

Provides outpatient treatment services, including assessment, therapy (individual, family, and group), and medical care as needed for youth ages 12-18, primarily from marginalized groups in San Francisco, who are actively using substances, meet criteria for SUD diagnosis, but who do not present with acute intoxication and/or withdrawal potential.

Intensive Outpatient

Provides outpatient treatment services, including assessment, therapy (individual, family, and group), and medical care for youth ages 12-18, primarily from marginalized groups in San Francisco, who are actively using substances and meet criteria for an SUD diagnosis, presenting with acute intoxication or withdrawal potential.

Peer-Based

Peer-Based Community Holistic Overdose Prevention Program includes a community needs assessment, specific SUD topic training, and support from peer-based counselors and a case manager serving Black/African American San Francisco residents at risk of opioid and polysubstance use disorders or fatal overdoses, including older adults, parents, transitional age youth, homeless individuals, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those with carceral system involvement.

HCN'S PROGRAM EXPANSION

BLACK BIRTHING HEALTH INITIATIVE

In response to the existing crisis in Black/African American maternal mental health, this Community Wellness Program is designed to mitigate and remove barriers to care for Black/African American birthing persons, their children and their support system through innovative, community-informed services.



CHILD PARENT PSYCHOTHERAPY (CPP)

An evidence-based, community-centered, and trauma-informed approach to restore the mental health and developmental trajectory of trauma-exposed children. HCN's goal is to broaden the spectrum of clinicians that provide CPP to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) children and their parents/caregivers in all neighborhoods in San Francisco by providing intensive training for clinicians in the practice.

ENTRE NOSOTROS

("Within Us"): Fosters an inclusive space for Latine individuals to access and reclaim holistic healing practices that empower multicultural identities and values. Services provided will include support groups, case management, referrals and linkages, and community outreach.





SUPPORTING AND NURTURING A PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND BIPOC WORKFORCE

Currently, only about 4% of therapists are Black (Yardi, 2024). The relationships that Black community members build with their therapists and healers are built on understanding, trust, and rapport. For members of the Black community, working with a therapist or healer who shares and relates to their racial and cultural background, and who understands and perhaps even shares their lived experience, is crucial for co-creating a strong therapeutic bond. **Homeless Children’s Network has managed to build, recruit, support, nurture and promote a strong Black workforce, which very few organizations in the country have been able to accomplish.** It is imperative that we begin to understand and amplify the experiences of that workforce and the factors that are key in supporting them.

We conducted three (3) focus groups with the HCN team (n = 16) from various programs and departments. Each focus group lasted for 90 minutes and was recorded and then transcribed. The questions we asked each focus group centered on their experiences being supported at HCN and explored the dynamics and types of support that are important to them. To analyze focus group data from HCN staff, we utilized two main types of coding for 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.

The key themes we found included:

- 1 Caring for the clinician;
- 2 Organizational culture promotes authentic selves; and
- 3 Addressing burnout and promoting retention.

CARING FOR THE CLINICIAN

The standard of care HCN employs to meet the needs of children, youth, families, and community members truly mirrors the standard of care in which the workforce is held at HCN. The model and culture of HCN is designed to hold space for the unique challenges that Black therapists and healers face in their personal and professional lives. Given the shared ethnic and cultural identities that staff share with the communities they serve, leadership at HCN holds space for the impacts of their work, such as vicarious trauma and triggers from events and policies that impact the community served as well as the HCN workforce.

In practice, this includes cultural celebrations, team building activities and staff retreats, generous PTO and support to take leave, a housing and transportation stipend, and providing multiple spaces for supervision and support, both one-on-one and within group settings. Uplifting and nurturing these ways of connecting and providing mutual support among HCN's team were also seen as ways to increase and sustain morale, joy, and motivation in this important yet challenging work.

"... and I think that's a big difference in the culture here, too, is that you know, we really believe in abundance in many different ways, not just financially, but also in the ways that we see people and support people and celebrate them in different ways, too. And so I think that is really felt on a variety of levels, even with things like bringing in food into meetings, right? Wanting to like feed people and nurture us. I think y'all experienced that on your visit with us as well. So I feel like that's a really big difference in just the way we treat and receive and see people."

~HCN Program Director



CARING FOR THE CLINICIAN

“The warmth and just like just attention and support, and people being understanding have helped me realize that I should take care of myself. I should make myself a priority, because I am serving the community. And what good am I doing the community if I'm not serving myself as well? And so having that be something that's amplified through our team meetings, whether it's in person or virtual. For example, during Black History Month, we had like a lunch thing. They rented a bus, and we all was just like at a cool restaurant, just chillin' playin' Uno and all types of stuff. And it was a very chill environment. That boosted me up to be like, 'Yo, I feel amazing. We're getting paid to do this? I feel amazing.' It made me think that I shouldn't be shy about taking some time off and like and feel even more supported. I should experience this more in my lifetime. So, yeah, I definitely feel supported.”

~ HCN Program Specialist



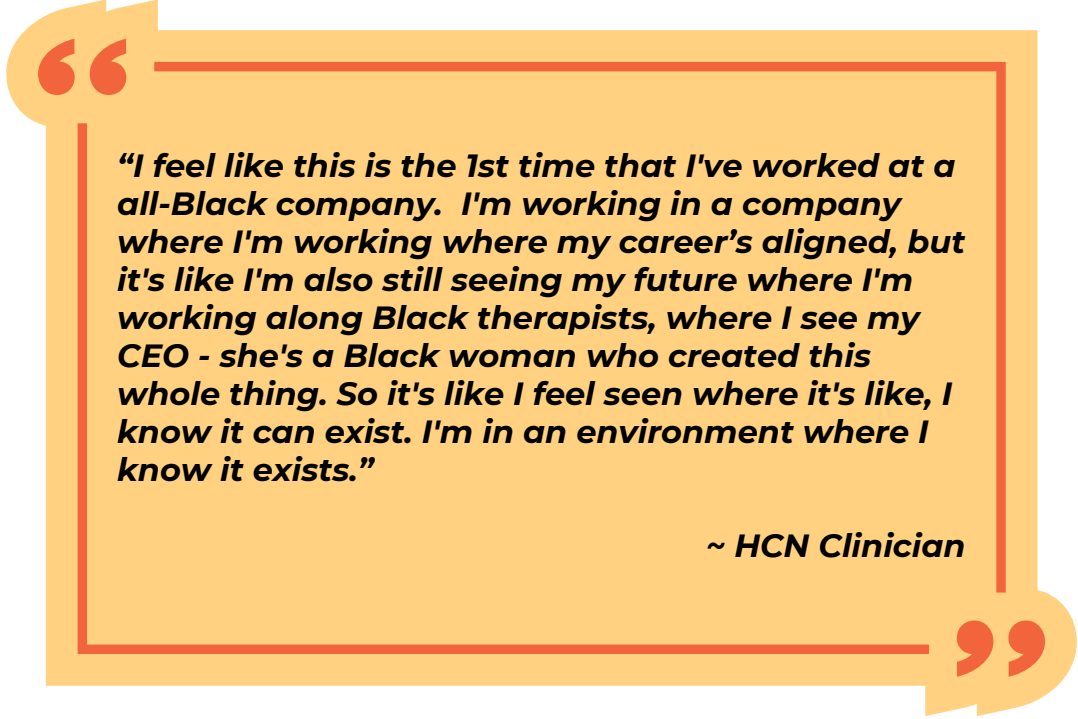
“But here at HCN, they made reflective supervision really intentional. They connected me with someone I was really close to already who felt really comfortable, for that individual support, as I'm like growing into this work. And then I also moved into a communal space of support as well. I think both of those are really incredibly held at HCN with high respect.”

~ HCN Program Manager



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE PROMOTES AUTHENTIC SELVES

All workers seek a sense of acceptance and comfort within their work space. For Black mental health practitioners and community healers, it is even more crucial that in order to thrive at work, we want to be seen as a valued member of that organization who doesn't have to contort, shape shift, and mask to be included. HCN workforce members who participated in our focus groups overwhelmingly shared that, unlike previous places of employment that were predominantly white, at HCN, they did not feel the need to be constantly vigilant about aspects of their expression such as tone and speech patterns. They also shared that at HCN there was no felt need to conform in order to contradict racial and cultural stereotypes. Focus group participants shared that constant vigilance as a necessity is unhealthy and unsustainable and contributes to burnout and turnover. They did not feel the need for constant vigilance at HCN. They also appreciated not having to code switch and fit into expected white norms of "professionalism."



"I feel like this is the 1st time that I've worked at a all-Black company. I'm working in a company where I'm working where my career's aligned, but it's like I'm also still seeing my future where I'm working along Black therapists, where I see my CEO - she's a Black woman who created this whole thing. So it's like I feel seen where it's like, I know it can exist. I'm in an environment where I know it exists."

~ HCN Clinician

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE PROMOTES AUTHENTIC SELVES

"I feel like I have to explain less here. Like I've been relieved of that. And that's because it's a majority Black agency. I just have to like, explain less of who I am. And that's yeah, that brings me a lot of joy and peace. I also get to talk about things that are the essence of Blackness – you know, when it's comfortable and safe to talk about somebody changing their hair, or the shoes they chose to wear with their outfit as a form of self-expression. It's comfortable. There's shared knowledge that just exists. We feel comfortable and safe exchanging with each other. That's amazing."

~ HCN Trainer



"It's just really nice to have people understand who you are and your culture, in a way where you don't have to explain yourself or be like code switching. "Am I allowed to say this? How will this be received"? At HCN, there's a space for us to be ourselves. I've had dialogue with Dr. Silas, really talking about Black and African American culture, and I don't have to explain it to her. I can use language or references, cultural references, and I don't have to explain them. And I think that you know, work is a place where people spend a lot of time, and so to be in a space where you don't have to work at being somebody else in order to be seen or promoted, and to be in a space where you don't have to, you know, turn it on and off - 'cause that takes energy - I think, is really, really important."

~ HCN Director

ADDRESSING BURNOUT AND PROMOTING RETENTION

Research has demonstrated that Black professionals are often burnt out due to cultural and organizational stressors (Hines & Ward, 2022). Addressing burnout is key to retaining Black therapists and community healers, and retention includes additional considerations: growth opportunities; compensation and cost of living stipends; support and connectedness among colleagues. Indeed, those were some of the themes uplifted by the HCN workforce when asked what HCN does to encourage retention.

“There's a lot of opportunities for growth, right? For example, if your current role is not a good fit, right? That could be so subjective and so individualized, right? If a role is not a good fit for you, instead of HCN just being like, ‘Okay, you got the boot,’ they're like, try out another program for size. Right? That flexibility. And I just think it's that way to say, ‘Hey, we value you, you know, stay here and try out other opportunities.’ And HCN has so many different programs - that allows us to have more opportunities for growth and diversity with how we maneuver our roles here. And I would say that's, that's key to retention.”

~ HCN Director

“And I think what helps with retention is the stipend each month of that \$1,000 stipend to pay my rent will help keep me in community mental health. That and the \$300 for our cars. I think that, on top of what we're paid feels good, and is what helps reduce my stress and keeps me around.”

~ HCN Therapist



CATALYSTS FOR SUCCESS: APPROACHES TO SERVING BLACK COMMUNITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO

In this section of the report, we summarize some key themes in understanding HCN's approach to implementing Black community mental health programs. HCN's work as a whole 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 and beyond (Fairfax, 2017).

We combed through the nine (9) program evaluation reports from this fiscal year (2023-2024) to find key themes that were the most common among the programs.

The top 3 themes included:

- 1 Integrating Afri-centric Models and Approaches;
- 2 Lived Experiences in the Community; and
- 3 Expansive Approaches to Community Mental Health.

INTEGRATING HCN'S AFRI-CENTRIC MODEL AND APPROACHES

Many of the programs at HCN were able to meet -- and in most cases exceed -- program deliverables by utilizing practices that map onto HCN's Afri-centric framework (e.g., affirms Blackness; is trauma-informed; is love-informed; focuses on self-acceptance; reframes the stigma of mental health among the Black community; integrates family and community into programming; offers space to process collective grief and fear without judgment; and facilitates difficult conversations).

Key strategies employed by the HCN team that are informed by an Afri-centric lens include:

- ✦ A focus on identifying unique areas of strength;
- ✦ Addressing barriers to resources;
- ✦ Normalizing community-clients' experiences;
- ✦ Encouraging community clients to believe in their capability and choice to engage in their own definitions of what is needed to heal; and
- ✦ Integrating community members into healing spaces.

"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



LIVED EXPERIENCES IN COMMUNITY







HCN's workforce discussed the importance of holding a stance of humility and curiosity when it comes to integrating community-love and community-knowledge into their work. And even though many members of HCN's workforce were raised in San Francisco and live in San Francisco, they mentioned the importance of never forgetting the history of Black communities in San Francisco and how that has impacted many of the people they work with.

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

~ James Spingola

EXPANSIVE APPROACHES TO BLACK COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

HCN's Afri-centric approach permeates throughout all the programs in how the staff hold, serve, and nurture their clients and families beyond the bounds of conventional mental health services. Mental health treatment often sees lower percentages of engagement among the Black community, with a variety of legitimate reasons driving this – from the field's own echoes of harm and racism to stigma, to interventions that do not reflect the intended client, to lack of insurance and underinsurance. HCN's team members intentionally hold in mind knowing their community, their community's history, and the diversity within the Black San Francisco community. Here are some of the expanded community mental health strategies that are implemented across HCN's programs:

-  We embody a holistic approach to well-being: We weave together mental health, Afri-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.



“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 could see the physical change in that person’s body.”

~ Leticia Erving

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for the workforce

It is critical that the field of mental health commits to **hiring AND supporting a culturally and linguistically congruent workforce** (Mullan, 2023; Murray-Browne, 2021). People feel seen, heard, and affirmed when someone who shares the same cultural space reflects with them and offers support, hope, and love.

Findings from previous HCN program evaluations underscore the need for mental health ‘diversity’ workforce initiatives to not only focus on increasing the numbers of Black professionals in the mental health field, but the imperative to also **expose Black students to the integration of Afri-centric frameworks early on in their mental health educational experiences**, and to **provide supportive environments for Black students to develop their sense of self** while navigating predominantly white spaces in higher education.

Another workforce implication worth noting draws attention to **WHO is hired to provide training**, coaching, mentoring, and support in Black mental health training programs. Hiring and supporting **Black therapists who embody HCN’s Afri-centric model and who are knowledgeable about liberatory frameworks** which may include Healing Justice (Page & Woodland) and Black Liberation Theology (Azibo, 1994; Hersey; 2022) is crucial to achieving transformational outcomes that have long lasting implications for the development of a Black mental health workforce.



Implications for the community

Nimble and flexible: Value of responding to community's needs in real-time. HCN's Community Mental Health model is 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 are responsive in real time to community needs, HCN provides resources, training, consultation and advice, healing circles, workshops, presentations, and individual case management and therapy services. The flexibility of this model allows the organization to plan expansively to meet the needs of specific populations, while also being responsive to emerging needs throughout the year.

Importance of expanded approach towards healing and wellness. HCN's expanded approach to healing and wellness is fully embodied through HCN's programs. 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.

Starting from within the Black community. An Afri-centric Model of Community Mental Health service provision starts from WITHIN the Black community. An Afri-centric model must start with:

- ✦ Reclaiming the mental health of our children and families,
- ✦ Reclaiming the mental health and healing of our communities,
- ✦ Reclaiming the narrative and paradigms, and consequently the education, trainings, literature, and professional development that guide our worldviews and professional identities, and
- ✦ Reclaiming the wellness of those who care for our families and communities.

It is only after this reclaiming takes place, that we can move forward towards the truth that our **Black communities deserve to have programs that reflects who we are, what we have experienced, reflects our universal worldviews, and is provided from within a Black affirming, Black supervised, Black directed, Black led paradigm.**

Next, community relationships are the lifeblood of a Black community mental health program. **Programs must be community driven, community endorsed and held accountable by the community.** A community powered model empowers collaborations for reciprocal learning and exponential growth.

Finally, community engagement strategies, as well as intervention modalities, **must be Afri-centric in vision, delivery, and implementation.**

“My very life is the convergence of multiple revolutions! As a Black woman whose entire life has been shaped by the civil rights movement, today I am standing proud in San Francisco with my Black fist in the air as an equally proud LGBTQIA+ community member. I stand as proudly as I kneel before my ancestors in gratitude for this opportunity. I stand as proudly as I protest with the multitude of beloveds who understand all beings are connected. Looking forward, I reimagine San Francisco to be a place where our communities align their voices for the panoramic well-being, radiant health, uncompromised safety, and equitable access to resources for all!”

*~Dr. April Y. Silas
CEO of Homeless Children’s Network*

REFERENCES

- Balakrishnan, E. (2023, November 2). SFPD can't explain its massive racial use-of-force disparities. Mission Local. <https://missionlocal.org/2023/11/sfpd-cant-explain-massive-racial-force-disparities/>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Publisher: Sage.
- Cho, W. K. T., Hwang, D. G. (2023). Differential effects of race/ethnicity and social vulnerability on COVID-19 positivity, hospitalization, and death in the San Francisco Bay Area. *Journal of racial and ethnic health disparities*, 10, 834-483. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01272-z>
- Fairfax, C. N. (2017). Community practice and the Afrocentric paradigm. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27(1-2), 73-80.
- Graham, M. J. (1999). The African-centred worldview: Developing a paradigm for social work. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 29(2), 251-267.
- Hines, E. & Ward, M. F. (2022). *Black women thriving report*. Every Level Leadership LLC. https://everylevelleads.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Black-Women-Thriving-Report_2022.pdf
- Marumo, P. O. & Chakale, M. V. (2018). Understanding African philosophy and African spirituality: Challenges and prospects. *Gender & Behavior*, ISSN: 1596-9231.
- Mugumbate, J.R. & Chereni, A. (2020). Editorial: Now, the theory of Ubuntu has its space in social work. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10, 1. [ISSN 2409-5605](https://doi.org/10.1080/24095605.2020.1811111).
- Mullan, J. (2023). *Decolonizing therapy*. Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Murray-Browne, S. (2021). *Decolonizing mental health: The healing power of community*. Psychotherapy Networker. November/December 2021 Issue. Retrieved July 28, 2024: <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/article/decolonizing-mental-health/>
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. The coding manual for qualitative researchers, 1-440.
- San Francisco Human Rights Commission (2020). *Investment of Funds to Support the Black Community in San Francisco: Community Engagement/Input Status Update*. Prepared by Sheryl E. Davis.
- San Francisco Human Rights Commission (2023). *San Francisco Reparations Plan 2023: A Submission from the San Francisco African American Reparations Advisory Committee*.
- Whitney, T. (2024, February 8). *A brief history of Black San Francisco*. KALW. <https://www.kalw.org/show/crosscurrents/2016-02-24/a-brief-history-of-black-san-francisco>
- Yardi, S. (2024). *Therapist Statistics 2024 By Therapy, Ethnicity, Sectors*. <https://media.market.us/therapist-statistics/>