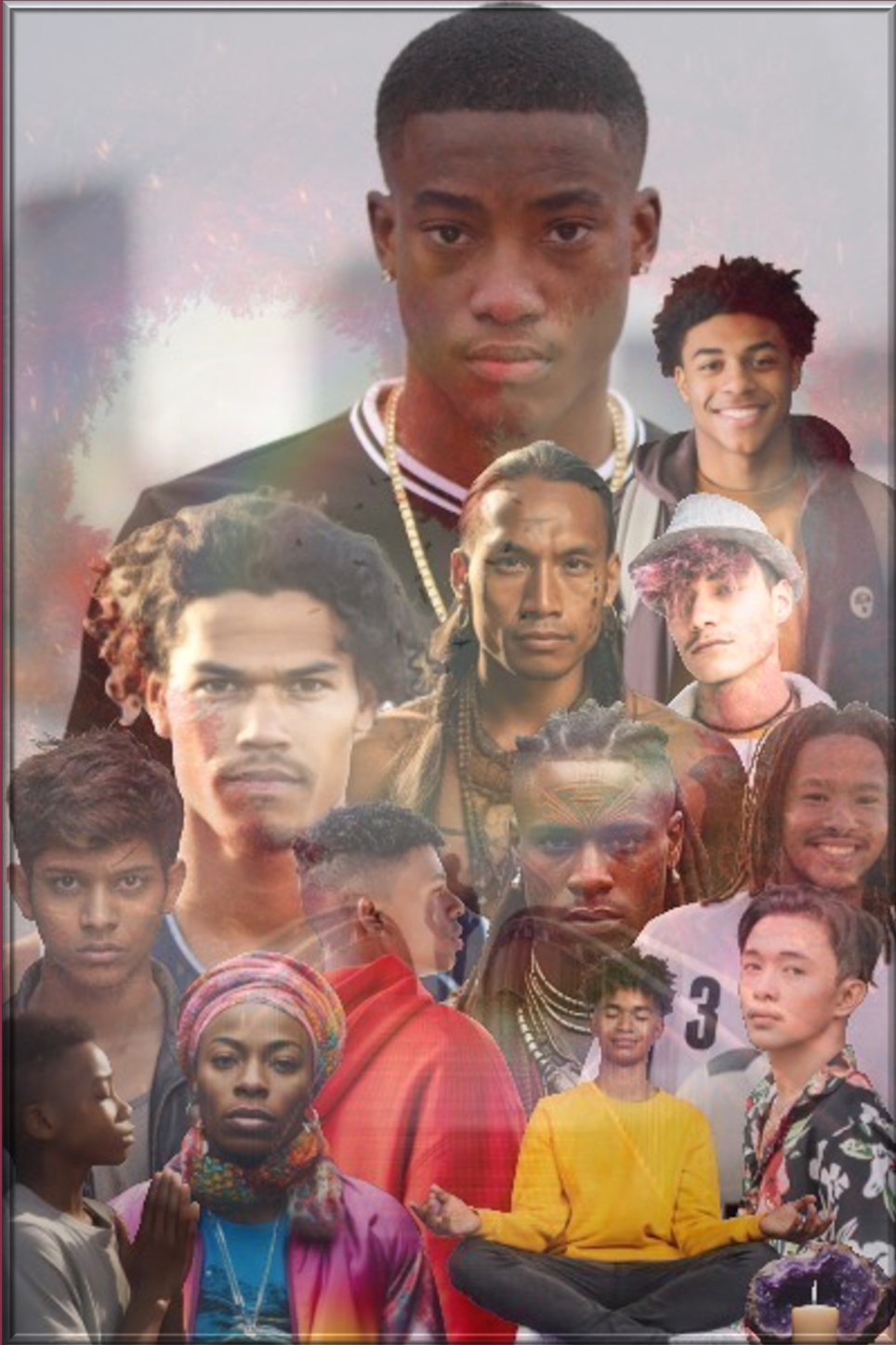


Journey To Radiance



*A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach
For Promoting The Health, Well-Being And Healing
Of Boys And Young Men Of Color*

Disclaimer

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Intergenerational Healing Activities In Nature



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Abstract

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Participation in National Community Events



The health and healing strategies include active intergenerational engagement that empowers each individual and seeks to tap into their inner joy.

Extant literature exposes the inordinate stress placed on urban school personnel and their students. While they both persevere through innumerable symptoms of a struggling educational system, both parties are expected to perform at their maximum during the teaching and learning process. This study, which is focused on the well-being of Boys and Young Men of Color (BYMOC), analyzes the effects of a community-based ecosystems approach. A community-based ecosystem is the social environment of a group of people that accurately represents their culture and includes parents/guardians, siblings and other family members, neighbors, school personnel, policy makers and other people who make up the

group's "community." A community-based ecosystems approach is an interconnected process of acknowledging and addressing the need for stress management, wellness, self-empowerment and healing strategies of the BYMOC's social environment. Data were collected from 2,436 youth, educators, school district personnel, parents/guardians, youth practitioners and community members over three years. Analyses showed a strong correlation between targeted interventions focused on the cultivation of a healthy ecosystem for both school personnel and Boys and Young Men of Color and the increased ability to improve school dynamics and learn skills to reduce the negative effects of stress and trauma. Assessment results confirmed specific language, creating safe spaces, allowing permission for self-care and engaging intergenerational role models were essential to cultivating a successful community-based ecosystems approach. Evaluation of the most effective health and healing strategies concluded that the programs with the greatest impact helped to reduce stress and improve school performance.

Key Words: Community-Based † Ecosystems Approach † Health And Healing Well-Being † Safe Spaces † Intergenerational Role Models Language Of And Permission For Self-Care

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Figure 1

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Icebreaker Activities To Cultivate Joy, Trust And Collaboration



Figure 1 illustrates the effective use of icebreaker activities as a culturally responsive strategy for promoting engaging dialogue between participants.

Why We Need A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach

In his thesis, Dr. Lesiba Baloyi “redefines psychology and psychotherapy from the viewpoint of the African experience” (Baloyi, 2008, p. 1). He asserts that, “The dominant Western paradigm of scientific knowledge in general and, psychology in particular, is anchored in a defective claim to neutrality, objectivity and universality because it obstructs Indigenous and pluriversal strategies for healing.” This assertion is crucial to accurately support the need for a community-based ecosystems approach for promoting the health, well-being and healing of Boys and Young Men of Color (BYMOC). Of equal importance is the necessity of addressing trauma specific to BYMOC by including healing strategies that can be substantiated through unconventional qualitative methodologies.

Figure 2

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Humorous Interactive Activities That Reward Participation



The Campaign for Black Male Achievement's Transformational Leadership retreat in 2009.

The Association of Black Psychologists is an alliance of psychologists of African descent that formed in 1968 after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a world-renowned civil rights activist, political philosopher, and Christian minister. At the Association of Black Psychologists' 50th anniversary convention, Dr. Phyllis SHU Hubbard surveyed the work of Dr. Baloyi and other

psychologists of the African diaspora. They grappled with ways to promote and share their research to facilitate healing in communities throughout the African diaspora. As Dr. Hubbard discovered that these challenges repeatedly surfaced during Black, Indigenous and Immigrant convenings, she decided to infuse their research into her work with BYMOC populations. Her enthusiasm for helping children to realize their potential began as a teen mentor. During the summer she spent tutoring a young Black male, Dr. Hubbard discovered that emotional trauma was the root cause of his academic challenges (Harvey, 1996). Since that time, she has worked with BYMOC communities in various capacities, including talent recruitment, mentorship and wellness training. Dr. Hubbard's collaboration with the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) began in 2009 (see Fig. 2).

The Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) was an organization focused on improving the life outcomes of leaders in the field of Black Male Achievement (BMA), which included community organizations and school personnel who mentored or educated Black males. CBMA was originally funded as a three-year campaign but secured additional funding to continue its work for a total of 10 years. Although the organization focused its efforts primarily on BMA leaders, it funded and developed several programs that directly served Black males and BYMOC communities. CBMA ceased operations of the organization in December of 2020.

CBMA invited Dr. Hubbard to be a keynote speaker at their Transformational Leadership retreat. She created an interactive experience for the retreat called "Transformational Leadership from the Inside Out," based on strategies (for healing the mind, body, emotions and spirit) that could be used to improve the personal and professional lives of its grantees. "Transformational Leadership from the Inside Out" is based on her theory of change model for cultivating self-mastery, self-empowerment and active engagement in self-care. Although CBMA asked Dr. Hubbard to focus the presentation on nutrition, she firmly asserted the importance of addressing unresolved emotional trauma (Carroll et al., 2021) as a deep underlying root cause which, unless properly processed, would sabotage the success of BYMOC leaders and prevent them from thriving.

Her affirmation is based on her research and personal experience. When Dr. Hubbard was seven years old, she accidentally stumbled upon a preteen White male raping a five-year-old Black female. She immediately wanted to rush in to help but felt some force that froze her in place. She was confused by the White male, who seemed to be talking aloud to no one and then realized, to her horror, that he was communicating with six younger Black males who were watching the scene from a distance with their hands down their pants. The

White preteen male was giving the younger Black males instructions on how to rape the young Black female. Though the boys had not yet spotted Dr. Hubbard, they were dangerously close. She realized that she had to make a quick exit to prevent herself from being attacked. She experienced a severe asthma attack as she attempted to explain to an adult what happened and then passed out before she could speak.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Hubbard developed Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). The COPD Foundation defines Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) as “chronic lung diseases including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. This disease is characterized by breathlessness. COPD is [currently] an incurable disease, but with the right diagnosis and treatment, there are many things you can do to breathe better and enjoy life and live for many years.” (What is COPD?, 2016, <https://www.copdfoundation.org/What-is-COPD/Understanding-COPD/What-is-COPD.aspx>). Although the COPD Foundation considers COPD to be incurable, holistic health asserts that diseases are actually dis-eases (a lack of ease or balance in the body).

For example, Ayurveda teaches that there are six stages of disease and that a person can reverse the course of disease by identifying and removing the mental, emotional and physical root causes (Lad, 2001, p. 209). The ancient Africans who migrated to India, beginning in the fourth century, brought with them the indigenous form of medicine that became known and developed as Ayurveda. The translation of Ayurveda is “the science of living.” Its primary function is to help people understand the profound effects that the mind and emotions have on the body and to increase self-awareness so that they can recognize the difference between a balanced and imbalanced state. This increased level of awareness helps a person to make corrections and establish a heightened state of well-being regardless of illness or age.

The practice of Ayurveda (see Fig. 3) includes but is not limited to:

- † Elemental Theory (the notion that the elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth are the building blocks and foundation of life for the body and for the universe)
- † Healing of the body, mind, emotions and spirit
- † Rebalancing personal, family, professional and social lives
- † Healing practices such as various forms of cosmology, meditation, mantras, yantras, invocation of the Gods and Goddesses, various forms of yoga (hatha, kundalini, etc.)

Figure 3

The Practice Of Ayurveda



Elemental Theory (the notion that the elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth are the building blocks and foundation of life for the body and for the universe)



Healing the body, mind, emotions and spirit



Rebalancing personal, family, professional and social lives



Healing practices such as various forms of cosmology, meditation, mantras, yantras, invocation of the Gods and Goddesses, various forms of yoga (hatha, kundalini, etc.)

Dr. Hubbard was on prescription medication which caused the COPD to become progressively worse. Ayurveda teaches that an imbalance in the body originates as an emotion that, if not processed properly, weakens the body and makes it vulnerable to disease. According to Ayurveda, if a person's sadness, depression, guilt and/or grief is suppressed, repressed and/or unhealed, it will cause a weakness or vulnerability in the lungs (Lad, 2001, p. 231). This weakness is greatly exacerbated by the onset of a traumatic event.

After 27 years of enduring the negative side effects of prescription medication, Dr. Hubbard discovered that true healing begins with her ability to take care of herself in between doctor's visits. She began to practice Ayurveda. The Ayurvedic remedies prompted the processing of suppressed and repressed emotions and mental health into its healing strategies. Within three months, her 27-year bout with COPD came to an end. This experience convinced Dr. Hubbard of the need to acknowledge and diligently work to heal trauma, inspiring her to study holistic health.

Dr. Hubbard defines Holistic Health as a wellness lifestyle approach to healing that seeks to discover and correct imbalances in the person's physical body (including mental, emotional and spiritual health) and their social environment. Her Holistic Health expertise includes Ayurveda, Naturopathy (a system of healing that uses food, water, herbs, therapeutic massage and other physical therapeutic processes to facilitate the body's self-healing mechanisms), Kamitic/Kemetiic (Ancient Egyptian) Yoga and Qigong, Reiki

(ancient Japanese system of energy healing), holistic nutrition and movement, aromatherapy, herbology, self-empowerment and cultural competency. Dr. Hubbard coined the term “Radiant Health Strategies” to promote healing of the body, mind, emotions and spirit so profound that it “radiates” wellness from one person to another and motivates people to inspire others to actively engage in self-care.

Building A Healthy Ecosystem

In 2016, The California Endowment awarded a one-million-dollar grant to CBMA for a health initiative within the Oakland and Sacramento City Unified School Districts. The “California Endowment is a not-for-profit foundation with \$3.4 billion assets under management. The foundation primarily focuses on healthcare issues including access to health care and health and well-being in California. It was founded in 1996 and is based in Los Angeles, California. Additional regional offices are situated in Sacramento, Fresno, San Diego Oakland” (The California Endowment, 2016, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-california-endowment/>). CBMA hired Dr. Hubbard to create a program entitled Black Male Achievement (BMA) Health and Healing Strategies (HHS). She based BMA HHS on her research and conviction that the BYMOC field needs the support of a healthy ecosystem to succeed, grow and fulfill its potential. BMA HHS’ focus areas included building the knowledge and skill sets needed to improve the physical and emotional health and overall wellness of the ecosystem of BYMOC (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4



(CBMA hosted a BMA HHS planning retreat with 34 school and community leaders to co-create a solid implementation strategy for the BMA HHS initiative in Northern California. The planning cohort decided to focus its efforts on supporting the psychosocial academic framework developed for middle and high school populations within Oakland Unified School District’s African American Male Achievement Program (primarily Black males) and Sacramento City Unified School District’s Men’s (BYMOC) and Women’s Leadership Academy. The team of trusted partners who lead the implementation of BMA HHS included school districts and organizations working on behalf of BYMOC populations such as Oakland Unified School District (including school personnel from San Francisco and San Leandro Unified School Districts), Sacramento City Unified School District, National CARES Mentoring Movement, Radiant Health Strategies, Strategic Destiny, LLC, 393Films, A Touch Of Life Leadership and Wellness Institute, Flourish Agenda and Spearitwux (see Fig. 5).

Figure 5



Note: Radiant Health Strategies served as the director of the program, strategic communication and facilitator of the “Transformational Leadership from the Inside Out” workshops for the strategic partners and the school districts. School personnel from other school districts such as San Francisco and San Leandro Unified School Districts were invited to participate in the wellness sessions.

The Oakland Unified School District’s Manhood Development Program

Oakland Unified School District’s (OUSD’s) Office of Equity addresses disproportionality for Black boys by employing a targeted-universal approach. Through the African American Male Achievement (AAMA) Initiative and the Manhood Development Program (MDP), OUSD’s efforts increase the grade point averages and reading levels of the African American male

student program participants. The Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) functions within the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). OUSD was the first school district in the United States to create an office to address disproportionality amongst African American males. AAMA's Manhood Development Program is "a unique academic mentoring model designed and implemented by African American males for African American males. Instructors for the program were carefully chosen based upon cultural competency, understanding of youth development and past experience teaching." (African American Male Achievement Program and Services, 2016, <https://www.ousd.org/african-american-male-achievement/programs-services>). Research data for OUSD AAMA and MDP student success can be found at <https://www.ousddata.org/public-dashboards.html>.

OUSD's Office of Equity creates systems change based on leveraging relationships and empowering people to challenge and radically disrupt oppressive systems. AAMA, working in collaboration with the Kingmakers of Oakland, was a vital partner in the implementation of BMA HHS in the City of Oakland. Kingmakers of Oakland, a non-profit organization, was developed after serving for more than ten years in the district as the facilitators of the Manhood Development Program (Kingmakers of Oakland, 2016, <https://kingmakersofoakland.org/>). Under the direction of Chris Chatmon (former Deputy Chief of OUSD's AAMA), "the independent non-profit now supports school districts across the country to improve the educational and life outcomes of Black boys by 'healing the fish while treating the toxic ecosystem.' This multi-faceted approach is rooted in a desire to collaborate, coordinate and convene folks who are inspired to create a healthy, affirming learning environment for Black boys in the public school system. Through professional development, narrative change, resources, curriculum and more, Kingmakers helps each unique district transform their school environment" (Who We Serve, 2016, <https://kingmakersofoakland.org/who-we-are/story/>).

The subsequent section provides snapshots of the different activities implemented through BMA HHS. Specifically, the BMA HHS integration within OUSD included BMA HHS workshops during teacher trainings, community engagement convenings and special events such as the OUSD Fall Forum, Spring Symposium and the Black Teacher Leadership and Sustainability Institute (see Fig. 6).

"The OUSD Fall Forum [and Spring Symposium] is a multi-day conference showcasing the Kingmakers of Oakland model for African American Male Achievement. This event is an opportunity for participants to learn ways to address the systems, structures, conditions and cultures that can lead to improved educational outcomes for African American boys from Pre-K to 12th

grade. Participants will leave with an action plan to inspire leadership for Black boys in their own city, town or region. The Fall Forum and Spring Symposium convene teams of students, teachers, principals, staff, administrators and elected officials from a combination of school district, non-profits, philanthropic and other educational institutions. The event is hosted each year by Kingmakers of Oakland, in collaboration with the African American Male Achievement Program within OUSD, as well as with their fiscal sponsor, The National Equity Project.” (Our Services, 2016, https://www.kingmakersofoakland.org/service_delivery/)

Figure 6

**BMA Health and Healing Strategies Implementation:
Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)**



CARES Mentoring's sessions and wellness circles



A Touch Of Life's wellness workshops for MDP teachers



Spearitwurx's Powerful Parenting workshops



Oakland community events such as Radiant Health Strategies' wellness sessions during the OUSD Fall Forums, Spring Symposiums, and teacher trainings, etc.

“The Black Teacher Leadership and Sustainability Institute is the Black Teacher Project’s signature professional development offering – an experiential institute providing ample opportunities for Black teachers to share, reflect and set intentions for how to lead from the classroom. Teachers will deepen their commitment, relationships and agency while developing strategies for leadership and sustainability” (Programs, 2016, <https://www.blackteacherproject.org/btp-programs>).

One AAMA administrator reported that “MDP facilitators are beginning to remember/use the concepts; very positive reception to the info cards for home and classroom ... [we need] more resources like this.”

Sacramento City Unified School District’s Men’s And Women’s Leadership Academy

Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) provides targeted academic and social-emotional interventions offered through their Youth Development Support Services (YDSS). Programs include the Men’s/Women’s Leadership Academy (MLA/WLA). The Men’s/Women’s Leadership Academy is “a class offered during the school day (and for elective credit) to teens at risk of dropping out. Through service learning and a multicultural curriculum, the class aims to provide students with the tools to succeed, including teamwork, leadership, life skills, problem-solving and resiliency skills. The Academy focuses on bringing together teachers, students, parents and community businesses and partners to provide the encouragement needed for these teens to complete high school and enroll in college. The targeted audience for the Men’s/Women’s Leadership Academy is boys/girls in grades 9–12 who have multiple risk factors, including low attendance, low academic performance and high suspension rates. Schools that have academies include C.K. McClatchy, John F. Kennedy, Rosemont, Arthur A. Benjamin Health Professions, American Legion and Sutter and California middle schools” (District Program, 2016, <https://www.scusd.edu/district-program/mens-leadership-academy>).

YDSS Programs also include site-based, out-of-school-time opportunities (after school and summer programs) that have increased school connectedness, attendance and high school graduation rates. Explicit in their goal to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and create systems to support the whole needs of the child and family, staff members of SCUSD’s YDSS Department were ideal partners for the implementation of BMA HHS in Sacramento City.

Figure 7

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:

BMA HHS Workshops For Sacramento City Unified School District School Personnel, Community Partners, Families And Service Providers



Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD)'s YDSS Department employs a social justice youth development framework toward empowering young men and women to be scholars of advocacy for self, culture and community. BMA Health and Healing Strategies offerings included:

- † Wellness mentoring circles at Sam Brannan Middle School and Will C. Wood Middle School
- † BMA HHS workshops for district school personnel, community partners, families and service providers (see Fig. 7)
- † A series of health and wellness challenges with district staff including fitness competitions, the creation of healthy work environments and offering healing centered retreats

National CARES Mentoring Movement

National CARES Mentoring Movement is a pioneering, community-galvanizing endeavor to offer Black children and underserved communities the social, emotional and academic support needed to unleash their potential and graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college or vocational-training programs and twenty-first century careers. More than 140,000 mentors and local CARES affiliate leaders across 58 U.S. cities are devoted to advancing young people who are often isolated and mostly written off by society (Mission and Vision, 2016, www.caresmentoring.org).

Figure 8

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: CARES Mentoring Wellness Sessions/Circles



BMA HHS collaborated with CARES Mentoring to elevate education, expectation and self-esteem by engaging youth in community wellness circles (see Fig. 8). The CARES Mentoring Wellness Circles were implemented across

five middle school sites in a partnership between Oakland Unified School District's Office of Equity and Sacramento City Unified School District's Men's/Women's Leadership Academy (MLA/WLA). One mentee at Sam Brannan Middle School in Sacramento City reported "I used to get into trouble with my teachers, now my grades are up." Another mentee shared that participating in mentoring circles "made me feel more responsible and helped me to think about life choices." The CARES Mentoring partners recruited and trained 240 adult mentors in Oakland and Sacramento City, conducting 71 wellness mentoring sessions with a total of 440 youth participants.

Radiant Health Strategies

Radiant Health Strategies (RHS), is a Holistic Health Education business, founded by Dr. Phyllis SHU Hubbard. RHS specializes in root cause analysis, organizational, professional and personal transformation, sustainability, therapeutic nutrition and movement, clinical aromatherapy, herbalism, self-empowerment and cultural competency. Dr. Hubbard travels nationally and internationally as a holistic health educator, gathering research on Indigenous health practices to integrate into her healing techniques. RHS has provided customized wellness education for corporate and community organizations since 2007.

Figure 9

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Radiant Health Strategies' Transformational Leadership From The Inside Out Workshop



RHS launched BMA HHS and strategic communication endeavors, including Executive Producing and co-hosting and the "Journey to Radiance" podcasts and webisodes, facilitating Transformational Leadership From The Inside Out workshops (see Fig. 9), producing numerous blogs, instructional videos

And empowering images. The Journey to Radiance podcasts and webisodes aimed to promote healthy lifestyles, share empowering healing strategies and provide accurate, positive and healthy depictions of Black men and boys, specifically as it relates to cultural identity, health and healing. The Journey to Radiance theme song and multimedia productions are available for open-source use to the public at: <https://www.phyllishubbard.com/journey> and <https://bit.ly/JTRPodcasts>.

Radiant Health Strategies encouraged BYMOC participants to discover their unique gifts and talents and actively engage in self-care through self-empowerment and wellness education. One workshop participant reported,

“After leaving Dr. Hubbard’s session, I made a vow to become better holistically. I changed my diet, started exercising and found a circle of friends to help hold me accountable.”

RHS facilitated 10 transformational leadership workshops, produced 27 blogs and educational posts and executive produced and co-hosted 13 “Journey to Radiance” podcasts, two webisodes and wrote the lyrics to the Journey to Radiance theme song.

Strategic Destiny: Designing Futures Through Faith And Facts

Strategic Destiny: Designing Futures Through Faith and Facts was founded by Reverend Dr. Alfonso Wyatt. Strategic Destiny seeks to find common language and collaborative opportunities with socially engaged practitioners who are motivated by faith, as well as secular practitioners motivated by evidence-based learning. Through workshops, training and healing circle facilitation, Strategic Destiny empowers caregivers to support their own healing and to influence the health and wellness of the youth they serve. Dr. Wyatt is a renowned national speaker on issues affecting men, children, youth, adults, families, community mental and physical health. In his role as a national public theologian, he offers a message of hope in and out of the faith community. Dr. Wyatt provides consulting to government institutions, universities, foundations, public/charter schools, nonprofits and civic groups.

In alignment with BMA HHS, Strategic Destiny provided workshops and training to community-based organizations, educators and families (see Fig. 10). Sacramento City Unified School District’s Youth Development Support Services collaborated with Dr. Wyatt to provide crisis-response support and

Figure 10

**A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Strategic Destiny's "Triumph Over Trauma" Workshop For Parents And Caregivers**



community healing for Sacramento families, district staff and community members after the tragic loss of Stephon Clark, a young Black man killed by police in March of 2018.

“In the late evening of March 18, 2018, Stephon Clark, a 22-year-old African-American man, was shot and killed in Meadowview, Sacramento City, California by Terrence Mercadal and Jared Robinet, two officers of the Sacramento City Police Department in the backyard of his grandmother’s house while he had a phone in his hand. The encounter was filmed by police video cameras and by a Sacramento City County Sheriff’s Department helicopter which was involved in observing Clark on the ground and in directing ground officers to the point at which the shooting took place. The officers stated that they shot Clark, firing 20 rounds, believing that he had pointed a gun at them. Police found only a cell phone on him. While the Sacramento City County Coroner’s autopsy report concluded that Clark was shot seven times, including three shots to the right side of the back, the pathologist hired by the Clark family stated that Clark was shot eight times, including six times in the back. The shooting caused large protests in Sacramento City, and Clark’s family members have rejected the initial police description of the events leading to Clark’s death. The Sacramento City Police

Department placed the officers on paid administrative leave and opened a use of force investigation. Police have stated they are confident that Clark was the suspect responsible for breaking windows in the area prior to the encounter” (Killing of Stephon Clark, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Stephon_Clark).

One Strategic Destiny workshop participant reported that they learned “tools for reframing and redirecting student behavior and using strength-based language.” Strategic Destiny facilitated 11 workshops with a total of 328 participants. The Strategic Destiny workshops offered extensive follow-up (including handouts and take home activities). Some presentations were facilitated as a series. Although each workshop welcomed new attendees, the total may include duplicate participants who attended more than one session.

393Films

“393Films creates multimedia projects aimed at transforming thoughts through creating media that inspires action (see Fig. 11). A San Francisco (USA) Bay Area-based full production house, 393Films’ services include screenwriting, directing and editing with state-of-the-art equipment and innovative digital media software. Founder Adimu Madyun, a.k.a. ‘WolfHawkJaguar,’ has an extensive history of production and service. An educator, filmmaker and musician, Adimu has produced films and music in both the United States and various African countries. Additionally, he facilitates the DetermiNation Black Men’s Group and trains youth in media and music production” (2016, www.393films.com).

“The DetermiNation Black Men’s Group is a program developed by United Roots of Oakland, a Youth Impact Hub. “United Roots, in partnership with Urban Peace Movement, launched the DetermiNation youth program in May 2013. DetermiNation is a program designed to support the success and development of young African American males (ages 16-24) from the Oakland area (the DetermiNation project was created and developed by Markese Bryant of Fight for Light). The DetermiNation program is especially tailored to support young men who are struggling to advance in their own life goals (such as employment, career, educational or other personal goals) and who have been formerly involved in or are currently in close proximity to the “street life.” As part of the program, youth participants will develop their media production skills and produce projects like short films, music and graphic design to share their personal stories and/or present a vision of what is possible for young

men of color in our communities. The media production will be part of the Boys and Men of Color media engagement strategy (a statewide initiative led by The California Endowment: <https://www.calendow.org/>).

The program entails a weekly support group for young Black males, with opportunities to do media production with youth groups throughout California. Participants will learn about Black culture and history and develop new skills and tools for achieving life goals. The program will also offer basic instruction in media production, and participants will be required to produce media projects as part of the training. Participants will receive a stipend for participation in weekly training sessions and have additional paid opportunities doing media production.” (DeterminaTION, 2016, <https://www.unitedrootsoakland.org/determination.html>).

Figure 11

**A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
393Films' Transformative Multimedia That Inspires Action**



In partnership with BMA HHS, 393Films co-hosted and produced the “Journey to Radiance” podcasts and webisodes to shift the narrative around BYMOC, specifically as it related to health and healing. The overarching goal for this collaboration was to elevate accurate, positive and healthy lifestyles of BYMOC. An activist, who calls himself “Young Black Soul,” left the following review of Journey to Radiance:

“This is a great podcast! Journey to Radiance focuses on one of the most pervasive issues in the Black community–Health and Healing. Learn more about the art of health and healing through this high quality, informative podcast! Side-note: awesome intro track!”

Another reviewer shared, “I can’t recommend this podcast enough. Much needed and happy you’re creating this for us! Thank you.” 393Films produced 13 Journey to Radiance podcasts, two Journey to Radiance webisodes and a Journey to Radiance theme song which was written by Dr. Hubbard and performed and produced by Adimu Madyun.

A Touch Of Life

A Touch Of Life is a health and wellness institute that specializes in facilitating transformational team building and employee wellness training for non-profit organizations, corporations and county/state institutions. Founder Asara Tsehai brings more than 35 years of experience in the health and wellness industry to her training and workshops. Ms. Tsehai’s work has been featured in several national publications, including Essence, Sister to Sister and Heart and Soul magazines.

Oakland Unified School District’s African American Male Achievement Office commissioned A Touch Of Life to lead the BMA HHS sessions for Oakland Unified School District’s Manhood Development Program personnel (see Fig. 12).

Figure 12

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
A Touch Of Life Wellness Workshops For Teachers



Note: Figure 12 illustrates the inclusion of family members in the self-care process. The MDP facilitators were encouraged to bring their children to sessions that occurred during after school hours so that they would not have to seek/pay for child care.

Session topics included overall health and well-being, nutrition, reflexology, yoga and guided development of individualized personal wellness plans. One wellness session participant reported that Asara’s sessions “created space to recharge/re-energize and ground one-self.” Another participant shared that

“[I’m] shifting patterns of behavior [workaholic mode, overexertion], toward a more meditative state.”

A Touch Of Life facilitated a total of 20 workshop sessions for the 25 OUSD MDP staff members.

Flourish Agenda

Flourish Agenda is a national non-profit consulting firm that works with youth of color, schools, youth serving organizations, foundations and local governments to build and implement strategies that allow young people to flourish. They are the leading providers of the healing centered engagement strategies, tools and research that are necessary to reimagine how systems can more effectively support young people of color.

“Healing Centered Engagement is an asset-based and culturally-rooted approach to healing and well-being for young people of color and their adult allies. The term was coined by Dr. Shawn Ginwright in 2018 and is based on more than 30 years of research and practice with young people, schools, probation departments and social workers. The healing centered engagement approach is a non-clinical and holistic process involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. It views trauma not simply as an individually isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively” (Certification, 2016, <https://flourishagenda.com/healing-centered-engagement-certification/>).

Flourish Agenda conducted seminars, workshops and trainings with K-12 teachers, non-traditional educators and district staff in each of the two targeted communities in Oakland and Sacramento City (see Fig. 13). Their Healing Centered Engagement workshops in schools and communities included strategies to support personal self-care, healing and tools toward the integration of a healing centered approach in educational practices.

Figure 13

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Flourish Agenda's Healing Centered Engagement Workshops



Additional BMA HHS efforts included:

- † Keynote addresses by Founder, Author and CEO Dr. Shawn Ginwright
- † Healing Centered Engagement workshops and retreats that provide breakthrough experiences to educational practitioners and caregivers
- † Customized services to support institutions and evaluate program impact and effectiveness
- † Application of research findings on youth of color, racial trauma and well-being to improve practices and inform the field

Flourish Agenda facilitated 13 sessions with a total of 309 participants. Flourish Agenda workshops offered extensive follow-up (including handouts and take-home activities). Some presentations were facilitated as a series. Although each workshop welcomed new attendees, the total may include duplicate participants who attended more than one session.

More than 80% of participants reported being motivated and willing to use the Healing Centered Engagement model for their youth and for their personal enrichment. Some participants were already using the model and enthusiastically attended these popular workshops as a refresher to their previous training experiences.

Spearitwurx

Spearitwurx provides innovative consulting and training for parents and youth development professionals on topics such as powerful parenting, staff wellness and sustainability, crisis intervention, intergenerational and vicarious trauma, classroom management, restorative justice, effective team building and more. Spearitwurx’s mission is to develop young people’s ability to actively contribute to the transformation of their families and create a healthy and sustainable community. They fulfill their mission by equipping youth development professionals with the right tools to engage and empower youth toward health and wellness. Additionally, Spearitwurx focuses on building support within families to provide a safe space for parents and youth to share strategies on how to build safety, sustainability and solidarity (2016, <https://www.spearitwurx.com/about-us.html>).

Figure 14

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Spearitwurx’s Powerful Parenting Workshops And Support For Families



In alignment with BMA HHS, Spearitwurx provided monthly healing centered workshops for parents, families and community members within the Oakland Unified School District (see Fig. 14). Most notably, at West Oakland Middle School, Spearitwurx bridged the cultural gap between the school community’s African American and Yemeni families through engagement in shared health and healing learning opportunities for parents and guardians. One participant shared, “If the parents felt welcomed and loved in schools, we would be able to do so much more for the children.” Spearitwurx facilitated 10 sessions with a total of 362 participants. Spearitwurx workshops offered extensive follow-up (including handouts and take-home activities). Although each workshop welcomed new attendees, the total may include duplicate participants who attended more than one session.

BMA HHS Participant Engagement

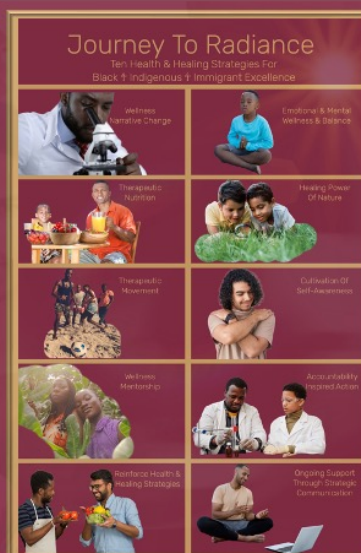
BMA HHS engaged 2,436 youth, educators, school district personnel, parents/guardians, youth practitioners and community members in various opportunities designed to build transformative leadership and promote health, healing and overall wellness for BYMOC, including the following:

- † Facilitation of more than 135 health and healing workshops, seminars and retreats
- † Engagement of 440 middle school boys in wellness mentoring circles
- † Production of 13 BMA HHS podcasts and two webisodes containing health and healing demonstrations, an affirmative theme song and numerous educational graphics (see Fig. 15)
- † Recruitment and training of 240 mentors
- † Facilitation of informational workshops and caregiver retreats with 354 parents, grandparents and/or guardians
- † Development of 27 BMA HHS blogs and educational posts

Ninety-one percent of workshop participants were motivated to increase physical activity; and 82% of workshop participants learned new skills to help reduce the negative effects of stress and trauma.

Figure 15

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Educational Graphics That Accurately Represent Black, Indigenous And Immigrant Communities

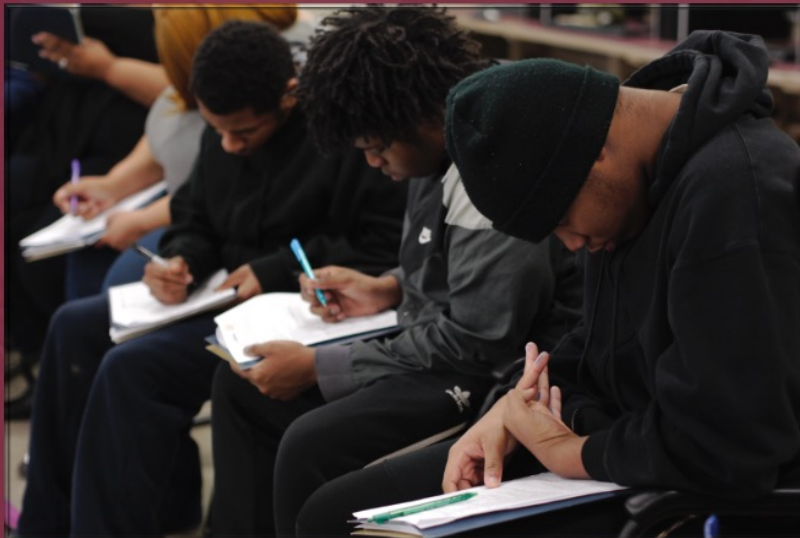


Evaluation And Methodology

During the second year of the initiative, Dr. Hubbard engaged a local evaluation partner, Innovation Bridge, to capture, document and analyze impact. The following sections detail the methodology and key findings of that assessment. Historically, the BYMOC community has often found itself the subject of research that pathologized negative narratives, yielding more harm than benefits for the community. Repeated research-related atrocities have harmed, silenced and exploited BYMOC, leading to significant distrust between researchers and the BYMOC community. Understanding this context, BMA HHS methodology sought to “illuminate the complex dimensions of goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi) as a counterpoint to the dominant culture and tradition of documenting failure in communities of color (see Fig. 16). The overall goal was to capture the wholeness and complexity of BMA HHS as it related to structures, people, relationships, goals, education and voice. The section below details how data was collected and evaluated.

Figure 16

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Empowering Students To Offer Feedback And Co-Create The Healing Experience



The analysis of BMA HHS commenced at the start of the second year. Innovation Bridge collected data using workshop attendance, post-workshop provider surveys and informal interviews with stakeholders to capture impact during the first year of implementation. The team surveyed attendance to provide a preliminary quantitative outlook on engagement and participation in the various programs/workshops and reviewed post-workshop surveys and stakeholder interviews to obtain preliminary qualitative data.

The evaluation team began primary data collection during the second year of implementation. This data centered on participant evaluation surveys and field observations. The objective was to ascertain the impact and sustainability of health and healing strategies within participants' everyday lifestyle and practices. Innovation Bridge conducted field observations to gain a better understanding of participant level impact. The team conducted their observations from the vantage point of participant observers, who attended the full breadth of programming while on site, taking intermittent notes. Innovation Bridge then debriefed and expanded on the notes.

The evaluation team analyzed targeted data via document review and provider focus groups to verify and support initial findings from the preliminary data review. Analysis of provider focus groups conducted during the second year of implementation and document review data, in conjunction with the primary data, provided additional clarity. The team and strategic partner organizations facilitated participant focus groups to further understand the impact of strategies on youth, practitioners and families. Innovation Bridge examined and triangulated the data for impact themes through the three data profiles (primary, targeted and analysis; see Fig. 17).

The team identified and cross-referenced emerging themes with health and healing strategies for relevance. They shared a preliminary write-up of the findings with BMA HHS partners, who provided additional clarity and feedback. The feedback was used as an additional analytical tool to determine the overall impact, giving voice to the community to capture the “complex dimensions of goodness” associated with BMA HHS. Innovation Bridge organized their findings based on effective BMA HHS strategies, key opportunities and recommendations for moving forward.

Figure 17



Fostering a Community-Based Ecosystems Approach

The information that follows summarizes the most impactful health and healing strategies within the implementation and evaluation of this initiative (see Fig. 18). The evaluation team highlighted practices that may be useful for individuals looking to begin or enhance their personal journey to wellness and offered suggestions for those who support others on their paths.

Figure 18



Confirming Specific Language

The first key finding from BMA HHS was the power of affirmative language in the healing process. This included the acquisition, understanding and use of supportive language. One of the barriers to healing is the inability to name what is wrong and to address the need for healing. Learning the “language of self-care” enabled participants to identify and name the trauma in their own lives, as well as in the lives of BYMOC (see Fig. 19). Additionally, it allowed participants to refine their process of identifying their emotions and facilitate better communication, youth-to-youth, youth-to-adult and adult-to-adult, in the process of securing empowering and authentic relationships.

The CARES wellness mentors created and consistently used memorable slogans to encourage student participants to use the language of self-care. One example is the expression “Saying it Out.” This expression empowered students to articulate their feelings, learn how to receive and respond to critical feedback and feel more confident in their ability to communicate. “Saying it Out” helped students to mindfully develop counter statements or ask questions for improved clarity, to maintain balance when emotionally triggered, which improved engagement in their schoolwork.

Figure 19



Flourish Agenda provided teachers and school personnel with the language of CARMA – Culture, Agency, Relationships, Meaning and Aspirations (Ginwright, 2016). As one of the Flourish Agenda session participants stated, “Through CARMA, I have been able to attune and refine the abstract attitudes and behaviors that no longer serve me.” For this participant, acquiring the language has not only led to an evaluation of the behaviors that serve them, but has supported them in building healthy relationships as they engage in therapy and liberation work in the community. Acquiring the word “agency” helped another participant to identify toxic relationships and take control of her mental health. CARMA provided clarity of purpose and improved her sense of confidence and personal power.

Flourish Agenda addressed their youth participants as “wellness contributors” and community “change agents.” This reframing shifted limiting beliefs about BYMOC as they developed spiritual practices, growth mindsets and healthy ways of living which made a positive impression on adults, particularly as the youth discovered their identity and purpose.

Creating Safe Spaces

The cultivation of safe healing spaces is another strategy that showed evidence of impact across BMA HHS partners and participants. Adult participants described their experiences of working within the school systems as “high stress, non-affirming and littered with microaggressions.” Youth participants spoke of school as a place that constantly threatened their

physical and social-emotional safety. They also described having to endure fights, excessive discipline, low achievement and a lack of confidence. The BMA HHS partners worked diligently to curate peaceful meeting spaces and infuse Indigenous healing circle rituals (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014) into their sessions (see Fig. 20). “[Indigenous] healing circles ... consist of people who sit together in a talking circle, in prayer, in ceremony and are committed to helping one another and to each other’s healing.” (Introducing Healing Circles and Talking Circles into Primary Care, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4022550/>).

Figure 20

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Creating Safe Spaces



BMA HHS Indigenous healing circle rituals would often include burning sage, palo santo or another traditional incense to clean the energy of the room before attendees arrive/during the opening ceremony, setting boundaries and intentions at the beginning of the session, taking a few moments to acknowledge the ancestors, the use of a talking piece such as a healing crystal or stone, breathing exercises with movement, engaging the participants in simple art projects to express their feelings, ice breaker games (see Fig. 1) to cultivate joy, trust and collaboration, etc.

The BMA HHS participants considered the meeting spaces to be places of refuge and healing for people of color. The attendees obtained valuable problem-solving and stress-management skills that they could explore with their colleagues and apply to novel situations.

Dr. Alfonso Wyatt of Strategic Destiny communicated the importance of cultivating a familial connection with his participants. Because grandparents, who were raising their grandchildren, participated in his workshops, he worked to find spaces within the community of the attendees to create an increased sense of safety, comfort and convenience.

Allowing Permission For Self-Care And Wellness Practices

Many BMA HHS partners stressed the importance of working with school personnel and community leaders to allow permission for, promote and prioritize self-care (see Fig. 21). This foundation allowed participants to remix their approach to building relationships with BYMOC. Claudette Lee and Ethel Williams stated that “survival ... racism, discrimination and oppression define the childhood of an African American male” (2001, p. 56). This narrative can often be interpreted through the lens of fear for the survival of BYMOC, leading caring adults to inadvertently approach relationship building through the vehicle of toughness, aggression or hypermasculinity.

Figure 21

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Allowing Permission For Self-Care And Wellness Practices



BMA HHS inspired and sponsored the creation of Sacramento City Unified School District's self-care room for teachers to relax and collaborate

The mothers and grandmothers who participated in the BMA HHS workshop sessions led by Spearitwux spoke about the fear that comes from the challenge of raising BYMOC in Oakland, CA. Yet, as part of their BMA HHS efforts, Spearitwux emphasized the importance of self-care as a process for dealing with the increasing stressors of raising BYMOC. They recommended strategies

They recommended strategies such as “connecting before you correct,” and “taking a breath before you engage in the correction process to make it more meaningful and less punitive.” These more thoughtful approaches to correction impacted how the participants of Spearitwurx engaged with their children. As one participant stated, the strategies she’s learned have helped her to “not be so aggressive” and to “calm myself down” when communicating with her grandchildren. Other participants noted that, despite the view that you can’t “slack on your mack with town teenagers,” the strategies of “more love and hugs, reciprocity with positivity,” and being more open to learning how to communicate with their children/grandchildren led to positive change.

Engaging Intergenerational Role Models

One of the most prominent areas of impact was the interactive engagement of intergenerational role models which included youth, adults and elders (see Fig. 22). The CARES mentors noted that the students who participated in their wellness circles at both the Oakland and Sacramento City sites experienced improved grades, confidence, behavior and communication skills. Student focus group participants reported that the wellness circle sessions were a protected space that allowed them to express their emotions in healthy ways. Participating in the wellness circles increased their awareness and personal responsibility to self and community, including modeling respectful and positive male-female relationships. Utilizing intergenerational role models to demonstrate and empower youth to create counter narratives resulted in academic and interpersonal success. One middle school principal noted, “The boys have learned how to forgive each other.”

Figure 22

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Intergenerational Role Model Engagement



The intergenerational role models consistently affirmed the BYMOC participants with empowering titles to focus them on a vision for their success. Spearitwurx presented BYMOC as “entrepreneurs,” providing place and space for students to be seen as resources to their community through their pop-up resource village. Spearitwurx also employed a catering company founded by a 13-year-old African American male to provide healthy food for their workshops.

Additional Factors To Consider

The following recommendations are focused more specifically on challenges and opportunities to increase BMA HHS for BYMOC within educational, city and community-based systems of support. Several BMA HHS partners noted the complexity and challenges of promoting wellness within the various school systems. These obstacles impacted their access to a diversity of potential participants who could benefit from their programming. The strategic partners asserted the need for school-wide and district-wide buy-in from institutional partners as well as an emphasis on streamlining access to space and potential participants for effective implementation.

While participants from educational systems spoke to the value and safety of having spaces that were primarily for people of color, there was also an acknowledgment that it was important to encourage their White peers to understand the need for and participate in self-care. Attendees reported a dire need for helping white school and community leaders to understand how their actions contribute to the creation/sustainability of toxic ecosystems. This understanding increases cultural competency, facilitates narrative change and actively engages white peers in the creation of a healthy ecosystem for BYMOC in schools.

Although background checks are used to contribute to the overall safety of schools, they can also serve as a barrier to the inclusion and participation of male adults of color. Though the culture of mass incarceration and the prison-industrial complex disproportionately impacts men of color, this fact is not addressed within the current policies around background checks, specifically regarding schools and/or youth-serving organizations. The prison-industrial complex is a term that makes the connection between various prisons systems (such as juvenile detention centers, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, etc.) and the businesses/governments that financially benefit from their growth and expansion. Consequently, males of color are frequently excluded from program leadership. Unfortunately, access to health and healing strategies that can assist BYMOC in recovering from trauma experienced within the justice system (through direct and/or indirect involvement) is denied due to their association

with those justice systems. BMA HHS partners and participants noted how the work is incomplete and, in some ways, self-defeating if these opportunities for participation continue to be elusive for men of color.

Recognizing that the specific health and healing needs for BYMOC in each city, school district and community are unique, how can we build on impactful strategies from Northern California to expand the work of this initiative to other communities throughout the country? What online or web-based opportunities exist for national and global learning collaborations? Furthermore, how do we expand to more explicitly address the critical needs of BYMOC, such as nutritional and mental health needs at various stages of life or health and healing support for BYMOC who are gender non-conforming, non-binary or transgender (see Fig. 23)?

Figure 23

**A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Wellness Support For The Gender Non-Conforming And Transgender Community**



Note: Gender non-conforming participants felt safe to be themselves during BMA HHS events.

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Figure 24

**A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Healing And Empowerment Retreats For Youth**



About The Author

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Celebration Of Identity † Ancestry † Culture



Dr. Phyllis SHU Hubbard specializes in Naturopathy, Natural and Indigenous Medicine, Ayurveda, Yoga, Qigong and Injury Prevention, Cultural Competency, Intuition Development, Visual Healing, Sacred Geometry and Multimedia, Root Cause Analysis and Problem Solving, Healing Through Storytelling, Transformational Leadership from the Inside Out, Creative Nonfiction, Technical and Academic Writing.

She designs interactive learning experiences using creative nonfiction, visual healing art and multimedia to advocate for and teach pluriversal wellness strategies for balancing the

body, mind and emotions. Dr. Hubbard is a social programming researcher who facilitates racial healing and decolonization through reconnection to identity, ancestry and culture. Her previous work as a PBS TV Producer inspired her to create and edit most of her videos to revolutionize the way people engage with self-care. She intends to develop and establish a global media platform for her Rise TV Channel and aspires to collaborate with investors and filmmakers who can help her reach disenfranchised communities. She trains organizations to utilize healing centered engagement practices for transformational leadership, professional development and workplace wellness. She is the creator of “A Cross-Cultural Healing Haven: A Healing Space For Everyone That Centers Black † Indigenous † Immigrant People” and continues to develop phyllishubbard.com into comprehensive online time devoted to self-care.

Dr. Phyllis SHU Hubbard is often pictured with Shu who is the Kamitian (Ancient Egyptian) God of Air † Breathologist † Sustenance of Life. The picture on this page represents healing through connection to identity, ancestry and culture. The “†” symbol means “key of life” and is an integral part of the restorative healing strategies shared on phyllishubbard.com. The African jackal represents community service, strategy, healing and empowerment of the disenfranchised.

Visual Appendix

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Wellness Collaborations With Student Support Services At Universities



A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach: Wellness Strategies and Empowered Dialogues
Between School Personnel, Students And Community Members



Visual Appendix

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Encouraging The Authentic Expression Of Black, Indigenous And Immigrant People



A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Engaging White Peers In The Co-Creation Of A Healthy Ecosystem For BYMOC



Visual Appendix

A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Strategic Partners Who Represent Black † Indigenous † Immigrant Communities



A Community-Based Ecosystems Approach:
Strategic Partners Who Represent Black † Indigenous † Immigrant Communities

