

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH  
AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN UsCC SUBCOMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES – September 19, 2019**

**Location: Lennox Library  
4359 Lennox Blvd, Lennox, CA 90304  
2:00pm – 4:00pm**

**Date:** September 19, 2019

**Present:** Philip Butler, Nakeya Fields, Romalis Taylor, Makesha Jones Chambers, Senait Admassu, JM Sales, C. Cleo Ray, Lanee Lanford, Kelly Thomas, Amy Williams, Craig Davis

**DMH Staff:** Anna Yaralyan, Mirtala Parada Ward, Desiree DeShay, Keacha Stewart, MC Harris,

**Participants via conference call:** Elisha Singleton, Ericka Malbourne, Imani Bradley

Agenda Items	Comments/Discussion/Recommendations/Conclusions
<b>Introductions</b>	Everyone introduced themselves.
<b>Review and Approval of Minutes</b>	Meeting Minutes approved.
<b>Capacity Building Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Seekr Project-Philip Butler, Ph.D.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Seeker Project Philip Butler, Ph.D.</b>	<p><b><u>Project Description:</u></b></p> <p>This project will introduce a culturally relevant conversation artificial intelligence (AI) agent with mental health capacities to the Black Community in Los Angeles County. The AI is intended to improve the perception of mental health in the Black community while increasing the amount of individuals who intentionally access mental health services. The Seekr project is a Black conversational AI that has 24/7 availability, immediate response times, and is a discreet medium for presenting mental health techniques to people who may need to process their mental and emotional state.</p>
<b>Seeker Project Philip Butler, Ph.D.</b>	<p><b><u>Project Purpose:</u></b></p> <p>As a Black AI, the Seekr project is geared towards providing an individualized digital safe space for Black people. Given the persistent stigma/apprehension surrounding issues of mental health in the Black community, Seekr was created to provide culturally relevant ways to engage people within the Black community through mediums they already utilize - their computers and mobile devices. Seekr is actively being trained in therapeutic methods that are intended to teach and engage users in an informal and compassionate way.</p>
<b>Seeker Project Philip Butler, Ph.D.</b>	<p><b><u>Project Objective:</u></b></p>

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Capacity Building Projects</b></p>	<p>The objective is two pronged:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase public engagement with mental health techniques, resources, and professionals through the text based medium of the Seekr platform.</li> <li>2. Increase emotional awareness among the Black population in Los Angeles County and the intentional implementation self-attenuation techniques geared towards greater levels of self-awareness and stress reduction.</li> </ol> <p><b>Project Justification:</b> Due to the ongoing stigma of mental health within the Black community, it is imperative to find a medium that is both palatable and discreet. Seekr provides a safe avenue for individuals to discuss mental health issues and to raise questions in a way that does not place them in a vulnerable position. This project allows for wider reaching, more automatic, and easily accessible modes of mental health support.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Empowering the Black Family Conversation Series – Nakeya Fields</b></p>	<p><b>● Empowering the Black Family Conversation Series – Nakeya Fields</b></p> <p><b>Project Description:</b> The Conversation Series is an innovative and deep dialogue about topics that affect the wellness of Black residents of the greater Los Angeles area, with particular focus on residents of Altadena, and adjacent communities. The goal of this monthly event is to decrease stigma &amp; increase awareness of healthy coping via an in-depth dialogue about mental health issues, connect to our most at risk, and provide resources/linkages for families who are in need of services. Interactive Healing Stations (massage, healing art, restorative yoga, affirmation stones, listening ear therapeutic check-ins) that is incorporated for the enjoyment of participants throughout the 2.5-hour events. The Series; also features a Q&amp;A with a Panel of Black Mental Health and conversation topic and assigned Linkages Coordinator for continued outreach in between conversation events. Nutritious foods will be provided at each event to model mindful eating and taking care of self.</p> <p><b>Project Purpose:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Increase awareness by having a dialogue about mental health issues among Altadena residents and adjacent communities.</li> <li>(2) Provide multi-disciplinary psychoeducation for parents and other adults who interact with school – aged youth to better detect and respond in a culturally competent way to mental health issues.</li> <li>(3) Connect residents who are faced with behavioral health issues (including serious emotional disturbance (SED) or serious mental illness (SMI) to needed services and include follow up to ensure that they are able to access their recommended services</li> <li>(4) Target expecting/new parents and those dealing with domestic violence to help improve functioning and health of the full family unit in times of transition and/or crisis</li> <li>(5) Develop healthy coping skills and provide community support with the intention of building a village/each one teach one mentality that becomes normative over the course of the Series</li> <li>(6) Provide a safe, culturally competent space to express emotion about issues facing the Black community.</li> </ol>

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<p><b>Empowering the Black Family Conversation Series – Nakeya Fields</b></p>	<p><b>Project Objective:</b> This project presents awareness outreach as a conversation style model in intentional way by seeking to give a voice to oppressed communities and offering a space at the table for Black persons to give feedback and feel heard when it comes to feelings, emotions, and needing connection as humans. We hope to offer an opportunity for ventilation and healing as well as community/village building that provides time and opportunity for rapport and skill building. The goal is to empower participants to be informed and able address/take action on issues that negatively affect Black persons and our wellness. In Black communities, Mental Health is often not spoken about openly and can be stigmatized. The Series is designed to get community members thinking about the various aspects of their own mental health and provide an opportunity for safe self-expression without judgement or villainizing in an interactive, fun and healing environment. We seek to build trust with Black mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunties, sisters, brothers and cousins so that we can all work together to be happier and healthier as a whole.</p>
<p><b>Capacity Building Projects</b></p>	<p><b>Project Justification:</b> With the rising levels of gun violence and traumatic experiences currently affecting our communities across the globe, this has created a significant increase in depression and anxiety felt particularly by families of color. Incidents of Black persons exhibiting mental illness symptoms in public has many times resulted in deadly or traumatic consequences for those suffering. We are able to be exposed to examples of these instances constantly on social media. Thus, we stay quiet from fear of being judged or deemed dangerous, believing just handling it, or consulting with prayer or a figure in the church community are the only options. There is also a lack of culturally competent MH providers that have an understanding of the Black experience. Many Black persons have worries/fears about biases that exist in service providers and are unwilling to engage in treatment, even when we need it, due to those perceptions that opening up and showing vulnerability to someone that seems to be an authority figure could be harmful to them and their families. When we fail to treat illness; it gets worse or there are consequences to our well-being and overall health when constantly in a state of stress, not taking the necessary steps to feel well.</p>
<p><b>• Art Links Us- Nakeya Fields</b></p>	<p><b>Nakeya Fields – Art Links Us</b></p> <p><b>Project Description:</b> Art Links Us is an art exchange program that connects students from View Park Preparatory High School, located in Los Angeles to students from Lycee de Kigali High School in Kigali, Rwanda. These two high schools will be linked together under the Art Links Us campaign. Art Links Us includes the use of visual arts, music and dance as the mediums for students to showcase their talents. Students will participate in an open forum environment; counselors trained to deal with trauma from gang and tribal violence will provide solutions to address mental health. Students will be matched up with their Art Links Us Pen pal. Students of similar backgrounds will be introduced to one another through a phone or online. Instructors and counselors from each High School will oversee and navigate the art projects, the student’s art supplies will also include elements and natural resources found in their communities – bottle caps, buttons, bead,</p>

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<b>Capacity Building Projects</b>	<p>shells, pistachio shells, newspapers, empty potato chip bags, etc. The artistic themes will honor heroes from the past and present that represent cultural pride existing in both cultures. We are excited about the positive impact this project will have on the international communities and the additional pride gained for those living in Los Angeles.</p> <p><b>Project Purpose:</b> Art Links Us sees View Park Preparatory High School as the perfect school to launch an international exchange program. The objectives of the Art Links Us are to bridge gaps between these two cultures that normally would not meet. This platform for global awareness will bring social issues and economic challenges that exist in both environments to the surface. At the conclusion of the art project, each student from View Park Preparatory High School would have obtained or be in the process of obtaining their passports to allow them eligibility to travel to Rwanda and finally visit their <b>Art Links Us</b> Art Pals in person. We will witness students from both cultures and establish new friendships that will last a lifetime. In addition, highlights of Rwanda will be shown and shared, thus increasing the awareness of all of the country’s cultural history, natural resources for trade, as well as the places of interest for tourism.</p>
<b>• Art Links Us Nakeya Fields</b>	<p><b>Project Objective:</b> The main objective of <b>Art Links Us</b> is to establish a relationship between African-American students and the students from Africa’s many nations.</p> <p><b>Project Justification:</b> With the rising levels of gun violence and traumatic experiences currently affecting our communities across the globe, this result has created a significant increase in depression and anxiety felt particularly by youth. A program such as Art Links Us provides an opportunity for students from different cultural backgrounds to express their shared experiences of trauma. Within the Art links Us program, students will utilize three forms of art- music, dance and visual arts. These areas will become the tools to heal, as students will artistically express their stories of survival and hope. This project is further justified by high rates of incarceration of Black males; also increasing with females. There are also high rates of maternal and infant mortality in Black communities and increasingly higher rates of suicides in young Black females.</p>
<b>Future Meeting Time &amp; Dates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10/31/2019, 1pm – 3pm</li> <li>• Location: <b>2600 Redondo Ave. Long Beach, CA 90806</b></li> </ul>

Respectfully Submitted:

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Anna Yaralyan, Psy.D. Clinical Psychologist  
Office of the Deputy Director of Strategic Communications  
AAA Underserved Cultural Communities Liaison