

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH  
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT  
UNDERSERVED CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (UsCC) UNIT**

**LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC Subcommittee  
2021 LGBTQ+ Black Family Unity Project**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit (LGBTQIA2-S) Underserved Cultural Communities Subcommittee was established under the Mental Health Services Act with the goals of reducing disparities and increasing mental health access to the LGBTQIA2-S community in the county of Los Angeles. This group works closely with community partners and consumers in order to increase the capacity of the public mental health system to develop culturally relevant recovery-oriented services specific to the LGBTQIA2-S community and also to develop capacity-building projects.

This project was specifically focused on cultivating Black LGBTQIA2-S collaboration and was developed in response to an explicitly expressed community need: a space to discuss identity among Black LGBTQIA2-S identified young adults and parents/caregivers of Black LGBTQIA2-S identified young adults and went beyond that to include Black LGBTQIA2-S identified parents as well. The project was awarded to the AMAAD Institute (Arming Minorities Against Addiction and Disease), a member of the LGBTQIA2-S UsCC Subcommittee, with a proven record of facilitating personalized individual access to programs and services that foster safe and supportive healthy environments for LGBTQIA2-S people to live, learn, and develop to their fullest potential. AMAAD invited collaboration with ProjectQ Community Salon and Community Center, GROWURPOTENTIAL Community Mental Health Agency, and COLORS LGBTQ Youth Counseling Services. The collective organized and executed the following components:

- A. Collaborative recruitment, including word of mouth and the creation of promotional materials for online recruitment and social media
- B. Curriculum Development for an eight (8) week collaborative dialogue space
- C. Pre- and Post-Tests for Community Survey
- D. Development of an LGBTQIA2-S Black Family Resource Toolkit
- E. Promotional Materials for Community Recruitment
- F. Curriculum Development for a Community Gathering
- G. Development of two 7-Minute Educational Videos for LGBTQIA2-S Black Families and community members

## **PROJECT RESULTS & OUTCOMES**

*A summary of outcomes collected for this project (as specified in the SOW) that demonstrate the project's **impact on community capacity**.*

The result of the Black Family Unity Project was that Black families in the greater Los Angeles area, including queer-identified parents with non-queer identified children, non-queer identified parents with queer-identified children, and queer-identified parents with queer-identified children, were able to partake in an opportunity to engage in a dialogue group focused on nurturing and healing the Black community around issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. The dialogue centered on emotional expression, destigmatizing mental health care, and uplifting historical civil progress, including the history and evolution of LGBTQIA2-S identification in the Black community, and media representations of Black LGBTQIA2-S individuals and the resulting stigma.

At these gatherings, twenty (20) intergenerational and primarily LGBTQIA2-S identified, Black/African American community members assembled via Zoom for two-hours weekly to engage with each other about the importance of mental health care, destigmatizing mental health issues among Black LGBTQIA2-S individuals, developing culturally sensitive resources and tools, and increasing community member engagement in these critical conversations.

Four (4) facilitators embraced this initiative to develop an eight (8) week curriculum centered on social and emotional skills building, community organizing, and curating community-specific resources. A month-long outreach campaign was launched through existing private and professional networks, social media, and community canvassing.

A summary of outcomes includes:

1. Produced and distributed an event flier, EventBrite invitation, and other promotional materials to recruit collaborative members. Distribution occurred via emails and social media posts (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn).
2. Developed an eight (8) week curriculum for approximately twenty (20) participants (Black and African American parents and caregivers, as well as LGBTQIA2-S, identified youth). The age range of participants was 16-65.
3. Hosted eight (8) weekly sessions, each lasting 2 hours. Meetings were on Oct 21, Oct 28, Nov 4, Nov 11, Nov 18, Dec 2, Dec 9, and Dec 16. Sessions were held virtually utilizing the Zoom platform (in support of Covid-19 best practices at that time).
4. Delivered a twenty-two (22) item pre-test survey utilizing a Likert scale to twenty (20) participants, and received input from thirteen (13) participants.
5. Administered eight (8) reflection surveys at the conclusion of each weekly session; received inconsistent input from participants.
6. Delivered an eighteen (18) item post-test survey utilizing a Likert scale to twenty (20) participants, and received input from fifteen (15) participants.
7. Distributed \$100.00 stipends to each of the twenty (20) participants.

8. Developed the "Black Family Unity Project" toolkit, a website page of resources (tools for the community to embrace LGBTQ History, contextualize Black activism, experience psychosocial self-guided content specific to the Black LGBTQIA2-S community including implicit bias and privilege, and bridge to culturally flexible care providers) that community will use for skills building, outreach, and engagement.
9. Produced two (2) educational videos, seven (7) minutes each.
10. Hosted a 2-hour Community Wellness Forum where twenty-four (24) participants engaged in emotional explorations and shared personal testimonials. The Community Wellness Forum was held virtually through the Zoom platform in honor of Covid-19 best practices at the time.
11. Administered a community survey to attendees of the Community Wellness Forum, which yielded 10 responses.
12. Hosted a five (5) participant focus group session to evaluate project acceptability and feasibility. Administered a twenty-two (22) item survey utilizing a Likert scale.

#### Upcoming:

1. Collaborators in this project will produce and submit a peer-reviewed article regarding the acceptability and feasibility of the project.
2. Collaborators in this project will present findings at two (2) National Conferences.
  - a. The American Psychological Association National Convention, Division 44 in Minneapolis, MN on August 5, 2022.
  - b. The 2022 National LGBTQ+ Health Conference in Chicago, IL on July 31, 2022.
3. Collaborators in this project will present the project, including a premiere of the two aforementioned videos, at the inaugural Black LGBTQ conference "Summit for Our Tribes" on June 29, 2022.
4. Collaborators in this project will invite the community to gather each quarter, to maintain connection and build upon our progress of nurturing safer experiences with self-expression, connection, and moving at the speed of trust.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

*Briefly discuss things that were important to the project, things detrimental to accomplishing goals, problems encountered and what was done to overcome problems and suggestions for doing the project more efficiently and effectively.*

Some of the most important elements that were learned or were reinforced were:

Participant emotional safety was enhanced by facilitator affinity, as confirmed by post-survey input. The facilitator group was comprised of four members who are Black, queer-identified, of mixed ages, and two of whom are non-binary individuals. This uplifted the power of working in affinity groups where "safer" and "braver" spaces allow participants to explore themes of shared identity and express experiences to affirm their emotional, intellectual, and physical responses to being part of a distinct subset of the community.

# LGBTQIA2S BLACK FAMILY UNITY SUMMARY 2022

The AMAAD Institute  
L.A. County Department  
of Mental Health

ProjectQ Salon and  
Community Center  
growURpotential  
Counseling Center



After a month-long outreach campaign that informed and invited participants, we accomplished thirty-two (32) Eventbrite registrations. When we hosted the gatherings we had consistent participation by twenty (20) community members, many of whom had no experience with psychosocial or emotional processing groups. The majority of these twenty participants attended at least seven of the eight meetings.

## LGBTQIA2S BLACK FAMILY UNITY SUMMARY 2022

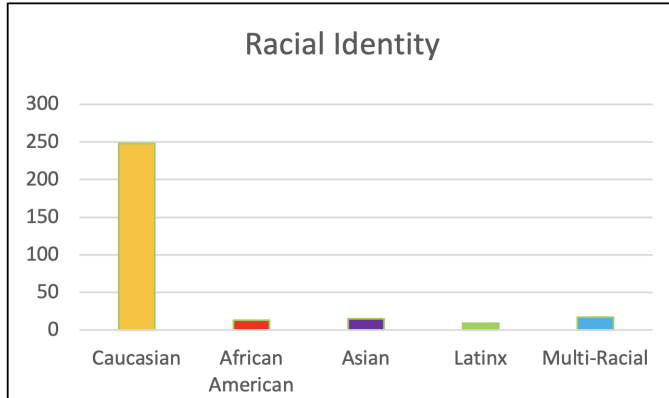
How many of the 8 meetings did you attend in this program?



It is well documented that Black utilization of mental health resources is significantly lower than white utilization: one such source is Racial and ethnic differences in mental health service utilization in suicidal adults: A nationally representative study by the Journal of psychiatric research

Findings in this pilot study demonstrate retention that is not common in other studies and makes room for curiosity about the impact of clarity, respect, and the intentional nurturing of trust in mental health resources for Black participants.

The utilization of mental health resources has been historically low for Black Americans and our results demonstrate the same findings as our peer, Jacob Rostovsky, whose 2021 - NON-BINARY & INTERSEX MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY by this same LGBTQIA2S+ UsCC Subcommittee



produced similar utilization of Black Angelenos, as depicted in this graph, from that report:

The process of building community trust is continuous and must consider the intersectional needs of facilitation, evaluation, data collection, and time investments. It is painfully true that little research exists about Black LGBTQIA2-S mental health care utilization, and we uplift the confirmation of this fact by

Sheehan, Ana E et al. “Racial and ethnic differences in mental health service utilization in suicidal adults: A nationally representative study” published in the Journal of Psychiatric Research, who affirm that more research is needed. They also affirm that:

The same was demonstrated by SAMHSA Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality in their National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Revised March 2012. We propose that the data is not shifting because utilization of mental health care outside of inpatient admissions is not shifting, and we are motivated to stay the course of nurturing this collective to embrace more organizations and family members.

Black LGBTQIA2-S identified individuals and Black families with LGBTQIA2-S members are under-supported, and utilization being so low has been associated with care that is not impactful. As was uplifted by the 2021 - NON-BINARY & INTERSEX MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY, the NBI community often feels like their mental health needs go unseen, including the Black members of this subset. Our system also seems to be unmotivated to address the “why” of low utilization. Our youth are committing suicide at never seen regularity, and we must collectively support LGBTQIA2-S families better.

We appreciate that we are not alone in this mission. In our LGBTQIA2-S Toolkit, we endeavor to shine more light on the number of contributors in support of this niche population. We also invite better awareness of NBI in the Black community in our *No Box, No Labels* video and inspire LGBTQIA2-S connection with our historical impact on system change in our *Black LGBTQ History Lesson* video.

While we strive to show up better, we must highlight that the “Racial and ethnic differences in mental health service utilization in suicidal adults: A nationally representative study” resolved that providers of care do not always see the urgency in the care needs of Black patients. In very clear terms, the authors uplift that their findings support other research that demonstrates systemic racial impact in several areas of healthcare. We encourage this LGBTQIA2-S UsCC Subcommittee workgroup to embrace the urgency and further our collaborations.

BLACKS ARE PERCEIVED TO BE NOT AT RISK BY CARE PROVIDERS ABOUT SUICIDE, ALCOHOLISM, BREAST CANCER AND HEART FAILURE

Source:  
Racial and ethnic differences in mental health service utilization in suicidal adults: A nationally representative study. Journal of psychiatric research

Participants in our eight (8) week support group gave overall positive feedback, and several agreed to participate in a focus group for a further case study about their perceived experiences. We also invited participants to share about our *Community Gathering* in their networks and earned a top-of-page inclusion of our poster in the

Black Lesbians United (BLU) newsletter, a historically black lesbian organization with thirty (30) years of tenure nourishing community and thousands of members. We accomplished more enrollments than participants.

For those who did participate, we received only positive feedback. All reported appreciation for a space where they can be open and transparent about their experience of being proudly Black as well as being a proud member of the LGBTQIA2-S community. They/we are yearning for conversations that promote healing, as evidenced by participants in our eight (8) week groups who attended regularly, arrived on time, stayed for the duration of sessions, and participated fully and enthusiastically.

### LGBTQIA2S BLACK FAMILY UNITY SUMMARY 2022



Did this group increase your confidence in relationships within your family and community?



Would you recommend this group to other families in your community?



How many similar community group programs have you attended in the past 3 years?

Participants in this collaboration come from lived expertise and professional execution at nurturing safety and moving at the speed of trust. We believe this valuable investment allowed us to demonstrate impactful approaches within our community.

## LGBTQIA2S BLACK FAMILY UNITY SUMMARY 2022



How would you rate your satisfaction with the ability to SHARE YOUR TRUTH



How would you rate your satisfaction with the RESPECT in the program discussions?



How would you rate the CLARITY of the information within the program?

Lastly, as organizers who had never partnered in this way, participants in this collaboration grew to better understand the impact of a collective strategy. As organizers, we have experienced that collective planning does yield significant value over our individual community investing. We hope to encourage other organizers that we can build better together. We also experienced that we were nourished by the work of building within the Black LGBTQIA2-S community.

The challenges we faced were:

- As resolved by the LGBTQIA2-S 2021 - NON-BINARY & INTERSEX MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY conducted by LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION, UNDERSERVED CULTURAL COMMUNITIES (UsCC) UNIT in 2021, utilization of mental health nourishments are low.
- This project uplifted and reinforced that Black families survive and thrive at the intersection of a number of issues that are detrimental to and negatively impact their ability and capacity to utilize mental health services.
- Limited capacity to embrace an eight (8) week time commitment existed for most of our participants and likely deterred enrollees who we did not get to survey.
- Finding consensus for meeting times when the majority of participants had competing schedules and obligations.
- Trust that a “program” can be helpful for emotional expression and related biases about mental health conversations.

- The pandemic impacted safety concerns about in-person gathering alongside travel concerns that we compared to invitee burnout, limited access to technology, and overall stamina to participate in Zoom conversations that span two hours. We chose Zoom primarily to embrace COVID safety concerns.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

*Offer recommendations for future projects that can effectively provide outreach and mental health promotion to the target community (next steps).*

Community investment has always been of interest to members of the Black/African American community, however, consistency is key. The Black community is less trusting of offerings that seem to pop up out of nowhere, there is an overarching distrust of events that feel untethered to a guiding force. Everyone who attended these eight (8) sessions and the Community Wellness Forum expressed that they were looking forward to this group's next offering and expressed the desire to invite friends they knew would be interested in participating in this type of dialogue. The Black community and the Black LGBTQIA2-S identified community in particular, need healing and safe, compassionate, and respectful spaces for trust to build and healing to happen.

With that in mind, we have four (4) specific calls to action:

1. We call for more funding to be allocated for organizations to hold regular dialogue spaces for Black families with LGBTQIA2-S identified family members so we can nurture trust with consistency.
2. We call for specific support and training of facilitators to host similar group spaces. This group found that while doing this work, not only did the participants benefit from the dialogue, but that the facilitators gained valuable experience, nourishment, and sustenance from the collaborative work of creating curriculum and debriefing the eight (8) week groups. With that, the call is for more resources to be directed towards creating affinity spaces for Black LGBTQIA2-S identified caregivers and service providers.
3. We call for funding to be directed towards specific research into the needs of the Black LGBTQIA2-S community with particular emphasis on the underutilization of services by members of the Black LGBTQIA2-S community members.
4. We call for more consistent mental health public service messaging for underserved communities, the Black LGBTQIA2-S community in particular, from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) in order to increase faith in DMH programming.



## **ABOUT THE FACILITATORS**

Madin Lopez (they/them) is an Emmy Nominated Gender Queer Speculative Activist. A Theminist, an aspiring quiet egotist, a recovering born-again Christian, an oil and water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty, and drive. It is their mission to grow towards a world free of houselessness through intergenerational healing and self-worth implementation. They are all about radical vulnerability, avenging the suffering of their ancestors, earning the respect of future generations, and being transformed in the service of the work. Madin is the Executive Director of Project Q, which “invites Black and Brown trans youth to build trust and accountability by way of access to representation, wrap-around services, self-discovery and creating equity through cycles of success.”

Jacquelyn (Jackie) Chin (she/her) is a second-year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Working with Drs. Tania Israel and Alison Cerezo, her research focuses on creative mental health interventions, racial identity development, sexual/gender diversity, substance use, and community-based methods. In this role, Jackie is a project manager for the Black LGBTQIAS-2 Family Unity Project, evaluating a community-based mental health intervention to support Black queer youth and parents/caregivers. She is also the president of the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA), and a student-clinician in the Healing Space Clinic (a clinic dedicated to servicing the Black Santa Barbara community and combating racial trauma).

Cynthia Ruffin (She/Her/Queen/RevolutionaryAngel) is a Caribbean-Canadian, queer-identified social justice warrior, writer, and performer known for creating social justice theatre pieces in the community. She is a long-time social justice activist and advocate with roots in circus and pedagogical playmaking. With her theatrical studies at the American Conservatory Theater and a degree in Nonprofit Management from Antioch University, she has found the perfect blend of creativity and activism. She currently serves as Chief Program Officer at the Amaad Institute, a whole person wellness agency “in South LA on purpose” with its focus on the Black and Brown LGBTQ+ community. Prior to working at Amaad, Cynthia helped expand programming as Director of COLORS LGBTQ Youth Counseling Services and taught at Wise Fool New Mexico and Fringe Benefits Alliance. She founded the production company Revolutionary Angel Productions, a groundbreaking and mission-based and value-driven production company to continue the work of teaching social justice and racial equity through theater and film. Cynthia is a practicing Buddhist and a deep believer in Black Girl Magic.

Meisha Thrasher (she/her) is a Healing Justice activist, speaker, anti-oppressive framework coach, community collaborator, and mental health program strategist who moves at the speed of trust. She is the founder of GROWURPOTENTIAL, a nonprofit clinical training site for therapists who want to practice from compassionate, culturally flexible, and trauma-informed approaches to mental health care. Meisha has served as a thought partner with the California Endowment, The Black Equity Collective, The CA Conference for Equity and Justice, and many organizers for equitable impact. Meisha currently participates in the SLASB AAIMM Community Action Team & Engagement Workgroups and is a facilitator for The Black Equity Collective. Meisha has a Master's Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and is a trained EMDR and somatic practitioner.

*Links to resources:*

Educational Videos:

- **NoBoxNoLabel**  
<https://youtu.be/qdkRY5tdDxs>
- **Black LGBTQ History Lesson**  
<https://youtu.be/KWkFNMmPuto>

Resource Toolkit

- **RESOURCES FOR LGBTQIA2S+ BLACK FAMILIES**  
<https://www.growurpotential.org/lgbt-bipoc-toolkit>