



For the Community, By the Community: Exemplar Culturally-Led Mental Health Programs

Introduction



Here we highlight the work of organizations that exemplify culturally-led mental health programs, as described in our corresponding funder guide, *For the Community, By the Community: How Philanthropy Can Support Culturally-Led Mental Health Programs*. These programs are first and foremost culturally grounded, but also exemplify one or more of the other four considerations outlined in the funder guide. They are not the only or best at supporting mental health and well-being, but rather they serve as examples to bring our guidance to life. Further, the profiles included here are just introductions to the organizations' programming, origin, and impact on mental health and well-being. They are just a snapshot, but we hope they serve as inspiration and provide insight for those funders looking to identify culturally-led programs to support in your communities.

To access our full funder guide on culturally-led programs, visit www.mindfulphilanthropy.org/culturallyledprograms.

Methods

To identify these organizations, Mindful Philanthropy undertook a nationwide scan of grassroots and community-driven programs that support mental health and well-being broadly, by consulting our partners, advisors, founders, and existing portfolio organizations. As a result, we identified 143 organizations that might be considered culturally-led, as defined by our preliminary screening criteria:

1. Programs are developed for and by a specific underserved/marginalized community;
2. Programmatic approaches are rooted in a cultural, racial, or ethnic identity that connects individuals to their community;
3. Programming impacts individual and/or community mental health and well-being.

After meeting this preliminary screening criteria, our team used a rubric to evaluate each organization's alignment with the five considerations outlined in our guidance. Based on this evaluation, our team identified the top 25 organizations that exemplified these five considerations and met with each of them to better understand their origin, program delivery, and culturally-led activities to support mental health and well-being. In doing so, we found that the five considerations and their core components were aspirational for most culturally-led programs and organizations we identified; very few met the criteria for all five considerations. As such, here we profile a selection of organizations that embody at least one additional consideration besides being culturally grounded.



Fanm Saj

Need: Currently, 1 in 10 Black people in the U.S. is an immigrant.¹ However, they are often left out of both Black and immigrant narratives and fall behind in several social outcomes, including less access to mental health services.²

Goal: Fanm Saj aims to provide families across the African Diaspora with cultural and wellness tools to nourish themselves, their families, and communities. “Fanm Saj” means midwife in the Haitian Creole language, and the organization aims to “catch communities” like a midwife catches babies.

Geographic Focus: South Florida/Miami

Program Overview: Fanm Saj provides holistic support and services that are designed and implemented for and by Black women. Born out of the experience of Black, immigrant, women in America, Fanm Saj focuses on physical, mental, and spiritual health to empower and equip others with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to take care of themselves and their community. For example, Fanm Saj hosts several circle keeping workshops, which offer a healing and safe space for members to share their stories and to build self-care and community care practices. Fanm Saj also provides political education and resources to participants, and partners with other organizations chosen by the community, such as immigration policy organizations.

Key Consideration: Historical Perspective is demonstrated through the application and integration of sacred healing circles for collective healing from historical trauma. Fanm Saj also centers justice in its vision, offering community members opportunities to engage in movement-building activities to work toward justice and social transformation.

1 Tamir, C., and Anderson, M. (2022). *One-in-ten Black people living in the U.S. are immigrants*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2022/01/20/one-in-ten-black-people-living-in-the-u-s-are-immigrants/>

2 Eltigani, E. (n.d.) *The Difference of mental health disparities among Black immigrants and U.S.-Born Black African Americans*. <https://sph.umich.edu/collaborative/media/articles/disparitiesamongstblackimmigrants.html>

Saahas for Cause

Need: More than one-third of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely, and nearly one-fourth of adults aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.¹ Older adults often experience loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to be living alone or suffering from chronic illness, putting them at higher risk for mental health conditions. Research also suggests that immigrant populations experience loneliness more often than other groups.²

Goal: [Saahas for Cause](#) aims to reduce isolation of older adults, address stigma, and foster intergenerational conversation around mental health in the South Asian community.

Geographic Focus: Los Angeles and Orange counties, California

Program Overview: Saahas for Cause delivers a broad spectrum of direct services to the South Asian community, providing linguistically and culturally-led programs and fostering intergenerational engagement. The Mauj Masti Sehat wellness program focuses on caring for South Asian senior immigrants, who often face challenges in adjusting to American life and culture. The program brings seniors together through skill-building, food, art, music, dance, and garden therapy, helping seniors to build confidence and engage with youth in their community. Volunteers conduct wellness calls with seniors to check in on their well-being. Saahas also runs women's wellness and domestic violence victim support programming, culturally relevant health education services in the community, and advocacy related work.

Key Consideration: Health Promoting Practices is demonstrated through the prioritization of wellness in all activities including traditional celebration, practices like dance and art therapy, connection through food, and the promotion of intergenerational connection and wisdom.

¹ Centers for disease control and prevention. (2021). *Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions*. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>

² Ibid.

Black Outside

Need: Research has shown that access to outdoor recreation and parks have a positive impact on mental health and well-being. Yet, only 1% of Texas state park participants identify as Black and/or African-American.¹

Goal: [Black Outside](#) aims to enable equitable access to the outdoors and to foster the positive well-being of Black youth by connecting in and around the outdoors.

Geographic Focus: San Antonio, Texas

Program Overview: Black Outside focuses on reconnecting Black youth to nature with hopes of diversifying outdoor spaces and ensuring that the outdoors and nature are a part of Black youth's identity. They aim to achieve this goal by providing programming that connects youth of color to culturally relevant and healing-centered outdoor experiences in and around San Antonio, Texas. Through three primary programs - Camp Founder Girls, Brothers with the Land, and the Bloom Project - Black Outside leads immersive outdoor experiences aimed at building self-esteem, confidence, and social-emotional learning for Black youth. Programming also leverages the power of mentorship to provide safe spaces for youth to learn and connect in shared identity through nature.

Key Consideration: Community Leadership is demonstrated through their work in empowering and integrating youth voice into programs, and in planning efforts for future youth leadership within the organization. This includes opportunities for youth to lead via a youth advisory board and/or internship and future employment.

¹ Our Mission. *Black Outside*. <https://www.blackoutside.org/copy-of-about>

Healing of the Canoe

Need: Cultural erasure and disconnect have greatly impacted American Indian/Alaska Native communities in the U.S., driving poor health outcomes. Studies indicate that AI/AN populations have disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges and suicide rates three times higher than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States.^{1,2}

Goal: [Healing of the Canoe](#) aims to prevent youth substance use and promote a sense of cultural belonging and cultural revitalization among young people.

Geographic Focus: Suquamish Tribe and the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribes in Washington State

Program Overview: Healing of the Canoe began as a project between the Suquamish Tribe, the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribes, and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute at the University of Washington. The project was created to develop a culturally grounded, yet adaptive suicide and substance use prevention and intervention curriculum designed for and by tribal youth. Using traditions and metaphors specific to each Native community, the Culturally Grounded Life Skills for Youth Curriculum provides an adaptable storytelling structure to increase young people’s hope, optimism, and connection to their communities and cultures. The project has transitioned its focus to support the Suquamish Tribe in continuing the implementation of their curriculum while also training other tribes and tribal organizations to adapt and implement their own culturally specific curricula.

Key Consideration: Evaluation is demonstrated through decolonized methods of measuring impact, like conversations with the community to understand their goals. As a result, they are reframing success using indicators of community satisfaction, like the presence of laughter in their training, in addition to measures of increased optimism, self-efficacy, and reduced substance use.

1 Heart, M. Y., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. (2011). Historical trauma among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research, and clinical considerations. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43(4), 282–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2011.628913>

2 Native American and Alaska Native | Zero Suicide. (n.d.). *Resources for Native American and Alaska Native populations*. <https://zerosuicide.edc.org/resources/populations/native-american-and-alaska-native>

Detroit Heals Detroit

Need: More than two thirds of children experience at least one traumatic event by age 16.¹ Research shows that exposure to trauma can result in cognitive impairment, poor academic outcomes, and mental and behavioral health issues.²

Goal: [Detroit Heals Detroit](#) was created by youth ages 12 to 21 in Detroit to foster healing justice for young people in their most marginalized communities by giving their trauma a purpose and transforming pain into a source of power.

Geographic Focus: Detroit, Michigan

Program Overview: Detroit Heals Detroit uses a community-centered approach to provide young people who experience trauma with the skills and supportive environment needed for collective healing. They believe that healing is rooted in and led by the community; as such, they support each other to heal from trauma together. Youth members employ a peer-to-peer mentoring model that implements healing circles and a social-emotional learning curriculum that is designed by the community and co-led by young people in community centers and schools throughout Detroit. Their ultimate goal is to combat trauma, while working towards dismantling oppressive systems for Detroit's youth.

Key Consideration: Historical Perspective is demonstrated through Detroit Heals Detroit's deep understanding and acknowledgement of the historical forces that have created conditions affecting Black communities in Detroit. With this in mind, Detroit Heals Detroit organizes several youth-led advocacy initiatives, such as using data to support a campaign for police-free schools, advocating for a larger budget for school-based mental health resources from the school board, and organizing community clean ups.

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations. (2022). *Understanding child trauma*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/understanding-child-trauma>

² Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2017). *Supporting brain development in traumatized children and youth*. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pub-pdfs/braindevtrauma.pdf>

You Are More Than, Inc.

Need: There are an estimated hundreds of thousands of human trafficking victims who live in the U.S.¹ LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, children in foster care, and undocumented immigrants are the most vulnerable to exploitation. Survivors are also 96% more likely to develop mental health conditions.²

Goal: [You Are More Than](#)'s goal is to transform the growth of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) LGBTQIA+ survivors of domestic trafficking and those negatively impacted by the commercial sex industry by providing barrier-free access to survivor-centered support focused on mental health, education, and economic stability.

Geographic Focus: New Jersey, with services provided nationally

Program Overview: YAMT is survivor-led, peer model organization that provides services to Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQIA+ adult survivors. YAMT offers several services in fostering healing and emotional well-being to its survivors, including peer-to-peer mentorship, individual counseling, group support, wellness grants, and education, and economic empowerment resources. YAMT also created the [Nurture Forward Directory](#), the nation's first directory of mental health services in the country exclusively for survivors of domestic trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. YAMT's goal for all of its members is to prevent relapse back into the sex industry. In 2021, out of 127 members served, only four were at risk of relapse. Overall, YAMT has served 503 clients in 35 different states, supported 32 survivor-led small businesses, and has provided \$41,000 of flexible funding to survivors.

Key Consideration: Community Leadership is demonstrated by their peer-to-peer model: peer mentors, who are survivors themselves and majority BIPOC, are hired and trained through YAMT to help members build up the skills in navigating community resources, job prep, education, emotional skills, and more.

1 American Association of University Women. (2022). *Quick facts: Human trafficking*. <https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2022/08/Human-Trafficking-Quick-Facts-Jan-2022.pdf>

2 Gomes, Isabella. (n.d.). *Health care providers are missing chances to help victims of sex trafficking*. Hopkins Bloomberg Public Health. <https://magazine.jhsph.edu/2020/health-care-providers-are-missing-chances-help-victims-sex-trafficking>

So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project

Need: According to the U.S. census, nearly 71% of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) live in urban areas, not on federally defined tribal land. Further, the lives of AI/AN people in urban settings can differ greatly from those of other native populations, and health organizations often fail to meet their unique needs.¹

Goal: The [So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project](#) aims to create community-driven resources and culturally-grounded wellness programming for Indigenous community members not living on tribal lands.

Geographic Focus: Los Angeles County, California

Program Overview: So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project serves urban Indigenous community members through Indigenous education and wellness programs. The organization's core values include intergenerational relationship building, as well as inclusive community-based programming rooted in culture. The organization leverages traditional practices to support well-being, including Indigenous Arts Gatherings, mental health discussion through Beading Circles, Healing Plant Medicines events, painting, poetry and pottery classes. So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project hosts specific events for elders and Indigenous Mental Wellness Gatherings designed to engage full family units. In collaboration with their sister organization, [Indigenous Circle of Wellness](#), and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project also helped develop a [mental wellness toolkit](#) to inform best practices in Indigenous wellness.

Key Consideration: Health Promoting Practices are demonstrated through So'oh-Shinálí Sister Project's wide range of programs, from traditional healing methods to interactive art activities to support groups, and serves everyone from youth to elders. They also intentionally and consistently integrate the community's voices in all program development.

¹ Urban Indian Health Institute. (n.d.). *About urban Indians*. <https://www.uihi.org/urban-indian-health/>

Mountain Shadow Association

Need: Mental health and well-being are bi-directionally impacted by a number of social factors including familial connection, socioeconomic status, community connection and belonging, and intergenerational relationships. Native people in Montana make up only 6.6% of the population, yet they are more greatly impacted by many of these social determinants of mental health than their white counterparts.¹

Goal: [Mountain Shadow Association](#)'s goal is to repair and restore relationships in Apsáalooke families, communities, culture, and environment to promote positive well-being.

Geographic Focus: Lodge Grass, Crow Reservation, Montana

Program Overview: Mountain Shadow Association's work was born out of the efforts of a small group of community members who came together monthly to discuss issues facing the town. From these gatherings, members drafted a strategic plan and family-centered process that allowed for community resident input, and a plan to address challenges. Today, Mountain Shadow Association supports community-based action to restore wellness for Apsáalooke children, their families, and their environment through a family healing center, a restorative justice program, and a local business incubation to transform and uplift the strengths of their community.

Key Consideration: Evaluation is exemplified by Mountain Shadow Association's commitment to utilizing methods of evaluation recommended by and tailored to the community. They have redefined traditional qualitative data collection by utilizing methods such as walking groups at the recommendation of a community member to collect feedback and insight.

¹ United States Census Bureau. (2021). *QuickFacts: Montana*. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT/PST045221>





To learn more about Mindful Philanthropy's
commitment to mental health and how you
can join our efforts, visit

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