

# Hennepin County – DOCCR: Trauma-Informed, Culturally Specific Programs

## *2020 Annual Summary*

Wilder Research is partnering with the Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative to evaluate a system of trauma-informed, culturally specific programs for African American male-identified youth. Of primary interest is whether programs help ground participants in their culture as a source of strength, whether programs help participants better identify trauma and stress in their lives, and whether programs help participants better cope with trauma and stress in their lives.

## Approach

Wilder Research surveyed and interviewed program participants, interviewed program staff and referral sources, and analyzed quantitative data on program participation in order to understand implementation of and preliminary outcomes for the programs. This is a summary of the third year findings of a three-year collaborative effort.

## Findings

Program participants continue to say that the programs are engaging and positively impactful, and staff say programs adapt during challenging times to meet participant needs.

## Background

Since fall 2017, Wilder Research has been working with the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR) to develop culturally specific, trauma-informed programs for African American male-identified youth, and evaluate the implementation and benefits of these programs with a focus on preventing and intervening in juvenile justice system involvement.

Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative funds drive evaluation of the community-based programs. Three programs began receiving funding in fall 2018: Ujima Family Resilience Program at Rebound, Inc. (focus on prevention), HOPE at Phyllis Wheatley (focus on early intervention), and Nia at NorthPoint (focus on intervention). Nehemiah, a program at Urban Ventures focused on intervention, began receiving funding (through DOCCR) in summer 2020.

Each program has unique eligibility requirements, specifically:

- **Ujima Family Resilience Program** - Families must reside in North Minneapolis, have at least one Black male child age 8-12, and have some experience with traumatic stress. Ujima Family Resilience Program staff network with schools, organizations, and agencies in the North Minneapolis community to reach and recruit families to participate. Ujima also runs a cohort model, where a small group of families participates in a structured weekly curriculum for between 12 and 16 weeks.
- **HOPE** - Participants are all African American males age 12-17 who are referred after a first contact with law enforcement. HOPE has weekly meetings with group participants, and accepts new participants into programming on a rolling basis.
- **Nia** - Participants are all African American males residing in or near North Minneapolis, age 12-17, referred by Hennepin County Juvenile Probation. Nia participants attend weekly groups, and staff check in with participants weekly. Nia accepts new participants into programming on a rolling basis.
- **Nehemiah** - Participants are all male-identified youth ages 15-19 residing in or near South Minneapolis, referred by Hennepin County Juvenile Probation. Participants attend two group meetings per week for 12 weeks, and work individually with a case manager.

While specific goals and outcomes for participants vary based on which program they access, common outcome goals are that participants:

- Improve their ability to identify traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences
- Improve their ability to address and/or positively cope with traumatic, stressful, and/or challenging life experiences
- Consider the program to be reflective of their culture
- Improve their grounding in their culture
- Improve their connections to a positive support network

## Evaluation details

Wilder Research is conducting an implementation process and outcome evaluation to help understand how these programs enhance and/or improve services and outcomes for African American boys in Hennepin County (and their families). Hennepin County began funding these programs to prevent and intervene in juvenile justice system involvement. This is the third annual report, which summarizes information collected in 2020. For more information about previous year's findings, find the first annual report [here](#), and the second [here](#).

In 2020, Wilder Research engaged program staff, referral sources, and participants in interviews and surveys as part of the evaluation. Figure 1 outlines who has participated in evaluation activities from January 1 through December 31 2020. Each year, program staff also report outputs, or the

numbers of youth and families served by programs, services provided, and program completion rates. Evaluators analyze interviews and surveys for themes, and report interview, survey, and output data on an annual basis.

## 1. Evaluation participants since January 2020

Informant type	Number interviewed	Number surveyed
Program staff	11	-
Referral source	9	-
Program participant	42	30
Total	62	30

Note: Wilder Research gathered information from a number of informants, including program staff, Hennepin County probation staff (who refer participants to Nia), and program participants. Wilder interviewed youth who participated in HOPE and Nia, and adults who participated in Ujima (though not the children in their care).

## Evaluation findings

Here we present findings from 2020 data collection activities. We report those themes, or common ideas, expressed by three or more interviewees.

### Program participants

Wilder asked program staff to describe the people they serve in their programs. All staff used positive descriptors when talking about their participants and the theme that emerged is that participants are resilient.

Program staff also tracked information about how many people were referred to, participated in, and successfully completed programming. Figure 2 summarizes how many people or families the programs reached in 2020.

## 2. Program participants

Number of people in 2020 who...	Ujima	HOPE	Nia	Nehemiah
Were referred to the program	7 families	29 youth	24 youth	10 youth <sup>1</sup>
Received some programming (though may not have completed)	4 families	29 youth	22 youth	5 youth
Received a referral to other service, including mental health, chemical health, health care, or pro-social activities	4 families	29 youth	22 youth	1 youth
Successfully completed program in 2020	2 families	3 youth	10 youth	0 youth <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Due to contract start date, Nehemiah did not begin receiving referrals until September 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Due to contract start date and program length, there was not sufficient time for youth to complete Nehemiah in 2020.

## Staff perspectives

### *Program staff adapted in response to urgent challenges*

During interviews with program staff, we asked about whether and how they changed programming in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice uprising. All programs shifted course from in-person (or, in the case of Nehemiah, planning for in-person) programming to virtual programming, which staff described as an ongoing challenge.

Program staff re-designed group curricula, and helped youth and families get the devices and internet access they needed to participate in video groups, which was a success. However, youth and families sometimes struggled with access issues. One staff member said:

*I didn't anticipate that parents were going to be on lockdown and having to work from home, using up whatever limited bandwidth they might have.*

Program staff also struggled to maintain participant engagement over video; often, group times were at the end of the virtual school day and youth seemed to have difficulty maintaining attention. In response, one program shifted the video platform they used to allow for more interactive features such as polls and virtual whiteboards, which seemed to improve youth engagement.

Program staff also adapted to meet their participants' emerging needs, both due to the pandemic, and the added stress of state violence and unrest in their area. Staff took on additional work in 2020, including:

- Ensuring increased mental health supports, including therapy and art therapy sessions
- Increasing the frequency of informal check-ins with participants, including calling and texting on a daily basis
- Providing food and toiletries, and/or referring participants to mutual aid sites
- Increasing flexibility around group meeting schedules, and allowing make-up sessions
- Collaborating more closely with other program staff to develop group sessions, and ensure follow-up with participants

### *Program staff build relationships to achieve success*

As in last years' summary, program staff reported that their programs were driving success. When asked to describe program success, all staff noted that youth and families connecting with the programming during a uniquely difficult year was a success. Additional themes were that youth and families improved their ability to understand and cope with their feelings, built trust with program staff, and made progress toward goals. We also asked staff to describe what was

working well with their programming, and all programs noted that youth or families building relationships with program staff or one another was integral in achieving success. One staff said:

*One youth, 15 years old, was in group explaining why it's unhealthy to bottle up anger. Other youth responded so well. He explained it so well that I wanted to ask if he'd present in other groups.*

## Participant perspectives

Wilder Research interviewed and surveyed program participants on two main topics: what the programs are like and their perceived impact. Here, we report those themes that emerged across three or more participant interviews.

### ***Participants found most program topics helpful***

Wilder Research interviewed 13 program participants and asked them to share the topics that were discussed during their time in the programs. As in past years, they mentioned the following:

- African American or Black culture, race, or identity
- Anger or managing anger
- Stress triggers
- Thinking through decisions
- Planning for the future
- Parenting skills

Most (N=8) found the topics to be helpful, though three said that none of the topics helped them. Elaborating on what they had talked about, interviewees said:

*We talked about controlling anger, what different decisions you can make -- everything depends on the choices you make. When a guy does something bad to a girl, we talked about that sorta stuff. Other than that, we're talking about what goes on with us, what helps us.*

*We talked about when you in a moment when you're grieving, before I'd came here, I never realized when I was grieving. Now when it happens, I know it, and have a couple ways to deal with it.*

## Participants felt one-on-one time with program staff was a positive

Most interviewees (N=7) had one-on-one support from program staff. As in past years, we invited interviewees to share what they thought about the meetings. Interviewees said they liked the one-on-one meetings, that the one-on-one meetings were helpful, and that they appreciated the emotional support of program staff. One participant said:

*It's better than the regular meetings because I get the majority of their attention.*

*It's going great. My grades were dropping in school and I talked to [program staff] about it, and he advocated for me so now my school is helping me more.*

## Participants reported improvements because of the program

We asked interviewees to describe whether and how the program had impacted them. Youth reported that the programs had improved their ability to understand trauma and stress (N=9), improved their ability to cope with trauma and stress (N=8), and improved their connections to other resources in the community (N=5). Youth said:

*It helped me realize what's about to stress me out, but I still go that way anyway. I can identify it, but I don't know how to stop it sometimes.*

*I notice stuff more now. If I'm mad or stressed, I think about it differently than I would before.*

*I realize what stuff stresses me out now. When I was younger, there was a lot of stuff that stressed me out and I would blame other people, but now I'm taking the time to realize what's causing all that stress. Now I start to just walk away. It's like "I don't have time for this; I'm going to walk away."*

*I learned more decision-making, I'm thinking things through more. I learned certain decisions don't really work for me. It's not worth taking that far. It's not worth being on that subject.*

*Sometimes I'll see myself trying different ways to bring down my anger.*

## Programs earn praise from participants

As in past years, at the end of every interview, Wilder Research asked interviewees if there was anything else they wanted people to know about the program, and 11 interviewees responded. Most of these offered positive comments about the program (N=10), including that program staff was a positive, or that the program was good, fun, worth the time, and something that they recommend for other people. Interviewees said:

*They work with you. They give you chances. If you mess up, they don't just fall off – they talk to you.*

*I thought that we'd be disciplined and forced into things because I made a mistake on something. It's not really that. They help you with stuff. And work with you to make those decisions on your own. They're a lot easier to work with than I thought.*

*[Program] is good to meet people, get other's people opinion and way of thinking. You can make friends probably too.*

*I think it's a pretty good program. I helps you make better decisions and makes you realize new things. It's been helpful.*

## Next steps

Wilder Research staff will continue data collection efforts in 2021, including interviews and surveys with program participants, and working with Hennepin County and programs to conduct further implementation interviews with program staff, referral sources, and possibly other program stakeholders. We will continue to analyze and report information gathered through these sources, as well as output data collected by the programs.

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