

Culturally Specific Responses to Keeping Black Survivors Alive (KBSA)

A project of the Massachusetts Women of Color Network

Cohort Year-End Report

On July 1, 2021, the Keeping Black Survivors (KBSA) project was formed with support from The Department of Public Health to address the high rates of homicide among the Black community due to domestic violence. Bolstered by the findings represented in the report, Keeping Black Women Alive: Responding to Intimate Partner High-Risk in Black Communities by Massachusetts Women of Color Network (2019), and two MAWOCN-hosted statewide panel events, the three-year cohort seeks to explore, develop and implement alternate responses to systems (e.g. police, child welfare, and incarceration), culturally-specific approaches, and models to not cause further harm and effectively meet the emergent needs of Black survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

The Massachusetts Women of Color Network (MAWOCN) partnered with five Black women-led community-based organizations to develop a statewide cohort of leaders and organizations currently serving Black survivors. This cohort is the first statewide cohort of its kind. Our organizations provide support services to the community and survivors of intimate partner violence. We include:

- The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc.
- Brookview House
- Love life Now Foundation, Inc.
- Transgender Emergency Fund
- YWCA of Central Mass

Collectively, these organizations offer a wide range of community-based services including medical, housing, legal, and general advocacy, individual, family, and group counseling, clinician-led behavioral health counseling, emergency housing, transitional housing, 24/7 hotline, web-chat support, food and utility assistance, personal supplies, youth development and youth parents programs, prevention education programs, family and friends bystander education, safety planning, crisis intervention, and referrals.

Events and Initiatives include the Get Safe Fund, Brown Bag and Care Against DV, Adapt-a-Family/Individual Holiday Drive, Bedding Drive, Survivor Retreats, Trans Women's Day Retreat, Empowerment Fashion Show, White-Ribbon Global Awareness Night, Women's Safety Network, Racial Equity Workshops, and Service Provider Consultations.

Our cohort convenes monthly for a minimum of four hours. In addition to referencing the 2019 report and direct interactions with survivors, we have conducted thorough research of other reports' and literary journals that directly align with this project. Also, we have engaged in a year-long collaboration with Collective Capacity Consulting to support our project design.

Milestones

1. The cohort created a Logic Model to outline the desired outcomes and plan how we will achieve the desired outcomes for this three-year project.

2. The cohort created guiding principles to direct our collective actions and approach to serve Black survivors.
 - a. Principle 1: Prioritize strategies that are grounded in survivor experiences.
 - b. Principle 2: Develop frameworks that break down the distinctions between service providers and survivors.
 - c. Principle 3: Implement approaches that address both systemic and individual harms.
3. In October 2021, The Transgender Emergency Fund hosted focus groups with Trans Women of Color. The participants were invited to share their perspectives on what it takes to end violence. The participants reflected a need for more community outreach and education, more resources to leave safely (housing, medical, etc.), and for systems to increase the availability of culturally competent services for Black survivors.
4. During this project's first year, we have collectively attended 9 panel discussions, 5 trainings, 3 listening sessions, and 8 interviews where we shared the truths that survivors have shared with us and further raised awareness of survivors' experiences and leadership.

Lessons from Year One

- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) or communities of color are often used to describe the experiences of racialized individuals. While it serves to build solidarity, all experiences are not the same. The KBSA cohort aims to center Black survivors and amplify their culture, wisdom, and experiences.
- Relationship-building and trust are at the core of offering culturally-specific services and making genuine referrals.
- Throughout this year, we have gained further clarity on what is available. We have observed an increase in funding for culturally-specific programming. However, gaps remain. We STILL need more services for transgender survivors, increased funding for culturally-specific programs to increase their capacity, and increased access for Black women at senior and executive- levels of leadership. We've highlighted the specific needs below:
 - Increase support staff at our programs
 - Increase tools for sustainability
 - Increase opportunities for leadership training, mentoring, and professional coaching to get individuals into leadership roles and be well-supported while in the roles.
 - Allow less restrictive funding and more general operating funds.
- As we analyzed our takeaways from interactions with others across the state, we have found that many organizations and individuals in the movement are still, intentionally, and unintentionally, erasing the experiences of Black survivors.

Key Takeaways

- Fatality rates of Black Women are continuously at an outrageous high. According to Jane Doe Inc., "As of December 31, 2021, there were 14 domestic violence homicide incidents in

Massachusetts, resulting in 15 domestic violence homicide victims and 2 perpetrator suicides or deaths (The State Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, 2021).” This data illustrates a 55.5% increase since 2020 with Black women at the highest rates.

- Housing instability, lack of social and economic resources, and inadequate health care exacerbate the impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV), make survivors more vulnerable to abuse, and have a greater risk of fatality
- Survivors of abuse in Massachusetts experience a lack of culturally specific services.
- Survivors of abuse in Massachusetts experience a lack of culturally specific responses.
- Traditional ways of providing support do not work for Black women.

Call to Action

With care and intentionality, we are creating a toolkit with guidelines and community resources to support the recommendations published in the report, [Keeping Black Women Alive: Responding to Intimate Partner High-Risk in Black Communities by Massachusetts Women of Color Network \(2019\)](#).

In the meantime, we seek continued action toward keeping Black women alive. This includes:

- Center survivors and strive to create trust.
- Recommit to the 2019 recommendations.
 1. Shift away from an over-reliance on law enforcement
 2. Challenge/undo the stereotypes
 3. Fund culturally specific organizations
- Implement guiding principles to ground your work. You are welcome to consider the principles we have implemented.
- Create and foster meaningful relationships with community service providers such as hospitals, salons, barber shops, churches, neighborhood high-risk response teams, community centers, other DV/SA organizations, etc.

Resources

The State Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security. (2021). A Report from the State Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team. Retrieved on July 20, 2022, from

<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=74337ce4fd1c3be2JmltdHM9MTY1ODM0OTgyNyZpZ3VpZD1iMzY5ODBiZi0zOTE4LTQxZGYtOWUyNi1IMWZmM2RhZDM0ZjImaW5zaWQ9NTIxMw&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=a6ea49a4-086c-11ed-89b4-6d5eeab3fac7&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9tYWxlZ2lzbGF0dXJlLmdvdi9CaWxscy8xOTlvSEQ0NzEyLnBkZg&ntb=1>