



2022 End of Year Report





LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Last year was a record year for Sista Afya Community Care (SACC) as we continued to grow and serve our network. As you'll see in this report, our existing programs have done just that—**we served 500 people in 2022**, more than any other year.

While the inequities in mental health care are constantly magnified and exposed, our collective commitment to care for Black women in our community is unwavering. With the help of donors, friends, and neighbors, SACC took multiple steps to develop our infrastructure to better serve our clients. This included growing from a fiscal sponsorship to a 501c3 organization, which allows more agency over our operations and a closer relationship with our donors. Our newly expanded Board of Directors includes women from a variety of backgrounds and experiences who will help us to responsibly manage our growing organization.

Additionally we've added **2 new staff members**, an administrator and a therapist to meet increased needs. All of these moves create a more solid foundation for our goal of community wellness. Because we have a stronger infrastructure in place, we can reach more clients. We can offer more opportunities for healing. We can break down those barriers that keep Black women from seeking and securing the care they need. Together, we're letting Black women know that they have a community to support them on their wellness journey.

Looking ahead, we envision making SACC a total community mental health center. We are expanding our services to Medicaid recipients, of which there are over 3.3 million in Illinois. We are also partnering with aligned organizations to encourage Black women to engage in care in creative, relevant ways. As we move forward, the most important thing is to make sure that we are always meeting women where they are; while we still offer many virtual options for care, we were thrilled to return to in-person services.

We are grateful that you continue to be part of the SACC journey—thank you for helping us forge this path that has had a tremendously positive impact on so many. This moment in time is a testament to our community working together to make good things happen. Through collective strength we achieve community healing. Let's keep going.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Camesha L. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Camesha L. Jones, LCSW
Executive Director, Sista Afya Community Care

Collective Strength, Community Healing

At Sista Afya Community Care, we live up to our name every day, providing care to our community and helping Black women work towards “Afya,” a healthy state of being free from physical or psychological pain. We can’t do it alone. To continue providing high-quality, free mental wellness care, community support is critical to keep our programs low and no-cost.

Our Collective Strength, Community Healing campaign showcased the generosity of our support system. Donors showed up, giving what they could so that we can serve even more Black women through Thrive in Therapy and Community Care programming in 2023. We ended the year strong, raising **\$20,000** during the campaign.



“I very much enjoyed the instruction, and participation. I found the group safe, warm and inviting. It was easy to express my shortcomings because the women were willing to help me and not judge me.”

—Workshop Participant

Below you can see the success of these programs over the past year, which were made possible by friends and donors like you—thank you. We are looking forward to an even bigger year.

THRIVE IN THERAPY BY THE NUMBERS:

1,050 Free Therapy Sessions

103 People Served

COMMUNITY CARE BY THE NUMBERS:

396 women served

22 wellness classes

18 workshops

4 groups

4 retreats

Topics covered: setting boundaries, Black love, self-recovery, women's empowerment, drumming, meditation, zumba, and yoga.

Celebrating Growth

If you asked what two years in would look like for SACC, 2022 exceeded any expectations we could have had for ourselves. We celebrated growth, adding to both our team and our Board of Directors to help us offer comprehensive mental wellness care to a growing number of clients. We'd love for you to meet them.



NEW BOARD MEMBERS

For the 2022–24 SACC Board we welcomed our new President, Tandra M. Rutledge. Tandra is a mental health and suicide prevention educator, advocate, and consultant. She currently serves as the Director of Healthcare Systems Initiatives for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Project 2025, a national initiative to reduce the annual suicide rate in the US by 20% by the year 2025.

Another new member is Sarah Suzuki, the founder of Chicago Compass Counseling (CCC). CCC is dedicated to serving the family system through inclusive, evidence-based behavior change counseling. The experiences these women bring to the SACC Board ensures that our organization is driven by both a passion for our mission as well as a wealth of expertise.

Staff Spotlight:

Tiana Hill, LCSW



Tiana D. Hill was born and raised on the South side of Chicago in the Greater Grand Crossing and Roseland neighborhood. She is a product of the Chicago Public School system and attended Miami University to obtain her bachelor's degree in Family Studies.

Tiana spent two years as a volunteer for inner-city youth, which led her to pursue her master's degree in social work from the University of Southern California. She has a diverse background ranging in education, foster care, juvenile justice, substance abuse, and mental health. In addition to SACC, she provides mental health

services to the youth and adults within the LGBTQ+ community who are HIV positive or vulnerable to acquiring HIV. She has a passion for social justice, building community, and ending the cycle of violence and intergenerational trauma.

Caring for Each Other

Halfway through the Year and Growing Strong

In an effort to raise awareness, build community, and increase support for Black women's mental wellness in Chicago, we launched the Caring for Her campaign this fall. Caring for Her consisted of three events to build community and funding to support SACC's work in serving Black women with multiple barriers to mental wellness care. Through this campaign, in addition to the three sold-out events, we raised over \$6,000 to support our Community Care program.



The first event of the Caring for Her campaign was Restaurant Week. Patrons could dine at Majani's Soulful Vegan Cuisine and Pie Pie My Darling, with a percentage of the restaurants' sales benefiting SACC.

We followed Restaurant Week with Caring for Her: State of Black Women's and Girls Mental Health Panel and Mixer held at the offices of our friends at Chicago Beyond. Over 50 attendees filled the room for a panel discussion featuring leaders in Black women and girls mental health in Chicago, including Dr. Inger Burnett Zeigler, Licensed Clinical Psychologist, speaker, and author of *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen: Emotional Lives of Black Women*; Lisa Butler, LCSW—Licensed Therapist, serving Black women and girls for over 20 years; Sherida Morrison, MA, founder of Coalition on Urban Girls; Rachel Bhagwat, MA, Director of Policy at NAMI Chicago; Jamila Trimuel, MA, Executive Director of Ladies of Virtue; Brittney Autry Cole, LCSW, licensed therapist and founder of Cent(her)ed Collective; and featured artist Pam Johnson Davis, award-winning poet and author.

Our final event was the Relax and Unwind: Mini-Retreat. The retreat-style wellness event focused on participants relaxing and unwinding before the end of the year through activities such as yoga, art-making, and sound healing.

We want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who made Caring for Her a huge success. Securing these funds ensures affordability and access to mental health care for Black women in Chicago.

CARING FOR HER SPONSORS

Black Roots Alliance

EverThrive Illinois

Women Unite!

WW

Drink Moment

Chicago Beyond

Bloom Yoga Studio

Chicago Foundation for Women

Sharing Our Innovation

With a rise in awareness about mental health in the Black community, everyday people want to be able to support people living with mental health conditions and to end stigma. This includes Mental Health First Aid training and topic-based trainings that are relevant to communities served. The Mental Health First Aid certification program is nationally recognized as having best practices to help people support the mental well-being of people living with mental health conditions and those in crises.



Our goal for Developing Mental Wellness Warriors is to strengthen the Black community's response to mental health crises in Chicago. Additionally, we seek to connect people to institutions and resources that can support prevalent mental health issues such as trauma, depression, anxiety, and substance use.

Last year, our goal was to hire a Mental Health First Aid trainer so that we could expand the number of people equipped to be mental health advocates in their communities.. We achieved that goal when we hired Ami Abdullahi, who helped us train 100 people to become mental health first aid responders in 2022. For Giving Tuesday, we raised an additional \$4,000 to support Ami's certification for teen and workplace Mental Health First Aid, expanding the work we do to reach even more people.

2022 DEVELOPING MENTAL WELLNESS WARRIORS BY THE NUMBERS:

100

people trained
in Mental Health
First Aid

12

Virtual
Trainings
were hosted

7

In-Person
trainings
were hosted

Community Synergy

As a small organization, creating a strong partnership can increase your impact. SACC partnered with a local, like-minded organization called Free Root Operation to do just that by delivering wellness care to Black women on the South and West sides of the city.

Free Root Operation (FRO) is combating gun violence by bringing compassion, resources, and opportunities to their South Shore community. During grocery deliveries that FRO conducted beginning with the 2020 George Floyd protests, it became evident that there was a niche need to be addressed. Nearly all the grocery recipients were mothers and women that were overwhelmed, under-resourced, feeling disempowered, and lacking opportunity. Many of them carried the burden of being an anchor to their entire family and those in their community. It soon became obvious that food insecurity pointed to an even deeper need: freedom of the self.

FRO developed the BLOOM program to assist these women along the lines of nourishment, transformation, and self-care. The goal of the program is to equip women to be leaders in their

families and communities through food, conversation, leisure, diverse experiences, and hands-on activities, facilitating a mind, body, and spiritual connection. Cohort participants are also exposed to 'luxury' experiences to heighten their ability to aspire, while also viewing themselves in a new and higher light.

Each month, SACC founder, Camesha, meets with the BLOOM cohort to facilitate an event relating to nourishment, transformation, and/or self-care, guiding these women to think about their wellness in ways and with support many of them haven't had before. Events include workshops, a bonfire, yoga in the park, art therapy, a field trip, and more. We are proud to be a part of these women's journeys and are proud to have an ongoing partnership with FRO.

To learn more about our partners at FRO, visit their website at freerootoperation.com.

“What we’re both doing is meeting people at the harm and at the pain and guiding them through to the future ... It’s an amazing partnership because we’re bringing that Western training with that ancestral knowledge and prospects for what we can be. We’re morphing [these women] into something radically different. I really do believe that what we’re doing here on the South side of Chicago should be applied across the nation and honestly across the world because it is anti-colonial, it is radical, and it is bringing back the value in Black women that society has tried to neglect for so long.”

—Eva Maria Lewis, Executive Director of Free Root Operation



Partner Spotlight:

Eva Maria Lewis, Executive Director
of Free Root Operation

Tell us about Free Root Operations and the BLOOM program's origins?

FRO's BLOOM program came from the Chicago Food Pairing Program, which was providing free groceries and household supplies to families in the South and West sides of Chicago. And we realized that of the 500 plus families that we were servicing, only 10 and less were headed by men. And so clearly there was a need for Black women, which was the majority of the people we were servicing to receive resources. Also they were telling us about disempowerment, so that's why BLOOM was born.

As a result, we have pivoted our work and response to the need that our community has been telling us to directly serve Black women, especially disenfranchised Black women, who are, ultimately not, provided resources. For example, women in their thirties through fifties, and single moms who there are not really programs for. And what we're doing is teaching them about self care, self love, nourishment, and in order to transform them into the powerful beings that have already existed within them, we're just helping to really like, nurture those talents, and those ideals and abilities out of them so that they could be leaders in their families on the block and within themselves.

How has partnering with SACC for BLOOM had an impact on women in the cohort?

The partnership with SACC, and in particular, Camesha, has been immeasurable because I am not a licensed therapist or trained social worker, even though I have

a lot of experience in community work and I have some social work training. To have someone (like Camesha) who has the skills to handle emotions and to target people's mental health, bring these topics into a conversation in a way that feels responsible because someone has that training.

It's just something that we would not have been able to do, had we not partnered with SACC.

How are SACC and FRO are aligned and how has this alignment been helpful in addressing the multiple challenges and strengths that Black women experience?

For sure—so I'm a sociologist, so I always talk about latent and manifest function with manifest being like someone perceives what you're doing to be in latent being exactly what you're doing. And so, our manifest function is like combating gun violence, but our latent function, is the idea that public safety cannot exist in our communities without compassion and opportunity.

Meaning that a lot of people, in the South and West sides have been formerly incarcerated, have dealt with poverty, have had to result in things that society might deem undesirable, but it doesn't make them less worthy of living their dreams, having agency and being able to impact others. What FRO was really doing is meeting them in the middle and saying, okay, I don't really care what you have done. I do care about what you've been through and I wanna help you.



So what we're both doing is meeting people at the harm and at the pain and guiding them to the future, helping them to dream, helping them to vision, helping them to say, okay, I wanna be a pastry chef. Which is literally what one of the women in BLOOM decided that she wanted to do. We're really helping people to open chapters they really never thought could exist.

And it's an amazing partnership because we're bringing that Western training with that ancestral knowledge and prospects for what we can be. And we're morphing them into something radically different. I really do believe that what we're doing here on the South side of Chicago should be applied across the nation and honestly across the world because it is anti-colonial, it is radical—it is bringing back the value in Black women that society has tried to neglect for so long.

What are your hopes for the Free Root Operation and BLOOM partnership with SACC for the future?

Oh, we're taking over the world, obviously! Honestly what I have, I have valued many, many things about this partnership. On a personal level, I have valued the different experiences between Camesha and I. I just graduated undergrad and Camesha is a licensed

social worker with her own clinic and she's been willing to work with me, be patient with me, and teach me things that I might not have been able to learn elsewhere. Even if she doesn't know she's teaching me. I'd be learning a lot of things and I am really grateful for the fact that we have been able to garner a sisterhood among the women that we're servicing and also kind of build a sisterhood among ourselves.

And I think that it's a really beautiful thing when you are helping other people. It's not charity, it's not altruistic because you understand that the freedom that you're helping other people embody is also the freedom that you two are embodying. And that's exactly how it should be. We should be perpetuating all of our freedom, our communal freedom, cuz that's how you stay invested. And I want us to continue to do that. I want us to, I want us to show other people that it's okay to love Black women as a Black woman.

I just think that what we're ultimately doing is really great and really beautiful and I'm excited to continue to work.

I'm excited for FRO to continue to work with SACC in the future. And I'm also excited to see what happens as we scale and build and intertwine our purposes and missions and work with each other.

In the Media

We are so grateful to have been featured in multiple outlets and publications in 2022. The recognition that Sista Afya Community Care receive helps spread our message of culturally centered mental wellness care.



[Sista Afya hosting 'Caring For Her' event—focusing on mental health of Black women and girls.](#)

CBS News Chicago, October 20, 2022

[Learn about holistic health and support a South Shore mental wellness center at Saturday's whole woman wellness festival.](#)

Block Club Chicago, May 5, 2022

"All of the panelists have a direct tie to Chicago and have provided direct care and services, or have been advocates in some way to ... improve the mental wellbeing of Black women and girls,' said Camesha Jones, Sista Afya executive director. It was important for me to bring women together who not just talk the talk, but walk the walk and are ... leaders and visionaries of this work as well."



[Wellness retreat boom: Meet the Black woman founder hosting them for free.](#)

The Grio, August 25, 2022

[Free Root Operation Hosts Free Dinner for Low-Income Women of Color with Majani Restaurant.](#)

Chicago Defender, April 5, 2022

"I really want to encourage Black women. A lot of times we wait a little bit too long to reach out for support and care. And the sooner that we do it, the sooner that we can see our lives improve in so many ways,' said Jones. 'And I believe that mental wellness is probably one of the most important issues in the Black community. If our community was healed, our community was well, we would be unstoppable. So I really encourage women that if you're noticing some changes with your mental wellness, go ahead and seek that support.'"

Thriving in Year Three

- Expanding services for Medicaid recipients
- Deepening relationships with community partners on the South side
- Strengthen our capacity and sustainability of our organization

As we look forward to the year ahead, SACC has big goals. We are excited to expand our services to include Medicaid recipients, of which there are over 3.3 million in Illinois. This will create access to mental wellness for a large group of women who will now be able to receive our therapy services. We would also like to deepen relationships with our community partners on the South side. Our partnerships have added extreme value to our clients, providing them with meaningful experiences on their mental health journeys.

We would like to continue to grow SACC's infrastructure to provide more capacity to operate our programming and organization as a whole. This includes adding a case manager to our team to support community members with high needs. We've noted enough need for this role that we hope to make it a reality as soon as possible. Additionally, we would like to strengthen our board by giving them more opportunities to help with planning and meeting our clients through community events.



Funding SACC's Future

SACC is grateful to highlight our generous returning and new funders. These organizations are essential supporters of our mission to deliver comprehensive, free mental wellness care.



Join Our Community in 2023

SACC has worked to expand our services this year, in part due to growing demand for mental health care caused by the pandemic. We couldn't do this without you. We need your help to keep growing and keep working to provide access and education.

Here is how you can be part of our community:

1 Donate to SACC at communitycare.sistaafya.com/donate

2 Sign up for our email list to have a more intimate experience getting to know us and our work at communitycare.sistaafya.com

3 Share our services with women in your area seeking holistic mental wellness care by signing up for services at communitycare.sistaafya.com/get-support

4 Spread the word—share our posts that resonate with you and others on social media and tag us [@sistaafya](https://www.instagram.com/sistaafya)

Leadership

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sistaafya.com/communitycare

Donate:

donorbox.org/sistaafya-fund

