



## The Asheville Chapter of the Links, Incorporated

*Linked in Friendship, Connected in Service*



C. Pamela Lowe-Hoyte, MD, MPH

**The impact of treatment during slavery and beyond has left a deeply ingrained stigma against mental illness and seeking help for challenges among members of the African American community.**

When this is added to the dearth of providers of color or diversity, and the pervasive lack of trust, we have a situation that is chronic. This year-long program has done much to open eyes to the situation, as well as begin the conversation at all age levels, but long-standing habits and stigma are not likely to be erased nor truly dismantled in a calendar year.

Continued education at all levels is needed to target this stigma over time, and this is best done in programming that is reliable, chronic, ongoing, and sustainable.

C. Pamela Lowe-Hoyte, MD, MPH, President, Asheville Chapter of the Links, Incorporated



JéWana Grier-McEachin

## Fighting Mental Health Stigma to Survive Historical and Present Day Trauma

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Program Chair, Asheville Chapter of the Links, Incorporated

**As a recipient of one of the Dogwood Health Racial Equity Grants at the end of 2020, the Asheville Chapter of the Links, Incorporated desired to tackle the stigma of discussing and addressing mental health in the African American Community.**

As a chapter, we have a unique interest and capacity for support to the community because our chapter president is one of the only black psychiatrists in the region, and we have many members who own businesses that provide mental health support services in addition to those that provide direct services within the healthcare system and public health.

Within this context, we know how immense this issue is and we decided to take a five-point approach from a heart of service.

- Provide education about mental illness as a brain disease and not a religious or personal weakness.
- Train faith leaders, equipping them to sit at the intersection of Faith and Mental Health for the African American population.
- Champion the importance of Self-Care for all ages taught by experts from the African American community.
- Promote and provide Mental Health First Aid Certification and CIT training for African American adults, youth and interested law enforcement.
- Support access to culturally competent care.

In the short window of a year we are proud of the traction we were able to make through programming:

- Women Specific: Taking Care of Mind Body and Soul interactive virtual presentation
- Distribution of self-care bags
- Victor Armstrong presentation to local pastors addressing churches' role in addressing stigma in African American community regarding mental illness.
- Two adult Mental Health First Aid Instructors trained to train community members
- Development of CIT booklets
- Presentations to the ladies at several local congregations
- Art as Healing sessions for children and adults
- Mental Health First Aid training to be offered free of charge as part of the grant to Community Health Workers, local African American-owned Mental Health Agency, and pastors.
- Nationally known speaker to discuss Depression in Women
- Developed and aired public service announcements titled "A Links Mental Health Minute" on WRES during the fall months, and in the weeks leading up to the holidays, which can be difficult for some.

### Results and Impact

- Results of after-program surveys have been almost 98% positive with participants noting particularly that they have learned new things and ideas.
- Comments from participants have been unanimously positive.

- LINKS speakers have been invited to speak again and to plan for more of a series of educational events.
- Educational and self-care material has been taken where offered.

### Future Plans and Sustainability

We are committed to making this a long-term effort by:

- Blanketing our community with educational materials like CIT literature, PSAs, and opportunities to learn about mental illness.
- Offering Mental Health First Aid to important segments of our community, to include but not limited to community health workers and child care providers. This medium has been shown to reduce stigma through recognition, compassion and the power of having someone close to them care, reach out, and suggest getting help.
- Focusing on educating young children about feelings, care, and compassion.
- Education of one LINK member, already trained to work with adults, to work with children and teenagers to offer Mental Health First Aid to that age group
- Further offering Art and The Arts as tools for healing in the community.

Thank you to Dogwood Health Trust for investing in our passion. We look forward to continuing to make a meaningful impact in our community.

## Safeguard Your Mental Health

Mental Health is supported by:

- A healthy diet
- 6-8 hours of sleep
- Regular exercise
- Prayer and Meditation
- Spending time outdoors
- Volunteering
- Having an attitude of thankfulness and forgiveness
- Spending time with people who truly care about you

- Making time to do your favorite activities
- Asking for help when you feel overwhelmed
- Labeling what you are experiencing (name it to tame it)
- Limiting or refraining from use of potentially addictive substances (tobacco, alcohol, drugs)



## Depression, Anxiety & the African American Female

A Zoom Webinar with Dr. Shakeerrah D. Lawrence, PhD, LCMHC

**Sunday, March 27 • 4-5 p.m. • Door Prizes**

Dr. Lawrence is the owner of CTB Counseling & Consulting, PLLC  
Topics Covered: Risk Factors, Symptoms, the Impact of Race & Culture, Treatment Options & Coping Strategies, Recovery.

To join the FREE webinar, go to [https://us02web.zoom.us/](https://us02web.zoom.us/MeetingID:82344453210)  
Meeting ID: 823 4445 3210 Passcode: 223328

For more information, please contact Sharon Pitts, [sharonpitts1@gmail.com](mailto:sharonpitts1@gmail.com) or (828) 258-5359. Presented by the Asheville Chapter of the Links Incorporated.



Shakeerrah D. Lawrence, PhD, LCMHC



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## Strengthening Our Mental Health



By Sharon Pitts

**Since the advent of Covid, the nation has become profoundly aware of the importance of our mental health and how easily it can be compromised.**

More and more people are experiencing unusual and uncomfortable bouts of fatigue, anxiety, sadness, anger/rage, loneliness, difficulty sleeping, etc.

This increased awareness of our mental health is even evident in our Black community—a community that historically avoids any discussion of mental health. Yet, more and more we see articles about mental health in popular Black publications. Furthermore, Blacks are beginning to enter occupations in Mental Health.

Mental health problems, like other health problems in the body, occur along a continuum, from very healthy, to moderately healthy, to moderately unhealthy, to very unhealthy. Getting proper mental health care early is essential to getting a person on track to improved health.

Listed on the opposite page are simple ways to safeguard one's mental health as well as strengthen it once it has become problematic. If unwanted feelings persist, it is time to talk with your family doctor. Your mood change may be caused by health issues that the doctor may need to address. If this is not the situation, it is time to seek help from a pastoral counselor, psychiatric social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. No matter your income level, these professionals are available.



### Crisis Response

CIT is the Gold Standard for Crisis Response. It is a community-based program that provides special training in de-escalation and crisis resolution to law enforcement officers and other first responders.

Taking as much time as needed, officers use these techniques to respond to a person experiencing a mental health, substance abuse, or developmental disabilities emergency. Such techniques safeguard both the person in crisis and the officer.

If needed, the person in crisis can be taken to a stabilization center to receive medical treatment and be reconnected to a mental health provider. If the person has broken a law, CIT is also a jail diversion program. Judges have the option to offer a defendant a choice of serving time in jail or in a treatment program. Upon completion of treatment, judges have the option to expunge the defendant's record.

## Mental Health Resources

*You deserve to feel better!*

Reaching out for help is the first important step to putting yourself on the path to getting better. Here are several places to begin asking for help:

### VAYA Health

Finding care can be confusing sometimes. Vaya Health makes it easier. The 24/7 Access to Care Line is available for people in crisis or those seeking information about care. This service is available to all residents regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. Call 1 (800) 849-6127.

### RHA Health Services

C3356 Comprehensive Care Center: Same day walk-in Crisis Clinic, Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC), Counseling, Peer Support, Pharmacy, Crisis Planning. Call (828) 210-2651.

### NAMI Western Carolina

NAMI WC offers free education and support programs that provide relevant mental health information, valuable insight, advocacy opportunities, and the opportunity to engage in support networks for individuals, family members, healthcare workers, and the general public. Visit [namiwnc.org](http://namiwnc.org), or call (828) 505-7353, Mon., Tue., Thurs., from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

### Additional Counseling & Behavioral Health Centers

All Souls Counseling Center: (828) 259-3369

Family Preservation Services: (828) 225-3100

NC Brookhaven Behavioral Health: (828) 676-1657

MAHEC Psychiatry & Mental Wellness: (828) 398-3601



## Heart Health in the Black Community

A Zoom Webinar with Dr. Michelle Boose and Dr. LaVone Smith

Thursday, March 10 • 7–8PM • Door Prizes



Presenters:

**Michelle Boose, MD, MPH, FAAFP** serves as clinical faculty in the department of Family Medicine at Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) in Asheville.

Her areas of interest are health prevention and wellness.

**LaVone Smith, MD** is a cardiologist with Asheville Cardiology Associates. She specializes in Advanced Heart Failure, Mechanical Circulatory Support, and Pulmonary Hypertension.

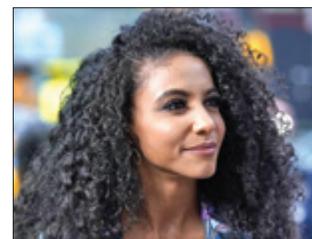


Michelle Boose MD, MPH, FAAFP

To join the FREE webinar, go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/MeetingID:83878781543> Passcode: 547555

For more information, please contact Sharon Pitts, [sharonpitts1@gmail.com](mailto:sharonpitts1@gmail.com) or (828) 258-5359. Presented by the Asheville Chapter of the Links Incorporated.

## Addressing Suicide



Cheslie Kryst, former Miss USA, hid her depression from everyone.

With the recent deaths of Regina King's 26-year-old son and 30-year-old Attorney Cheslie Kryst (former Miss NC and Miss USA), suicide is on the minds of many people. The common thought is that if you suspect that someone may have suicidal thoughts you should be silent, for fear that talking about your observation will trigger a suicide attempt. Actually, the opposite is generally true.

### If You Think Someone Might Be Considering Suicide

The best thing to do is gently say, "I feel like you may be thinking about hurting yourself."

### Don't be afraid to ask!

Asking generally makes the person less likely to act on thoughts of suicide—like letting air out of a balloon.

### Listen to their response.

If they say yes, ask if they thought how they might do it.

If they have a "Plan," or if you continue to sense the person might want to hurt themselves, seek help right away!

### Get Help

If this is an emergency, call or text 911, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1 (800) 273-8255. Otherwise, contact Vaya Health's 24/7 Access to Care line, 1 (800) 849-6127.