

# Empowering Women through Holistic Care

2025  
IMPACT  
REPORT

Sista Afya  
COMMUNITY CARE





## Letter from Executive Director



This year marks 5 years since Sista Afya Community Care's (SACC) founding. Our organization was born in the midst of the COVID pandemic crisis, which was a critical and uncertain time for many of us. I remember how more people than I have encountered in my mental health career wanted mental wellness support and to be connected with others. Since our founding in 2020, SACC has risen to meet many challenges that Black women and girls face in Chicago and nationally. The SACC Team and Board of Directors worked together to innovate and rise to the moment to meet Black women and girls where they are—to let them know they are not alone and deserve the best mental health care regardless of their background.

I am blown away by all that our Team and community have accomplished together. From serving over 2000 women and girls, to expanding access to holistic care services, and receiving recognition from Former First Lady Michelle Obama, SACC has been a beacon of hope and promise in the mental health care field. This year, SACC is meeting another set of challenges that could threaten

the advances in mental health care that we worked hard to achieve. Sociopolitical tension, cutting of safety net programs, and economic uncertainty have left Black women and girls in a unique place of vulnerability. This year, we have shifted to provide what our community needs during this time of vulnerability. Our staff are unwavering in our commitment and refuse to be broken by setbacks. Our commitment has been renewed by this time of crisis because we understand that **mental health care makes a difference, and it literally saves lives.**

As we enter 2026, uncertainty remains. But thriving in this climate demands more than resilience—it requires vision, strategy, and community. SACC will be here: strong, bold, and unwavering in our commitment to our community. **Join us in fighting for mental health equity and ensuring Black women and girls have vibrant, thriving futures.**



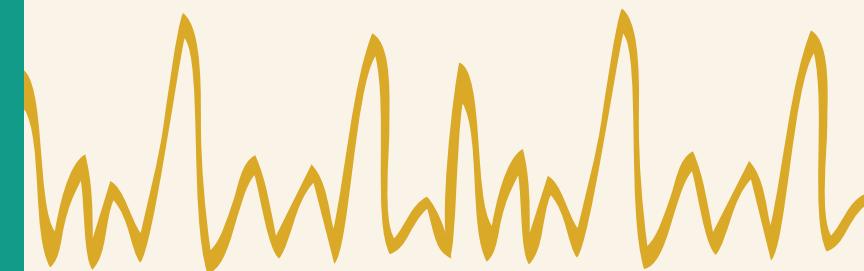
**Camesha L. Jones-Brandon, LCSW**  
Executive Director, Sista Afya Community Care

## Our Mission

Sista Afya Community Care builds sustainable mental wellness communities through providing affordable and culturally-centered community mental wellness care and education.

## Our Vision

We believe in a world where mental wellness care is accessible and achievable for any woman who needs it in her community.



# Showing Up for Black Women & Girls

In 2025, Black women and girls faced new but familiar challenges that impacted their ability to lead healthy lives. For the first time since the pandemic, the SACC client community sought us out for services focused on basic survival outside of individual therapy. From job loss to housing crises and inflation—Black women and girls became more vulnerable to mental health concerns that threatened their stability. SACC saw this shift occurring and immediately implemented more holistic support for our community. Through the support of a grant from Cook County Health, SACC hired a Clinical Case Manager and Peer Supporters, to provide enhanced connection to resources and community care—with many of our clients for the first time using a wide range of our services to meet their needs. SACC became not just about therapy and community events; we, for the first time, provided a deeper level of care that met the moment of challenge and change that Black women and girls are living through now. Our dedicated and compassionate staff showed up for



Black women and girls consistently, listened to their needs, and moved swiftly to enhance our offerings from a spirit of collective action grounded in well-being.

# Transforming Mental Health Equity through Policy and Practice



SACC embarked on not just offering services but amplifying the importance of civic engagement in transforming the mental wellness outcomes of our community. In November, we hosted the Mental Health Impact Summit, which empowers mental health providers to lead boldly through impactful policy and practice. The Summit was hosted at **Erikson Institute**, a leader in mental health and policy education that focuses on the well-being of children, their families, and communities. The Summit's keynote speaker was **Illinois State Representative Lindsey LaPointe, LSW**, a fearless advocate for mental health policy for all people in Illinois. The Summit featured speakers who shared their expertise on relevant and urgent topics such as crisis response, navigating changes in Medicaid policy, and AI and Big Tech's impact on mental health care. For SACC, advancing mental health equity does not just happen through services—it happens through systemic action. We look forward to building upon the Mental Health Impact Summit to uplift mental health advocacy that can improve the livelihood of all Illinoisans.

# Thank You to Our Partners

We are grateful for our corporate partners and supporters, whose unwavering commitment and collaboration have been essential in breaking barriers to mental health care. Your support has helped us empower women and teen girls and create a community that embodies Wellness Without Limits, ensuring access to quality mental wellness care for all.

## Foundation Partners

African American Legacy Fund  
 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois  
 Chicago Community Trust  
 Chicago Foundation for Women  
 Chicago LINKS  
 Foundation for Health Enhancement  
 Fourth Presbyterian Church, World Mission and Social Justice Council  
 Julian Grace Foundation  
 Reva & David Logan Foundation



## Corporate Partners

Bank of America, Charitable Trust Fund  
 Blue Door Neighborhood Center  
 Cent(her)ed Collective  
 Copper Wellness  
 The Elevate Box  
 Illinois Network of Charter Schools  
 Loyola University of Chicago, Parkinson School of Health Sciences and Public Health  
 Meridian Medicaid Plan  
 Northwestern University, Alliance for Research with Chicagoland Communities  
 PCA Skin  
 University of Chicago Medicine

## Academic Partner

Erikson Institute

## Government Partners

Cook County Health  
 Cook County Justice Advisory Council

# Program Highlights, Impact & Statistics



# Thrive in Therapy

*Thrive in Therapy* provides affordable individual therapy and clinical case management for people experiencing multiple barriers to care.

Through our *Thrive in Therapy* program, SACC empowered women by breaking down barriers to mental health care. In 2025, we served over 300 women and girls—our largest number to date. We expanded options to afford therapy—including private health insurance, Medicaid, and reduced-fee options—opening up options for anyone, regardless of income, to receive mental health treatment. In addition to individual therapy, we provided clinical case management to over 70 women. Our Clinical Case Manager helped women navigate housing, childcare assistance, food assistance, and public benefits applications.

## Thrive in Therapy By the Numbers

**311**

Total People Served

**2,771**

Free Therapy Sessions

“

Ever since I started in therapy, I have always felt welcomed, supported and validated. My weekly meetings mean so much to me. My counselor has become a very important support person in my support system. She always communicates and is there when I need her. It has brought me into a space of gratitude and self-love to be poured into and given resources the way that I have been able to get during this program.”

**Thrive in Therapy Testimonial**

# Thrive in Therapy for Teens

This past summer, Thrive in Therapy for Teens (TTT) provided enhanced mental wellness programming to over 40 girls in Chicago. Each week, girls engaged in our ***Black Girls Blossoming*** group therapy program for middle and high school age girls using the ***Black Girls Smile Group Coaching Curriculum***.



Girls also engaged in art therapy with Pierra Brown, a youth Art Therapist exploring the intersection of Black girlhood and artistic expression. We offered monthly teen drop-ins and our quarterly VIBE Day. Our Back-to-School themed VIBE Day included Hip-Hop Dance by Praize Productions, Art Therapy by The Healing Academy, and a stress management workshop from Ladies of Virtue. Our increase in programming for TTT was made possible by a grant from Meridian and UChicago Medicine.

**“** I loved this group so bad! It taught me how to cope and speak positive thoughts.”

Thrive in Therapy for Teens Testimonial

## TTT By the Numbers

45%

rated their experience as “excellent”

50%

shared that art activities were impactful and engaging

75%

are very likely to return for a future event

# Community Care

Community Care provides free workshops, groups, peer support, and wellness classes where Black women can connect, learn, and support one another with their mental wellness.

Through Community Care, women experienced enhanced connection that moved them out of isolation to address mental wellness challenges. This year, we increased support through *Heal TogetHER*—an evidence based peer support program for Black women developed by Dr. Marion Malcome in partnership with SACC. Women engaged in up to 5 brief emotional support and problem-solving sessions with a peer supporter. The impact of *Heal TogetHER* was astounding:

## HEAL TogetHER By the Numbers

94%

satisfaction rating  
of services

99%

would recommend  
*Heal TogetHER*



“

The meeting I had was transformational for me. I can't even believe the 'work' we did in 30 minutes has had a better effect than my six months in therapy. This kind of support is NEEDED in our community because we can get lonely in a room full of people.”

*HEAL TogetHER Testimonial*

SACC continued to offer our monthly community events and groups for women at no-cost. This year, we hosted events like a community care walk with Girl Trek to a Financial Therapy workshop with acclaimed Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Aja Evans author of the book *Feel Good Finance*. We provided Black women with a holistic avenue to care for themselves with topics relevant to their everyday lives.

“

I appreciate the intentionality and personalization of the event. Every woman who attended got/learned something we needed. It was a wonderful experience to feel grounded after feeling dysregulated for so long.”

Community Care Testimonial



### Community Care By the Numbers

179

Participants

97

Groups,  
Workshops,  
and Classes

82

Peer Support  
Participants

# Developing Mental Wellness Warriors

**Developing Mental Wellness Warriors (DMWW) provides low-cost professional development training to local organizations and businesses that focus on supporting people with mental health conditions. This includes topic-based professional development training to social workers and counselor, adult mental health first aid, and youth mental health first aid.**

In 2025, DMWW equipped individuals to support others experiencing mental health challenges. DMWW trained over 60 people, including participants from Chicago Volunteer Doulas, expanding its impact to maternal and child health. Empowered by their training, these mental wellness warriors became advocates and supporters, equipped to show up for women who are experiencing mental health crises. In addition, for the first time, SACC provided mental health consulting services to non-profit organizations in Chicago. Through our consulting services, we supported organizations with improving operations, client experience, and mental health program evaluation.



## DMWW By the Numbers

**60**

**People Trained**

**14**

**Virtual Trainings**

**3**

**Organizations Trained:**

Artists Community Alliance  
Chicago Volunteer Doulas  
Ox Bow

“

It's a really lovely course. I felt confident in responding before, but now I feel like I'll be more effective. I also have a clear understanding of my role as a MHFA responder. Before, I probably would have tried to do too much. I'm happy to know the tested and approved best ways to communicate when a person is having a Mental Health Crisis.”

**DMWW Participant**



# Authentic Alignment: Empowering Black Women to Thrive in Wellness and Work

Since January 2025, **over 400,000 Black women have lost their jobs** through mass layoffs, company restructurings, shifting diversity priorities, and the economic downturn. Given the loss and challenges that Black women are having in the workplace, it is imperative that they have a space to focus on their mental well-being and make career decisions from a place of alignment.

This past Spring we hosted our first cohort of Authentic Alignment—a mental wellness platform designed to empower Black women to embrace their authenticity, ambition, and alignment in wellness and work. This initiative reflects our commitment to addressing the unique challenges Black women face, particularly in their professional lives, while providing tools to support their holistic well-being.



Created specifically for early career professionals, Authentic Alignment empowered 5 women in a 4-month pilot cohort to embrace mental wellness, increase professional development, and receive peer support from other Black women. Participants from Authentic Alignment explored topics including self-worth, Black women's workplace experiences, emotional intelligence, networking, work-life alignment, and how to enhance life beyond their careers.



**Women received:**

- Biweekly Peer Support Groups
- Professional Development Workshops
- Topic-Based Wellness Classes
- Two In-Person Retreats
- Individual Therapy

“

I felt so overwhelmed and dissatisfied with work before this cohort. Now I accept my gifts, have identified my purpose, and feel like I have a plan of action to being more aligned. I love the women I met. I feel connected, understood, appreciated, and reassured.”

**Authentic Alignment Testimonial**



We are excited to continue Authentic Alignment in 2026 and are grateful to our donors, such as Loyola University of Chicago, Parkinson School of Health Sciences & Public Health, and partners whose support makes programs like Authentic Alignment possible, enabling us to create opportunities for Black women to align their wellness and ambitions in ways that encourage growth and success.



Learn more about  
Authentic Alignment

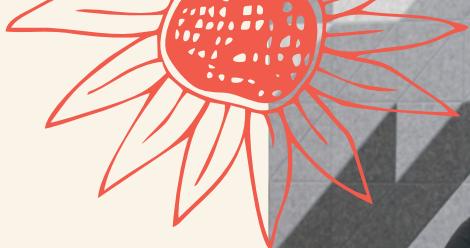


# Stories, Highlights, and Spotlights



# Women Rising Wellness Festival

The Women Rising Wellness Festival was a day of healing, empowerment, and community at the Discover Shine Bright Community Center. Over 70 women engaged in wellness classes and educational workshops led by Black women wellness practitioners. Women participated in classes from everything to body-liberation yoga to healing through artistic expression.



“

It was great. The venue was beautiful and the workshops were awesome. I loved meeting all the beautiful Black women that are invested in bettering their lives.”

**Women Rising Wellness Festival Testimonial**

# Sisters Rising Community Breakfast

The Sisters Rising Community Breakfast brought together Chicago's most inspiring women—living testaments to what power and resilience look like in action.

The morning spotlight shone on **Tytannie Harris, LCSW**, Founder and CEO of TMH Behavioral Services, who captivated the room with her deeply personal journey. From struggle to social impact, Tytannie's story illuminated the path that led her to revolutionize mental health care in Chicago—building businesses that don't just serve communities, but truly understand them.

We also celebrated **Ladies of Virtue**, a transformative mentoring program reshaping the future by empowering Black girls to step into their purpose as the next generation of leaders.

Between bites of a delicious breakfast, the energy was electric—women connecting, stories flowing, and a community strengthening with every conversation. This wasn't just networking. This was sisterhood in action.



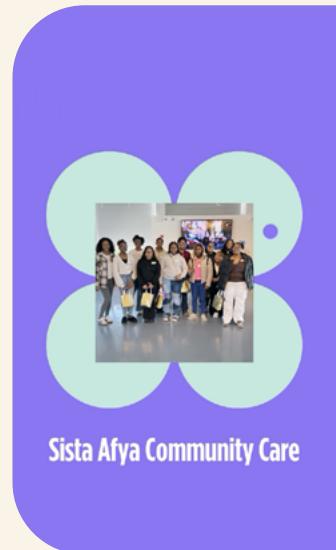
# SACC in the News

SACC's Founder, Camesha Jones-Brandon was featured in the article ['Youth Mental Health: It Doesn't Have to Be Therapy to Be Therapeutic'](#) by [New Profit](#). In this article, she shares the power of holistic mental health care for Black teen girls that is effective and just as impactful as therapy.

Camesha also appeared on [PBS NewsHour: Black Americans Struggle with Lack of Mental Health Care Access in Communities](#). She discussed the shortage of mental health providers for young Black Americans.



SACC featured as a top resource for mental health on Rapper, DoeChii's resource hub. Visit the website to check out amazing mental health resources at: [anxietyiswatchingme.com](http://anxietyiswatchingme.com)



SACC's work with teens was highlighted by Former First Lady, Michelle Obama as a part of the Girls Opportunity Alliance.

# Looking Forward to 2026



## Looking ahead to 2026, SACC is excited to build on the progress we've made and embark on new initiatives to deepen our impact.

In 2026, we are committed to increasing our ability to provide holistic mental health care. These efforts reflect our unwavering dedication to meeting the evolving mental health needs of women and teen girls we serve and empowering them to thrive.

### **Enhancing professional development education**

for Illinois Social Workers and Counselors through classes on community mental health, social justice, and culturally-responsive care.

**Expanding Heal TogetHER**, our peer support model for Black women and training other organizations to implement it in their communities nationally.

**Showing up for Black women and girls** through enhanced, relevant, and consistent programming that meets their needs in an evolving mental health landscape.

**Deepening our impact** in our existing programs by forming new aligned community partners, expanding our reach beyond the South side of Chicago.

## Join Our Community

We believe that everyone has a part to play in breaking barriers to mental health care for Black women.

Whether you volunteer, donate, or help spread the word, your involvement is essential to sustaining our mission and expanding access to mental wellness care. We are creating a community embodying Empowering Women through Holistic Care, ensuring that Black women and girls have the support they need to thrive and make lasting, positive change. Join us in this vital work!

**Give:** Become a monthly donor and join our Collective Care Giving Circle, or make a one-time gift at [communitycare.sistaafya.com/donate](http://communitycare.sistaafya.com/donate).

**Connect:** Sign up for our email list to stay informed and gain a deeper understanding of our work at [communitycare.sistaafya.com](http://communitycare.sistaafya.com).

**Volunteer:** Join Friends of SACC and contribute your time and skills to support our work.

**Share:** Let women in your community know about our holistic mental wellness services by directing them to [communitycare.sistaafya.com/get-support](http://communitycare.sistaafya.com/get-support).

**Amplify:** Help spread the word by sharing our social media posts that resonate with you, and tag us @sistaafya.

# Leadership

Executive Director

**Camesha L. Jones-  
Brandon, LCSW**

President

**Tandra M. Rutledge**

Treasurer

**Dr. Arielle Smith**

Secretary

**Rayell Grayson, LCPC**

Board Members

**LaKeisha Gunn**

**Venu Gupta**

**Shelena Johnson**

**Sarah Suzuki, LCSW**

**LaShawnda Thornton**

**Nicole Tyrpak, LCPC**

**Kiesha Williams, LCSW**

**Leslie Wooten**



**Learn more:**

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