

Heal TogetHER

One-Year Pilot Executive Summary

April 2024 - September 2025

Bottom Line: Heal TogetHER, a peer support intervention designed by and for Black women, produces large, statistically significant improvements in mental health outcomes with 94% satisfaction and exceptional equity across all demographic groups. The program is ready for scaling with a proven train-the-trainer model.

The Challenge

Black women face unique mental health challenges at the intersection of racism and sexism, experiencing depression that is more severe, chronic, and disabling than their white counterparts. Yet Black women are **half as likely to seek mental health care** as white women due to barriers including stigma, cost, mistrust, and lack of culturally-responsive providers.

The Solution: Heal TogetHER

Heal TogetHER is an innovative, community-based peer support model where Black

women with lived experience provide brief, culturally-grounded mental wellness support to other Black women. Adapted from Zimbabwe's Connect.Talk.Support program, the intervention delivers 3-5 virtual sessions addressing mild-to-moderate mental health concerns through problem-solving, mindfulness skills, psychoeducation on gendered racism, and stereotype resistance strategies.

A Truly Community-Centered Design

Heal TogetHER was developed through an authentic community engagement process:

- **February 2024:** Focus groups with 18 Black women revealed barriers to care (cultural stigma, limited culturally-competent providers, intergenerational trauma) and desires for community-centered solutions
- **March 2024:** Dr. Ruth Verhey from Zimbabwe trained 30 community members (practitioners, peers, and community members) on the Connect.Talk.Support model to gather community buy-in and perspective
- **April 2024:** Informed by all the feedback gathered from the community, Dr. Malcome collaborated with Sista Afya Community Care (SACC) to adapt the model, creating Heal TogetHER
- **August 2024-September 2025:** Official pilot implementation and evaluation

Pilot Results at a Glance

97

Black Women
Served

140

Sessions
Delivered

94%

Satisfaction
Rate

99%

Would
Recommend

Mental Health Improvements (All $p < .001$)

Outcome	Mean Score	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Social Connection	4.34/5.0	1.26 (Very Large)
Sense of Belonging	4.26/5.0	1.12 (Very Large)
Mental Health Awareness	4.23/5.0	1.03 (Very Large)
Emotion Regulation	4.04/5.0	0.90 (Large)
Reduced Distress	3.96/5.0	0.73 (Large)
Overall Effectiveness	4.16/5.0	1.20 (Very Large)

Critical Success Factor: When peer supporters met participants' emotional needs, effectiveness scores were 4x higher (4.27 vs 1.10), demonstrating that the quality of the peer relationship is the intervention's most powerful mechanism.

Health Equity: It Works for Everyone

Heal TogetHER produced consistent, equitable outcomes with no significant differences in effectiveness or satisfaction by age, income, parental status, or current treatment engagement. This is rare in health interventions and demonstrates that when we center the most marginalized in intervention design, we create solutions that work for everyone.

Who We Served

- **66%** under age 36 (primarily young to mid-career women)
- **72%** earning under \$65K annually (low-to-moderate income)
- **50%** mothers, 50% non-mothers (universal appeal)
- **72%** NOT currently in mental health treatment (reaching underserved population)

Equity Insight: Heal TogetHER successfully reaches Black women who face barriers to traditional mental health care—72% of participants were not receiving treatment, yet reported high satisfaction and significant mental health improvements.

Why Heal TogetHER Works: Evidence from 101 Participants

Our mixed-methods approach combined quantitative surveys (N=97) with qualitative data from 89 open-ended responses and focus groups with 12 participants. Their voices reveal how and why peer support creates transformation:

"The meeting I had was transformational for me. I can't even believe the 'work' we did in 30 mins has had a better affect than my 6 months in therapy. This kind of support is NEEDED in our community."

Six Key Mechanisms

1. **Cultural Concordance** - "Someone who looks like me and understands" (7 mentions) eliminates need to explain racism or cultural context
2. **Being Heard & Validated** - "I felt heard and not patronized" (34 mentions) - authentic listening without judgment
3. **Connection & Community** - "Community and connection drives healing" (13 mentions) - reduces isolation and opens access to support networks
4. **Safe Space** - "Without coming off as the angry Black woman" (12 mentions) - freedom to express emotions authentically
5. **Practical Tools** - Affirmations, breathing techniques, problem-solving frameworks provide immediate coping strategies
6. **Access Alternative** - For 72% not in treatment, provides gateway to care; for 28% in therapy, offers cultural complement

"I've been in therapy with other corporations... but with Heal Together, it felt very personable. I felt like I was really talking to a friend. The clinical therapist I'm working with is not Black, so... just having someone that's like me... made this program all worth it."

Ready for Partnership & Scale

Heal TogetHER has moved beyond pilot phase and is prepared for immediate expansion with established infrastructure:

What's Ready Now

- Train-the-trainer program developed and operational - Partner organizations can be certified to deliver Heal TogetHER
- Comprehensive training curriculum with fidelity measures
- Virtual delivery model proven effective across Chicago
- Quality assurance and evaluation framework ready for implementation

- Research partnership infrastructure for ongoing measurement

Ideal Partner Organizations

- Community-based organizations serving Black women
- Mental health service providers seeking cultural competency enhancement
- Community health centers expanding behavioral health services
- Faith-based organizations with wellness initiatives

What Participants Are Asking For

Based on feedback from 89 participants, Black women want:

- More/longer sessions (program expanded from 3 to 5 sessions based on this feedback)
- Group therapy options to build community connections
- In-person gatherings to complement virtual sessions
- Broader awareness so more Black women know about the service

Value Proposition for Partners

For Black Women

- Accessible mental wellness support (free, virtual, culturally-grounded)
- Alternative pathway for those facing barriers to traditional therapy
- Cultural complement for those already in treatment
- Gateway to further care with reduced stigma

For Organizations

- Evidence-based intervention with rigorous evaluation data

- Workforce development - trains Black women as peer specialists, addressing behavioral health provider shortage
- Cost-effective - brief intervention (3-5 sessions) with large effects
- Turnkey implementation - train-the-trainer model with comprehensive support
- Competitive advantage - demonstrates cultural responsiveness and health equity commitment
- Research partnership - ongoing evaluation support from Dr. Malcome

For Funders

- Proven impact - effect size ($d=1.20$) exceeds many traditional interventions
- Health equity - reaches underserved populations (72% not in treatment)
- Community-designed - authentically co-created with Black women
- Scalable model - train-the-trainer enables horizontal spread
- Strong ROI - prevents escalation to crisis care through early intervention

Research Rigor

Study Design: Mixed-methods pilot evaluation using Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles

Quantitative Methods: Post-intervention surveys ($N=97$) measuring 5-item effectiveness scale (Cronbach's $\alpha=.893$), satisfaction, acceptability, and demographics. Analysis included one-sample t-tests, ANOVAs, correlation analysis, and chi-square tests.

Qualitative Methods: Open-ended survey responses ($N=89$) and focus groups ($N=12$) with thematic analysis revealing mechanisms of change and participant experiences.

Timeline: Pilot launched April 2024; data collection August 2024-September 2025

Research Leadership: Led by Dr. Marion Malcome, LCSW (Assistant Professor, Loyola University Chicago) in partnership with Sista Afya Community Care NFP (Camesha Jones-Brandon, LCSW, Executive Director).

Next Steps: Partner With Us

Heal TogetHER has proven its effectiveness with rigorous data and is ready to scale.

We're seeking partners who:

- Serve Black women and want to enhance mental health offerings
- Value culturally-responsive, community-designed interventions
- Are committed to health equity and reducing disparities
- Want research partnership support for evaluation

Partnership Opportunities

- **Implementation Partners:** Organizations ready to implement Heal TogetHER with train-the-trainer certification
- **Funding Partners:** Support program expansion and research
- **Research Collaborators:** Academic institutions interested in joint evaluation
- **Community Partners:** Referral networks and co-location opportunities

What Comes With Partnership

- Comprehensive train-the-trainer program (40+ hours)
- Peer supporter curriculum and training materials
- Fidelity checklists and quality assurance tools
- Evaluation framework and measurement instruments
- Ongoing consultation and technical assistance
- Research support from Dr. Malcome's team

Contact Us

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