Letter from the Director
Dr. Alfiee M. Breland-Noble

Greetings!

It is again a pleasure to present this edition of our newsletter to you. We have been very busy at work nurturing our long-standing relationships with our partners and seeking new partnerships (we're looking at you Lincoln Memorial Baptist Church!) and expanding our new relationships here in the DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia).

We have so many exciting things to report including continued support from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (www.pcori.org) and the Georgetown Howard Universities Center for Clinical and Translational Science (www.GHUCCTS.org). We have been truly blessed to have the support of organizations who find our work with African Americans, Blacks and other people of color valuable and worthy of support. They have invested in our efforts and our goal here at AAKOMA is to ensure that we deliver on the promises we made to build a network of Black faith communities and to empower them to help address the mental health needs of our youth.

In this edition of the newsletter, we provide updates on our efforts in building community partnerships with Black faith communities, new outreach to communities of color and building partnerships with stakeholders in the fields of education, human and social services. Moreover, we are truly pleased to share with you updates on our efforts to hear the voices of our African American and other youth of color as they provide leadership to teach us best practices for reaching racially diverse youth and ensuring that their voices are heard. We know that without the efforts of our partners, stakeholders, faith communities and families, we could not achieve our goals and we are ever so grateful for their numerous contributions.

We look forward to sharing additional information with you on our upcoming community group discussions and our other community based activities designed to expand our team and to (hopefully) include you!

As always, we welcome your referrals, ideas and support and we thank you.

Warmly,

Dr. Alfiee

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

DIRECTOR’S LETTER 1
COMMUNITY PARTNER 2
PROFILE 3
STUDY UPDATES 6
RECENT PRESENTATIONS 7
CALENDAR 9
THE AAKOMA TEAM 11
CONTACT US

Find us on social media and the web:
www.twitter.com/aakomaproject
www.aakomaproject.org
Community Partner Profile

Mrs. Kathy Springfield-Cobb
Orange Grove Missionary Baptist Church
Durham, North Carolina

Kathy Springfield-Cobb is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She has served as the secretary for the NC School Counselor Association, was a School Counselor Supervisor to university counseling interns, and mentored new counselors to the profession. She participated in numerous doctoral research projects with doctoral students at North Carolina State University and Duke University. Nationally, she has served as a conference presenter for the Association of Curriculum and Instruction. Kathy continues to serves students and families in her community in any way that she can. She believes that, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” —Maya Angelou

Do you know what we're about?

The AAKOMA Mission

The AAKOMA (African American Knowledge Optimized for Mindfully Healthy Adolescents) Project addresses the mental health (esp. depression) needs of African American and other youth of color through culturally relevant, patient centered, community-engaged research and clinical care.
Completion of Tier I Pipeline to Proposal Award Program

We are pleased to announce that we have completed Tier I of our PCORI Pipeline to Proposal Award. Over the past 9 months, AAKOMA built a partnership with communities in Northeast Washington, DC and Maryland focused on mental health for African-American and Black youth. Our goal is to continue to build capacity in underserved communities to teach African American patients, stakeholders, and community members about the benefits of Patient Centered Outcomes Research (PCOR) and Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER) with a focus on Community-Based Participatory Research principles. We are grateful to our colleagues at Georgia State University for their support with this project. We are also excited to announce that we received the notice of award for our Tier II pipeline award!

Breaking the Silence and Stress in Teens Seminar

On March 31st, Dr. Breland-Noble, Mrs. Kathy Williams, a mental health advocate from North Carolina, and Ms. Lauren Ann Sonnabend, AAKOMA Program Manager, presented "Breaking the Silence and Stress in Teens" at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Arlington, Virginia. The event was focused on adolescent stress, depression, and suicide prevention. Dr. Breland-Noble and Mrs. Williams also provided helpful resources for teens and their parents. They talked about African-American participation in PCOR and their efforts to reduce the stigma of mental illness in the community. A number of teens participated in the event, some even sharing their stories of identifying signs of stress, depression, and suicidal ideation in their peers.
**Engagement Award Kick-Off Retreat at the Avila Center**

On January 28, we held a meeting for a group of 20 teens, patients, and stakeholders to discuss mental illness in African-American teens at the Avila Retreat Center in Durham, North Carolina. During that meeting, Dr. Breland-Noble taught the group about PCOR, CBPR, and CER. There were two additional presenters, Mrs. Williams and Rev. Chase-Sands, both community co-leads for this project. Mrs. Williams talked about her journey to becoming an advocate for depression awareness and suicide prevention. Rev. Chase-Sands presented on how researchers and community partners need to effectively engage underserved groups. Additionally, Dr. Breland-Noble provided initial IRB training.
We are proud to announce that our article "Community Led Faith Based Mental Health Promotion: Qualitative Outcomes from an Academic-Faith Community Partnered Pilot Program" is complete and is under review for publication. This study presents qualitative findings derived from a Community Based Participatory Research initiative between a university and faith community partners. Community partnership building outcomes and outcomes related to church leader perceptions of a novel mental health stigma reduction intervention are presented. The research team, led by Co Principal Investigators from the faith community and university, employed mixed methods to collect data on the feasibility and acceptability of a church developed Faith Based Mental Health Promotion program entitled, "The SpeakOut." Faith community partners co-led the development of the qualitative question guide and completed most of the interviews with study participants. The faith community partners were also trained to complete transcript-based qualitative analysis allowing them to identify key elements and patterns in participant responses.

The team extracted seven primary themes from the raw data including:

1. SpeakOut is Participatory
2. Mental Health Education
3. Mental Illness Stigma
4. 'Church as a Lighthouse'
5. External Support
6. Resources
7. Downplaying the Feelings of a Mentally Ill Person

Study outcomes provide practical tips to guide faith communities and academic researchers in building partnerships to implement health disparities research and highlight the import of community led initiatives. Findings also highlight the unique strengths that Black faith communities bring to disparities research. Implications for the added benefits of community partnerships to academic institutions are discussed.
RECENT COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS:

by Lauren Ann Sonnabend

Arlington All In Conference at the George Mason University School of Law

On March 12th, Dr. Breland-Noble and Ms. Sonnabend presented at the Arlington All In Conference at the George Mason University School of Law in Arlington, Virginia. The purpose of the conference was for teens, parents, and the community to share ideas on mental well-being and healthy relationships. Dr. Breland-Noble and Ms. Sonnabend provided tips to parents on how to recognize and handle stress, anxiety, and depression in teens, including using mindfulness-based interventions. They highlighted how teens are experiencing much higher stress than did previous generations and discussed the impacts, such as social-emotional difficulties, behavior problems, depression, and poor school performance. Dr. Breland-Noble and Ms. Sonnabend also emphasized ways parents can help, including by talking with teens regularly and modeling stress reduction.

Community Engaged Research Symposium at the Kellogg Conference Center

On March 22nd, Dr. Breland-Noble and Cindy Harding, Community Partner at the First United Methodist Church of Hyattsville, participated on a panel at the Community Engaged Research: Turning Knowledge Into Action to Eliminate Health Disparities Symposium at the Kellogg Conference Center in Washington, DC. The goal of the symposium was to promote partnerships between academia and the community as a useful mechanism for responding to health disparities through Community-Engaged Research and CBPR. Dr. Breland-Noble and Ms. Harding spoke about their experiences and knowledge surrounding building successful CER and CBPR relationships surrounding their work in faith-based mental health promotion and the reduction of African-American mental health disparities and stigma.
Events: March - July 2016

Dr. Breland-Noble, AAKOMA Partners and Team Presentations

MARCH


APRIL

- Breland-Noble, A.M. & AAKOMA Project Partners (2016, April 27). Lessons from PCORI funded programs with The AAKOMA Project: Engaging African American Youth, Families and Communities to Address Mental Health Disparities. Children’s Hospital, Boston (Harvard), Boston, MA.

- Williams, H. K. (2016, April 23). Breaking the Silence Presented for HUGS, Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Bahama, NC.

- Williams, H. K. (2016, April 27). Suicide Prevention Summit Panel, Chapel Hill, NC.

MAY

Community Resources

Center for the Improvement of Child Caring
http://www.ciccparenting.org/

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
http://www.nami.org Click on “Support & Programs” & scroll to & select “Child & Adolescent Action Center”

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry-Facts for Families
http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/facts_for_families

American Psychological Association-Parenting Information

National Institute of Mental Health: Teen Depression

Depression and Bipolar Disorder Support Alliance
http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pageName=help_landing

Stop Breathe, & Think
http://www.stopbreathethink.org/

This regular newsletter feature is designed to provide parents, teens and families with information we hope you’ll find useful. If you know of resources we have missed, please contact us to share your thoughts.

Thank you!
The AAKOMA Project Team
The Group that Makes it Work

AAKOMA ADULT ADVISORY BOARD
Rev. Dr. Clarence Burke
Cynthia Laws-Davis
Karen Sansom-Goodman
Theresa Lewis Ph.D.
H. Kathy Williams
Rev. Dr. Jalene Chase-Sands

Youth Advisory Board
We are looking for a few great young people to join us as emerging leaders. See flyer included in this edition of the newsletter for more information.
Engaging Black Faith Communities to Address Youth Mental Health Disparities Partnership Opportunities

We’d like to share information with you about an exciting new project designed to increase the capacity of faith communities, youth, and stakeholders to lead, design, and conduct their own patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR) and comparative effectiveness research (CER) studies. Supported with an award from the Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute, www.PCORI.org, we have partnered with various Black faith communities and youth stakeholders to assist us in understanding: 1) what African-Americans’ know about CER and PCOR for mental health, 2) what African Americans need to know to be able to design and lead their own programs and research. Our program team of Dr. Alfie Breland-Noble, a researcher at Georgetown University and the Principal Investigator; Rev. Dr. Janene Chase-Sands, a pastor and DC team lead, and Mrs. H. Kathy Williams, a community mental health advocate and NC team lead, is working to empower Black faith communities to conduct PCOR and CER for youth mental illness. Eight churches have joined our network and we hope to expand to at least 50 faith communities by the end of our work in 2017. To move forward, we are hoping that you will consider collaborating with us through: A) Our needs assessment and/or B) Our network.

Needs Assessment – Focus Groups
• Take part in either a focus group or an individual interview.
• Focus groups include a small gathering of about 10 people during which people have dinner or lunch, complete a few surveys and share their ideas through a discussion.
• Share your experience with others to help us invite additional participants.
• We anticipate a period of about four weeks to recruit participants, obtain informed consent, and conduct each focus group.

Needs Assessment – Individual
• Another option is to participate in a 45 – 60 minute individual meeting, which includes completing a 62 item health promotion checklist.
  o The checklist helps us understand community advocates, leaders and researchers ideas on the best ways to help communities build capacity to address health issues.
• We could also use your help in identifying key experts who could complete these interviews.

Potential Benefits for your Faith Community

We believe that our efforts will help Black faith communities, youth, patients, and stakeholders develop skills to allow them to lead their own research studies and build their own programs. This effort is important because we believe strongly that Black faith communities are critical social change agents for African Americans and that they are natural leaders for efforts to enhance African American youth mental health.

For more information, please visit our website at http://www.aakomaproject.org/ or contact:

AAKOMA Lab: 202-687-0672
Engaging Black Faith Communities to Address Youth Mental Health Disparities

Partnership Opportunities

We are also seeking partners to expand our network of collaborators

While we do not anticipate that our curriculum will immediately turn community members into academic researchers, we are mindful of the need to create a group of patients, stakeholders, and communities who can arrive at the research table ready to fully engage in the process and to co-lead. Overall, we realize that while our long-term goal is to support African American youth, families, and communities in adequately meeting the youth’s mental health needs, in the short term, our PCORI Eugene Washington Engagement Award allows us to build a network and reach the primary gatekeepers to mental health services for our youth, namely, parents, caregivers, faith leaders, and other authority figures in the young people’s lives. Therefore, while our curriculum is targeted to adult stakeholders, our engagement and curriculum development project will include youth as a part of the process (to inform adult gatekeepers and caregivers of their unique mental health and overall engagement needs as youth). Ultimately, we acknowledge that our curriculum will be designed to help the key stakeholders most likely to develop and engage in CER and PCOR focused on African American youth mental health (i.e. parents, adult caregivers, faith leaders, and authority figures).

Join our Network

- We are seeking new members of our stakeholder team, which meets monthly, to discuss the progress of our project.

- To join, we would ask that you designate one member of your faith community to participate in phone calls, receive updates and share that information with others.

- Members of our stakeholder team will have the opportunity to be involved in every step of the process and contribute to the development of a curriculum we are building.

- Our primary audience for the curriculum is adults however, our focus on the needs of teens means that we must include teens in our process.
  - We welcome your referrals for teens whom you think might be interested in participating and whom you feel could commit to at least bi-monthly (phone conference or computer video conference) meetings.
  - One of our goals is to expose youth to research and show them how communities are a vital part of research on diverse populations.
  - We eventually hope to prepare and allow youth (through our teen advisory board) the opportunity to help us present our findings from this project.
  - In particular, we are looking for teens to help us with social media.

Benefits

Network members will receive education about mental illness in African American youth; gain knowledge about how research works and how patients, caregivers and communities can be involved.

We look forward to speaking with you!

For more information, please visit our website at http://www.aakomaproject.org/ or contact:

AAKOMA Lab: 202-687-0672
Have ideas that could improve the well-being of your peers? Would you like to make a difference in your community? Interested in being a part of research?

Be a part of the AAKOMA Project Lab's **Youth Advisory Board**. The AAKOMA Project (African-American Knowledge Optimized for Mindfully-Healthy Adolescents) is a community engaged research project focused on addressing depression, and other mental health issues that affect African-American and other youth of color. As a Youth Advisory Board Member, you will help us to identify and target the needs and issues facing youth in the community.

Our goal is to not only improve the psychological well-being of affected individuals, but change the way mental illness and mental health concerns are perceived in our community.

The lab is part of the Department of Psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine, GUMC and led by Associate Professor of Psychiatry, PCORI and NIH sponsored researcher Alfiee M. Breland-Noble, Ph.D., MHSc.

Youth ages 13-18 contact us now to learn more about this exciting opportunity!

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**THE AAKOMA PROJECT LAB**

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MEET THE 2015-2016 RAS:

Lauren Ann Sonnabend
Lauren is the Program Manager for the AAKOMA Project. Her research interests include addressing depression and trauma in underserved children and adolescents. This is Lauren's final month with AAKOMA. She is leaving to pursue a doctoral degree.

Michele J. Wong
Our former lab manager, and now a graduate student in public health, Michele continues to work with the AAKOMA lab in disseminating our developments to the patient, stakeholder and scientific communities.

Irene A. Jacobs
Irene is a research assistant/volunteer at the AAKOMA lab. Her research interests include adolescent risk and resilience. She has extensive experience working with urban youth in New York City and the D.C. area. She supports day to day activities in the lab.

The AAKOMA Project
Embrace, Encourage, Enlighten

Next Issue...
Our funded research, efforts to reach a broader audience and exactly what is Patient Centered Outcomes Research? All in our next edition of AAKOMA Bulletin...