February is Black History Month

During Black History Month, we come together to celebrate and remember the history and legacy of Black people. Part of this celebration of Black heritage is contextualizing the struggle African Americans face.

According to the American Psychiatric Association:
- African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population.
- About 27% of African Americans live below the poverty level compared to about 10.8% of non-Hispanic whites.
- Approximately 11% of African Americans are not covered by health insurance, compared with about 7% for non-Hispanic whites.
- Only one-in-three African Americans who need mental health care receives it.

And According to the Prison Policy Initiative:
- While 14% of all youth under 18 in the U.S. are Black, 42% of boys and 35% of girls in juvenile facilities are Black.
- In 2017, Black youth made up 35% of delinquency cases, but over half (54%) of youth judicially transferred from juvenile court to adult court.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

NCTSN has valuable information and resources for working with clients of color and the unique challenges this population faces:
- This webinar is designed for therapists of color working with families of color and discusses the unique challenges and opportunities of this therapeutic dynamic.
- This webinar discusses the impact of polyvictimization in urban communities of color.
- This webinar is designed for white therapists working with families of color. The webinar explores the intersections of developmental trauma, clinical work, and race.

**Check out the African American Heritage Museum**

The African American Heritage Museum has two locations in Atlantic City and Newtonville. This museum has exhibits on African American History throughout the 20th century.

You can read about the exhibits at this museum [here](#). The museum also has a traveling collection that can be brought to schools and organizations. You can read about the traveling museum [here](#).

**NAMI presents an African American Guide to Mental Health**

*Sharing Hope* is a training on the unique mental health challenges African Americans face. NAMI-affiliated agencies are able to present this training to the community. The training uses case studies to discuss the mental health adversities African Americans often face.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Sharing Hope training.

**Cultural Competence Training Center offer Motivational Interviewing Training**

The Cultural Competence Training center is offering a training titled "How to Have a Culturally Responsive Dialogue Using Motivational Interviewing Training" at Union County College for contracted agencies of DHMAS.

[Click here](#) for more information.

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MONTH

**BOOK:**

*Black Enough* is a collection of short stories about being young and Black in America. Collected by National Book Award finalist Ibi Zoboi, these stories are written by leading Black authors in the world of young adult fiction.

One review calls this book "A breath of fresh air…it’s nuanced and
This collection of stories can be relatable, inspiring, and empowering to the youth we work with.

FILM:

*Just Mercy* tells the true story of Bryan Stevenson, a young Harvard Law graduate, who appeals the murder conviction of Walter McMillian. When Stevenson looks overs the evidence of McMillian’s case, he believes McMillian was wrongfully convicted and his incarceration is racially motivated.

This film is one of the African-American Film Critics Association's Top Films of the Year.

PODCAST:

The NPR podcast, *Code Switch*, has compiled a playlist of "hidden heroes and buried history of Black America".

The playlist includes episodes on the activism of Black athletes, the history of LGBTQ+ Black Americans, and the history of housing segregation.

You can listen to these episodes here.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

*Each month, we will spotlight a New Jersey trauma informed agency that is providing services*
related to the theme of the month.

As discussed earlier, Black youth are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. To discuss this, we interviewed Reverend Leonard Grayson, the Reentry Coordinator for the City of Elizabeth. His primary task is to assist public, private and faith-based organizations in maximizing service delivery through collaborative planning and implementation of projects that serve the reentry community.

Q: How does the City of Elizabeth Reentry Program help youth going through trauma?

A: We try to make sure professional clinical services are available to assist individuals and their families with identifying and confronting trauma issues that have negatively impacted their lives. For example, we have a partnership with Jewish Family Services of Elizabeth. They provide, at no personal cost for those in our program, therapeutic counseling to assist in moving past issues that have become obstacles to personal growth and development. Access is key: especially to those without health care or those who feel stigmatized using those services.

"We try to teach staff to move past judgmental attitudes, especially in areas that we have not struggled ourselves. We try to get our staff to simply say, not just in words, but in facial expressions and body language, your problem may not be mine, but I understand."

Q: Tell us two things your agency does to make sure you are providing trauma informed care?

Q: What are some of the challenges your staff faces when working with children who have experienced trauma?

A: The most significant struggle is in understanding and accepting contemporary youth trauma. Our struggles are not the same. We did not have the options kids have today. We had seven channels on the television. We had no internet, no cell phones or iPads. For many of us, especially in the African American community, we were just beginning to benefit from the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Act, and other new policy initiatives that opened the door to better to employment and housing. We had no domestic violence hotline, no access to clinical therapy. Our first car was a broken-down old Volkswagen. No one gave us rides to school, we walked or took the bus if we could muster up a dollar. Frederick Douglas said, “Without struggle there is no progress.” We looked at struggle as a means to an end. We took it and we learned to make it work for us. Because young people have access to so much, and while there is a great deal of advocacy and support for them that we never had, we find it difficult to relate to their struggle. Today, in most of our minds, because the definition of struggle has changed, we minimize their struggles. As a result, we don’t give them the attention they need. Secondly, we have forgotten what it was like to try to tell somebody about the pain we were feeling. Everyone, regardless of their label: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials or Generation Z, want to be heard. Not truly listening results in the same rebellious attitude. Today, the responses are just different, and the consequences are much more severe.

Q: Tell us two things your agency does to help your staff identify and cope with secondary traumatic stress?
Training and more training. Not in just understanding the professional terms and potential outcomes, but in understanding the compassion, sympathy, empathy and patience that is needed to urge suffering individuals to break the chains of silence. No one wants to put their private business in public view. So, my Director, Mrs. Krishna Garlic and I, ensure our staff always tries to maintain a level of personal understanding in that we all have issues. For whatever reason, none of us have journeyed through life without making mistakes. With that, we try to teach staff to move past judgmental attitudes, especially in areas that we have not struggled ourselves. We try to get our staff to simply say, not just in words, but in facial expressions and body language, your problem may not be mine, but I understand. If we can get there, our staff can be more compassionate.

As managers, we must constantly be available to our staff to discuss the issues they deal with every day. When you work with disadvantaged populations, there are many times when solutions are not immediately available. On occasion, our staff goes above and beyond to get situations resolved, while that may be good for the client, staff can easily burnout and/or become cynical and sarcastic over time. That is why training and an open-door policy is so important. In addition, the City of Elizabeth the Department of Health and Human Services advocates strongly for health programs and events that relieve stress. For one example, the City of Elizabeth offers the Employee Assistance Program, which is a voluntary, work-based program that offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems. We urge our staff to use these services and attend events.

COPING SKILL SPOTLIGHT

The Elizabeth Reentry Program has shared this coping skill with us this month. We hope you are able to teach it to your staff and clients.

"Talking about it. As noted earlier, my Director is available to me when I am feeling weighted down with the concerns of others. She sets a good example."
Family and Children's Services continues to provide free community education workshops on Child Traumatic Stress. See our entire brochure here!

Please Contact:

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