



BLACK PEER SUPPORT *and* COMMUNITY CARE GRANT IMPACT REPORT



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HISTORY & PURPOSE

why peer support?

In Black communities, mental health challenges are rising amid the compounding effects of systemic racism, generational trauma, and longstanding mistrust in the medical industrial complex.¹

Only an estimated 22% of Black Americans who need mental health care actually receive it, highlighting a deep and urgent need for more accessible, affirming forms of support.²

Peer support is a powerful and culturally-attuned solution to address these gaps. Grounded in shared lived experience, peer support offers a space for connection, understanding, and encouragement- often in ways that traditional mental health services cannot. These models emphasize collective care, mutual aid, and resistance to medical systems that have historically excluded and harmed Black people.^{2,3}

BEAM, in partnership with Healthline Media, launched the Black Peer Support and Community Care grant in 2022.

Through this program, BEAM has provided \$10,000 to seven Black-led organizations and initiatives to fund peer support groups, healing circles, social support spaces, and wellness projects that support Black folx in culturally responsive ways.

This initiative reflects BEAM's commitment to expanding mental health access for Black folx through trust-based, values-driven grantmaking approaches. Grant recipients described BEAM's approach as affirming because of how BEAM honors their time, labor, and vision. These partnerships are sustaining community-rooted mental health work and helping more Black people access the healing they deserve.

¹ Brandow, C. L., & Swarbrick, M. (2022). Improving Black mental health: A collective call to action. *Psychiatric Services*, 73(6), 697–700. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.202000894>

² Chambers, V. (2021, April 8). *Black peer support: A role in mental health recovery*. Harvard Health Blog. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/black-peer-support-a-role-in-mental-health-recovery-202104082428>

³ Bakshi, S. (2021). Peer support as a tool for community care: "Nothing About Us, Without Us". *Columbia Social Work Review*, 19(1), 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.52214/cswrv.19i1.7602>

MEET THE RECIPIENTS

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2023



ProjectQ provides a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth, using hair and self-empowerment to advance social justice. Funding supported a workshop series to facilitate meaningful **dialogue between caregivers and thriving Black gender expansive adults.**



Native Son is a storytelling platform that leverages the collective power of Black gay and queer men to inspire, empower, and amplify their voices and visibility. Funding supported *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, a program that includes **dynamic wellness conversations.**

2024



Hand to Hold provides personalized support to families with babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Funding helped to provide a weekly, virtual support group for **184 Black families of NICU babies** to foster connection, community, and belonging.



Black Being is a wellness studio that provides programs that are grounded in culture and ancestral wisdom. The grant expanded the *Being in Practice* program and launch of a weekly *Balance and Mobility* class, **serving 150 people** in their wellness and healing journeys.



Ballet After Dark provides education and cultural programs to help Black and Brown girls (ages 8-24) heal from sexual violence and other trauma through performing arts and somatic interventions. Funding supported BAD in **reaching over 600 girls** and piloting a new peer education program.



The DBT Skills Group tailors Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Black women to support them in learning how to cope with the impacts of daily oppression and live fuller and more effective lives. Funding helped sustain the DBT groups by **reducing operational costs and out-of-pocket costs** for participants.



Dade County Street Response serves the most disenfranchised communities in Miami-Dade County through free medical care, case management, legal advocacy, disaster relief, and other community programs. **The grant supported the Life Wellness Course, a peer support group to address the mental health needs of Black, unhoused individuals.**

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SPOTLIGHT

NATIVE SON

Native Son

“[W]HAT WAS GREAT ABOUT THIS GRANT] IS REALLY LEANING INTO WELLNESS, BEING WHOLE... OTHER GRANTS HAVE FELT A BIT TRANSACTIONAL, WHEREAS THIS GRANT FELT MORE HOLISTIC, MORE EMOTIONALLY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY SUPPORTIVE.”

For founder Emil Wilbekin, Native Son began as a personal intervention, an intentional effort to find belonging and healing among other Black gay and queer men.

“I describe [Native Son] as an intervention for myself ... I wanted to be in community with other Black, gay, and queer men... A lot of people were going through that and wanted to have that same sense of community and belonging. So it's been really, really a blessing to do that.”

In these politically distressing times, Native Son has continued their work with Black gay men by amplifying narratives of joy and hope through the support provided by the grant.

“It's very important to make people feel good and remember to be joyful even in moments of uncertainty, like right now...The Black community and the LGBTQ community always survive, innovate, reinvent itself, create new things. It's not that it's going to be easy, but as a community, we can get through it together.”

Emil emphasized that the **flexibility** of The Black Peer Support and Community Care grant allowed them to pursue wellness in ways authentic to their community's particular needs.

“The biggest lesson for me... is being very clear about the community you're serving and how you want to serve them, and being audacious ... Don't hold back. Just pie in the sky dream and put it out there and see what happens, because that's how we ended up getting this grant.”

One of the most meaningful aspects of BEAM's support was that they trusted Native Son to and lead with their own vision and autonomy.

“I kept wanting Yolo (BEAM's Executive Director) to be involved with the ideation and shaping of [the project]. He respectfully was like, ‘*You got this*’...I wanted to have more input, but in a way, him just trusting us and supporting us was what was needed...That's an art, [to say] ‘*No, you go ahead...Here's the money. You have the vision. Now go do the work.*’”

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

Grant recipients were able to.....

- Fill **resource gaps** in their communities
- Address demand for **culturally-relevant resources**
- Increase availability of **accessible well-being practices**
- **Expand reach** to serve more participants
- Promote **alternative care practices** in Black communities
- Increase **sense of belonging** and community
- **Reduce stress and anxiety** among Black participants
- Create **safe spaces** for support and healing



"BEAM'S SUPPORT HELPED US LAUNCH OUR COMMUNITY CARE CLASS OFFERINGS... WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO BE ACCESSIBLE AND LOW-COST FOR OUR COMMUNITY. THE \$10K GAVE US THE FLEXIBILITY TO MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AND CREATE HEALING SPACES THAT HONOR REST, RESTORATION, AND EMBODIED CARE. WE'RE DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR BEAM'S INVESTMENT IN WELLBEING AND HEALING JUSTICE."

- Black Being (2024 Recipient)

SPOTLIGHT

DBT Skills Group for Black Women

"BEAM HAS DONE A REALLY BEAUTIFUL JOB OF CONSISTENTLY EXPRESSING THE VALUE OF THE WORK THAT WE DO AND THE VALUE OF OUR TIME."



Led by clinicians Clerissa Cooper & Winter Foddrell, the DBT Skills Group for Black Women centers Black feminist and healing justice frameworks. The group is a space where mental health support is not only accessible, but also culturally grounded and values-driven.

"The way that we've been doing this group is 'Pay What You Can', which is in alignment with my values...but also means we may or may not make our hourly rate...because we want it to be accessible."

The grant made it possible to continue offering sliding-scale and reduced fee access to meet participants where they were, while amplifying awareness of the services.

"This grant has been so very helpful [for us] to offer more reduced fee spaces in the group. I believe receiving the grant also increased others' awareness of our services. "

"The grant allowed more flexible financial capacity...[it] empowered potential new members to feel comfortable with taking space in the group because they could ask for the fee they were financially comfortable paying."

Clerissa and Winter explained how BEAM's grants go beyond funding - their approach is affirming, humanizing, and reflective of community care.

"Being willing to compensate us for the application process was a very clear, functional demonstration of value for our time, our labor, our skills, and what we offer the community."

"We attended [the grant recipient] dinner in Atlanta, and it was so warm and welcoming. But part of what I remember was just being uplifted and guided and supported...I just thought that was beautiful and meaningful, and nothing that I had ever experienced before, surely not from someone who was giving us money."

"Certain spaces in the therapist community are just extra up tight. People's ideas of professionalism really are things that play into white supremacy and really undermine folks' individualities and my identities. And so with BEAM, it was the exact opposite. It wasn't intimidating. We can just show up as ourselves, and it could be a casual conversation."

TESTIMONIALS

From program participants

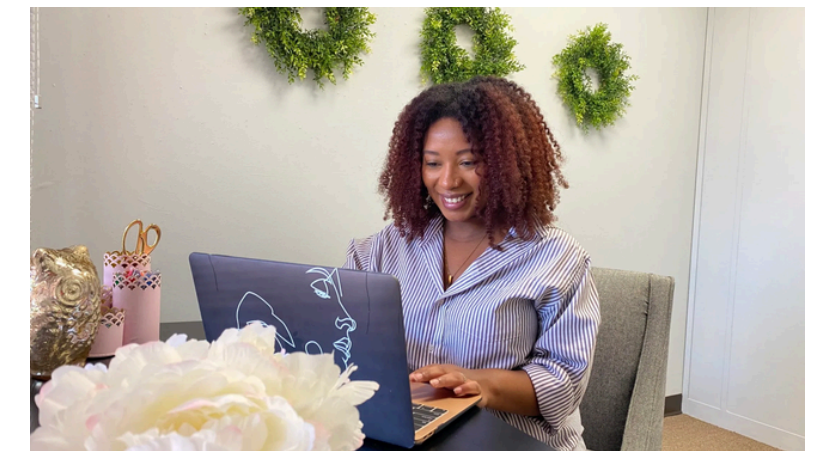
"ONE OF THE HARDEST PARTS OF TRAUMA IS FEELING LIKE NO ONE UNDERSTANDS. AT BAD, I FOUND PEOPLE WHO HAVE WALKED SIMILAR PATHS. THAT SENSE OF CONNECTION HAS BEEN LIFE-CHANGING. I'VE LEARNED THAT HEALING ISN'T MEANT TO BE DONE ALONE."

- Ballet After Dark (BAD) Program Participant



"AS A BLACK NICU PARENT, FINDING THIS SUPPORT GROUP HAS BEEN ESSENTIAL. IT PROVIDES A SAFE SPACE TO SHARE MY EXPERIENCES AND FIND STRENGTH TO GET THROUGH EACH DAY. BEING ABLE TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS WHO TRULY UNDERSTAND HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE."

- Hand2Hold Black Peer Support Group Participant



"THIS PROGRAM IS A GREAT INSPIRATION TO ME - IT HAS BROUGHT ME FROM THE DEAD OF HELL TO LIFE... I HOPE THIS PROGRAM WILL ALWAYS BE THERE TO TEACH OTHERS HOW TO FIGHT FOR THEIR SURVIVAL"

- Dade County Street Response Wellness Course Participant



The Black Peer Support & Community Care Grant is a part of BEAM's Black Wellness Innovation Fund, a funder collaborative that supports innovative, wellness work in Black and marginalized communities.

This grant is sponsored by Healthline Media.

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