Meet our founder

Dr. Alfiee M. Breland-Noble (Dr. Alfiee) is an internationally recognized scientist, author, speaker and media contributor. She is a mental health disparities expert in research and clinical care for BIPOC populations and is regarded for translating complex scientific concepts into everyday language.

With over 25 years of experience in academic medicine, honed at Duke and Georgetown Psychiatry and implemented at her innovative non-profit, The AAKOMA Project, she is noted for her ability to draw in audiences and inspire. Dr. Alfiee's media reach includes diverse outlets like CNN, NBC, Refinery29, Black Enterprise and more.

Dr. Alfiee and her team have built a research enterprise founded on the science of community engagement centering BIPOC youth, families and communities. Dr. Alfiee's scientific mission is to combine lived experiences with data to support patients, providers and the public. To this end, she collaborated with Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D) and the Congressional Black Caucus to develop the Black youth suicide report Ring the Alarm and federal legislation to reduce disparities (HR5469 the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act) passed in October 2020. Dr. Alfiee's academic achievements, including authorship of 2 books and numerous peer-reviewed publications on Black and Youth of Color mental health, reflect her commitment to a culturally relevant, patient and community centered approach to her work.
A world where EVERY child, teen and young adult (inclusive of all points of diversity) feels the freedom to live unapologetically and authentically within an environment that allows them to rise and thrive.

AAKOMA builds the consciousness of Youth of Color and their caregivers to recognize and place importance on mental health, to empower youth and their families to seek help and manage mental health, and to influence systems and services to receive and address the needs of Youth of Color and their families.
Since the stigmas associated with mental health care often begin early, the AAKOMA team works with teenagers and their families to raise awareness, conduct patient-centered research, and encourage young people to begin conversations in their communities.

We bring special focus on the unique experiences of People of Color. As a result, we are able to engage with communities on a deeper culturally-relevant level by conducting research and providing clinical support.
AAKOMA believes that to meet the mental health needs of Youth of Color we need to operate at these three levels:

- Raising consciousness among individuals
- Providing accessible tools for ongoing management
- Shifting systems to receive youth and provide better care
AAKOMA's work directly focuses three key populations - youth of color, their communities and relevant system actors.

**YOUTH OF COLOR**
- AAKOMA primarily focuses on BIPOC youth inclusive of all fall points of intersectional diversity (LGBTQ, Youth of Color, disabled, under-resourced and other).
- AAKOMA specifically names and centers issues of intersectionality by partnering with a wide array of seasoned experts.

**COMMUNITIES**
- AAKOMA works with families, communities and other stakeholders (e.g. school counselors, coaches, teachers, administrators police officers that engage with Youth of Color directly.)
- AAKOMA also aims to educate and influence the broader population to influence stakeholders that may lead or work at organizations serving Youth of Color.

**SYSTEM ACTORS**
- AAKOMA seeks to influence researchers, research institutions and associations to ensure that research is generated.
- AAKOMA aims to use the research and evidence to influence federal and state agencies as well as policy makers.
Research

What is needed to address mental health disparities and why is this important?

We conduct research to better understand:

- The mental health disparities in Black youth and Kids of Color
- Why disparities are important
- What can be done to address this problem
Barriers to conducting research for BIPOC youth:

1. A lack of diverse researchers empowered to identify promising practices, proofs of concept and pilot studies that can go on to secure large-scale foundation and federal funding. (e.g. PCORI, NIH)

2. A lack of research specific to the needs of racially diverse young people, families and communities.
Research tells us that mental illness (including depression and anxiety) impact millions of young people nationwide. Though stigma is an issue affecting all communities, people are often surprised to learn how highly stigmatized mental illness is in communities of color.

At AAKOMA, we are equipped to study many aspects of mental health disparities but we focus on two key areas: depression and suicide.
Our research team identified moderate to strong correlations between clinician-rated and adolescent rated depression (among African American youth).

Our data suggests that differences between a parent and their teen's descriptions of the teens behaviors and emotions is a helpful factor in predicting depression in African American adolescence.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 10 - 19 year olds in the US, with the greatest increases in suicide rates in the previous decade experienced by African American and other racially diverse youth.

"The increase in the suicide rate for African American Youth from 2.1 to 4.5 per 100,000 or 114% between 1980 to 1995 points to the potential detriments of untreated depressive illness."

- A.M. Breland-Noble et al. (eds.), Handbook of Mental Health in African American Youth, Springer Series on Child and Family Studies, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-25501-9_1
The AAKOMA Project addresses these issues by:

1. Curating and planning events that inform the public about the mental health needs of African American and racially diverse youth.

2. Collecting data and collaborating with the mental health field about the unique perspective of African American and racially diverse families regarding depression and mental health disparities.

3. Sharing practical everyday mental health tips in a language that resonates with Black people and People of Color.
At the AAKOMA Project, our mission is to help diverse teenagers and their families achieve optimal mental health through dialogue, learning, and the understanding that everyone deserves care and support. AAKOMA is uniquely positioned to both create the scientific knowledge that can lead to behavior change and implement this science using patient-centered, culturally relevant and community-engaged practices.

At AAKOMA, we seek to:

**Raise Consciousness**
by creating greater awareness and de-stigmatization of mental health in ways that resonate with diverse communities.

**Empower People**
by helping teens, parents, families and communities achieve optimal mental health.

**Change Systems**
by building new practices informed by culturally relevant evidence based to address the needs of all youth.
Team AAKOMA

the backbone of this project

Since our inception, AAKOMA has built and maintained relationships with intersectional BIPOC (including youth who are LGBTQ and Disabled) youth advisors. They’ve helped us lead virtual summer mindfulness meditations sessions, interview teen mental health advocates on our social media channels, assisted with our research findings, and helped disseminate our research findings to their peers.

These individuals are Team AAKOMA, who enable us to ensure that the messages we convey and the treatments we propose resonate deeply with all young people.
AAKOMA has 14 subject matter experts who support the mission of AAKOMA in their respective areas of expertise. We have spotlighted two experts below, and are happy to provide information on others!

**Brandon Johnson**

Brandon J. Johnson, M.H.S., MCHES, is a Subject Matter Expert for the AAKOMA Project, supported by an award from the Upswing Fund for Adolescent Mental Health. He is a subject matter expert in suicide prevention, with a particular focus on suicide prevention planning and suicide prevention strategies for Black youth.

Brandon is the Co-Lead of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention’s Faith Communities Task Force, which works with faith communities nationwide to combat the often stigmatized issue of suicide. Previously, Brandon served as the Director of Suicide and Violence Prevention for the State of Maryland.
AAKOMA has 14 subject matter experts who support the mission of AAKOMA in their respective areas of expertise. We have spotlighted two experts below, and are happy to provide information on others!

Dr. Angela L. Harris

Dr. Angela L. Harris is a Subject Matter Expert for the AAKOMA Project. She is a Mental Health and Wellness Advocate, Speaker, Author, Blogger, and Podcaster. She is the founder of Harris 316 Consulting and Services, LLC, which aims to provide workshops and presentations on the intersection of mental health, wellness, faith & spirituality to small Black churches and community agencies that serve marginalized communities.

Dr. Harris has trained at a community mental health center, a women’s prison, and three college counseling centers. She has over 20 years of experience working as a higher education administrator and is currently the Assistant Dean of Students at Davidson College, in Davidson, NC.
The AAKOMA Team Wants to Speak to Your Organization About:

- BIPOC Youth Treatment Engagement
- Barriers to Mental Health Care in Families of Color
  - Mental Health and Comorbid Diseases
  - Culturally Engaged Youth Suicide Prevention
    - BIPOC Youth Mental Health
    - BIPOC Student Athlete Mental Health
- How to Engage BIPOC Youth and Families in Mental Health Treatment
- Improving the Current Mental Health System to Serve a Diverse Population
- Relationship Between Mental Stress, Trauma & Mental Health in BIPOC Youth

**rate:** $1,500 (60 min. keynote session)
Couched in Color is a weekly podcast hosted by Dr. Alfiee M. Breland-Noble designed to enlighten the public and encourage dialogue on the mental health needs of youth and Young Adults of Color. Celebrities, influencers, teens and professional experts are guests on the show.

- **Downloads**: 2,200+
- **YouTube Views**: 11,000+
- **Episodes**: 45+

**REACHING OUR AUDIENCE**

Combined Reach: 25K+

In addition to this, AAKOMA has received:

- 27 Media Placements
- 7.39B Impressions
- 221K+ Press Lifetime Views
- $58,180 Ad Value Equivalency to Dollars
Expand funding opportunities for racially diverse investigators.

Initiate innovative calls for proposals focusing on underserved groups.

Expand our scientific and consultant community to include BIPOC and experts of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Contact us

For all media inquiries and speaking opportunities please contact candice@candicenicolepr.com

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www.aakomaproject.org