The AAKMA Project
Impact Report
2022
What is Impact?

One definition of impact states that it is to “have a strong effect on someone or something.”

When I founded The AAKOMA Project as my scientific research lab in 1999, that was my goal — to have a POSITIVE impact on multiple “someones.” Those “someones” have always been marginalized young people, their families, and the communities that have for too long been neglected, merely tolerated, and overlooked.

Since we incorporated The AAKOMA Project in 2019 as a 501(c)3 organization, it has been our mission to have a lasting and genuine positive impact on the mental health of intersectional Young People of Color so that they will always see how valuable, beautiful, brilliant, and important they are. We believe that our team, our youth leaders/partners, the families who support us, and all of our external partners see the value in diverse young people and want to lift them up. We operate at three levels:

- **Raising Consciousness**
- **Empowering People**
- **Changing the System of Mental Health**

so that ALL youth, inclusive of all points of identity, know how much they mean to us. This work is a labor of love and my life’s purpose and I am grateful every single day for the privilege of serving Young People of Color, their families, and our communities.

I am so appreciative of my team at The AAKOMA Project for their support in manifesting my vision. They make this work possible through their focus, commitment, and skills. I am also profoundly grateful to our partners (whom you will see featured in this impact report). They uplift and amplify our work and they are the supporting cast that help us shine brightly. Finally, I thank our young people, especially #TeamAAKOMA — they are our reason and our purpose. Without them, our work would not be possible.

Love, Light, Science,

Dr. Alfiee
About Us

At The AAKOMA Project, we build the consciousness of Youth of Color and their caregivers on the recognition and importance of mental health; empower youth and their families to seek help and manage mental health; and influence systems and services to receive and address the needs of Youth of Color and their families.

We operate with these three strategic outcomes in mind:

**Raising Consciousness**
Ensure that young People of Color are aware of the importance of their mental health and that they and their caregivers can share, support, and understand young people’s experience with mental health.

**Empowering People**
Provide tools and resources for young People of Color and their caregivers to manage their own well-being and mental health in a timely, accessible, and approachable way and, when needed, connect with culturally relevant, formal, and/or clinical service offerings for support.

**Changing Systems**
Build a set of systems and services equipped to receive Youth of Color and their caregivers to address their unique needs. This requires a well-trained workforce, culturally relevant, evidence-informed services/interventions, and an accessible set of supportive resources.
Our Vision

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.

Our Mission

Build the consciousness of intersectional Youth of Color and their caregivers on the recognition and importance of mental health, empower youth and their families to seek help and manage mental health, and influence systems and services to receive and address the needs of Youth of Color and their families.

The AAKOMA Project Serves:

Youth of Color

The AAKOMA Project primarily focuses on Youth and Young Adults of Color fully embracing intersectionality and uplifting youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ and young people with disabilities.

Community

The AAKOMA Project works with families, communities, and other stakeholders (e.g., school counselors, coaches, teachers, administrators, police officers) who engage with Youth and Young Adults of Color directly. We also educate and influence the broader population to positively impact stakeholders who may lead or work at organizations serving Youth and Young Adults of Color.

System Actors

The AAKOMA Project seeks to influence researchers, research institutions, and associations to ensure that research is generated. We also use our culturally-relevant and community-partnered research and evidence to influence federal and state agencies as well as policy makers.
In 2022, The AAKOMA Project’s commitment to raising consciousness, empowering people, and changing systems looked like this:

- **5.5 BILLION** people read articles featuring The AAKOMA Project.
- **$10.38 million** of advertising value from the 93 articles in which AAKOMA was featured.
- **131 providers** who are part of AAKOMA’s Free Therapy network.
- **25%** annual increase in followers across all social media channels.
- **13 youth from three countries** were invited to join Team AAKOMA as our advisors and youth leaders receiving training, leadership and engagement opportunities who also stood tall and initiated mental health conversations with family and friends.
- **100%** of our AAKOMA Project Free Therapy network providers (supported in large part by Meet Flamingo) are People of Color and/or people with expertise in providing culturally responsive care.
- **400 hours** of free virtual therapy for Young People of Color.
- **80 Young People of Color** were matched with culturally responsive providers for treatment.
- The AAKOMA Project was featured in four of the top global publications: *Forbes, Women’s Health, HuffPost*, and *Oprah Daily*.
State of Mental Health for Youth of Color (2022) and CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data & Trends Data

We share this data as part of our impact report to emphasize the importance and significance of our work alongside that of respected institutions like the CDC and to demonstrate our commitment to generating data that fills in the knowledge gaps about intersectional Youth and Young Adults of Color, a population that is severely underserved in clinical care and research.

**SUMMARY**

In our State of Mental Health for Youth of Color 2022 report, symptom severity and presence were measured among Youth of Color, revealing that 70.7% of participants reported feeling down, depressed, irritable, or hopeless. Furthermore, the report highlights that at least half of the sample reported experiencing moderate to severe depression.

According to the CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data & Trends Report: 2011-2021, nearly 40% of high school students experienced prolonged feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2021, which is a common symptom of depression.

**SUMMARY**

Both reports note that Black youth are more likely to attempt suicide than Latino/e youth and AAPI youth in pairwise comparisons across racial groups.

Suicide attempts appear to be more prevalent among Black youth when compared to youth of other racial groups, according to the most recent statistics from The AAKOMA Project and CDC, as well as The Ring the Alarm report from 2019, which focuses on Black youth suicide. The report was created by Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, the Congressional Black Caucus, the CBC Black Youth Mental Health Task Force and was co-authored in part by The AAKOMA Project.
From The AAKOMA Project:

Among Youth of Color in high school, 76.8% reported they have at least one person they feel they can trust. (SOMHYOC, 2022)

From the CDC Report:

Among the high school students, 61% felt close to people at school. (CDC, 2023)

SUMMARY

According to our recent data, most of the Youth of Color in high school report having at least one person they can trust, with 76.8% indicating they have such a person.

Our research suggests it is important to understand where Young People of Color find support and trust to promote their well-being.

State of Mental Health for Youth of Color 2022 Data

Anxiety and Depression

77.7% of girls, including trans-girls, reported feeling anxious, worried, or nervous.

A key finding in our report: Nonbinary and Transgender youth had significantly higher depression scores than youth who identified as female or male, regardless of age.

A key finding in our report: We identified a trend for Pansexual youth having significantly higher anxiety scores compared to all other sexual orientations (we note this trend with caution because of the very small sample size).

Racial Trauma

25.8% of Youth of Color reported exposure to racial trauma often or very often in the prior year from social media.
Non-Suicidal Self Injury

50.5% of youth who identified as Nonbinary/Transgender Youth of Color reported engaging in non-suicidal self-injury in the prior year, compared to 22.7% of females and 14.3% of males.

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- The AAKOMA Project launched a groundbreaking study in 2022 to examine the state of mental health among Youth and Young Adults of Color. Our study identified unique challenges faced by Youth and Young Adults of Color in their experiences with mental illness and accessing mental health support. We further proposed solutions to address these challenges. By shedding light on this important issue, we are driving change to uplift and center a too long forgotten group of young people and communities.

- The Mental Wealth Expo, hosted by Charlamagne Tha God and sponsored by iHeartRadio, is hosted annually in honor of World Mental Health Day. In 2022, the expo featured discussions on Black mental health with experts, celebrities, athletes, and influencers. Along with the members of the Collaborative for Black Mental Wealth, The AAKOMA Project team and Dr. Alfiee engaged in a full day of hosting a booth, leading workshops on Black youth suicide prevention, and co-hosting multiple main stage events with celebs including Charlamagne, Anthony Hamilton, G Herbo, Nedra Tawaab, Dr. Rheeda Walker, Lamann Rucker, and many more.
2022 HIGHLIGHTS

• In May 2022, the MTV Mental Health Youth Action Forum, a partnership between MTV and the White House, brought together youth leaders and mental health experts to discuss ways to improve mental health outcomes among young people, with a focus on reducing stigma and increasing access to resources and support. The AAKOMA Project was proud to be a mentor and member of the core team of organizers supporting MTV and the Biden-Harris administration in this important initiative.

• AAKOMA's experts and Dr. Alfiee participated in multiple press days and virtual events as part of the expert board of partners for Sound it Out, a program created by the Ad Council and Pivotal Ventures. Sound it Out is a virtual resource focused on the power of music to support parents and caregivers in starting conversations with their middle school children about emotional wellbeing, promoting mental health, and reducing the stigma around mental illness.
Looking Ahead

An on-the-go nonprofit, The AAKOMA Project is positioned for growth in 2023 with significant opportunities on the horizon. We are continuing to prioritize our strategic focus on our team, our processes, our technology, and our programs — aligning and optimizing each to support our mission, vision, and goals.

In 2023, AAKOMA is engaged in:

- **Top Tier Panel Moderation Opportunities**
  - National Governors Association 115th Winter Meeting (February 2023)
  - The Aspen Institute on Black Youth | Adolescent Mental Health Crisis (May 2023)
  - Mental Wealth Expo (October 2023)

- **Closing Keynote Address**
  - Selena Gomez’s Rare Beauty Mental Health Summit (May 2023)

- **Miraval Resorts (Brand Partnership)**
  - Second Annual Elevation: Diverse Women’s Wellness Retreat (November 2023)
  - “Caring for our Caregivers” special workshops for Miraval Resorts employees and leaders at their three U.S. properties (March – November 2023)

- **MTV Partnership**
  - Mental Health Action Day (May 18th)

- **Youth Advisory Council**
  - Active Minds and MTV

- **Sneaker Gala** (July 21, 2023)

- **SOMHYOC 2022 Report Launch** (May 16 – 17, 2023)

- **Free Therapy Program**
2022 Financials January–November

Learn more about how The AAKOMA Project is prioritizing starting up and scaling our work in our first five years as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

General & Admin .............................................. 76.2%
Fundraising ........................................................ 2.6%

Programs:
AAKOMA Connects ........................................ 7.8%
AAKOMA Consults ........................................... 0.1%
CIC Podcast ................................................... 0.4%
Free Therapy .................................................... 4.3%
SOMHYOC ....................................................... 1.3%
Speaking Engagements ...................................... 4.3%
Suicide Prevention .......................................... 1.3%
Team AAKOMA .............................................. 1.5%
Workshops (FLOA) ........................................... 0.2%
Partnering with 51 local & global organizations

- ACPYF
- AETNA
- Aetna Innovation Health
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Alliance of Eating Disorders
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Benevity Community Impact Fund
- Black Men Heal
- Black Mental Health Alliance
- Born This Way Foundation
- Bright Funds
- CFNOVA
- CharityVest
- Comcast
- Community Foundation of Northern VA
- Choose Kindness
- HP
- Harry’s Shave Club/Flamingo
- fleter’s Game Day
- LTY Foundation
- Lululemon
- Mental Health America
- Mental Health Coalition
- Mental Wealth Alliance
- Metaphysical Milkshake
- Miraval Resort
- The Born This Way Foundation is a non-profit founded by Lady Gaga and her mother Cynthia Germanotta, with a mission to support mental and emotional well-being of young people and create a kinder and braver world.
- The Choose Kindness Project is a non-profit organization that promotes kindness, empathy, and inclusion in schools, workplaces, and communities through various programs and resources, with a goal to create a more positive and respectful world.
- ESPN/Disney
- Fidelity Investments
- GoFundMe
- Project Healthy Minds

Project Healthy Minds is a mental health tech non-profit startup. They are pioneering a first-of-its-kind model: applying technology to address one of the biggest social issues of our time—the growing mental health crisis. They believe in a simple but profound idea: that it should be as easy to find mental health services as it is to book a flight or a restaurant reservation. That’s why they’re building the world’s first digital marketplace for finding mental health services that are right for you.

- Sangster Family Foundation
- Silence the Shame
- Slumberkins
- Starbucks Foundation
- Steven Madden Foundation
- The Defensive Line
- The Mental Health Coalition

The Mental Health Coalition is a non-profit organization, founded by Kenneth Cole, that aims to raise awareness and promote mental health education, resources, and support, with a focus on diverse communities and underrepresented voices.

- Thrivent
- United Justice Coalition
- Vanguard Charitable
- ViacomCBS
- Villanova University
Our Directors, AAKOMA Staff, Team AAKOMA, and Subject Matter Experts:

Directors:

- Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble
- H. Kathy Williams
- Kathy Springfield Cobb
- Dr. Richard Noble, III
- Dr. Shauna Cooper

AAKOMA Staff:

- Dr. Alfiee Breland-Noble
- Jody Lee
- Keka Sircar
- Lexy Fields
- Morgann Noble
- Dr. Seetal Parikh-Chopra

Subject Matter Experts:

- Dr. Angela L. Harris
- Brandon Johnson
- Jason Phillips
- Dr. Jessica Jackson
- Dr. Monica Band
- Dr. Shanita Brown

Team AAKOMA:

- Mekhi H.
- Naysa S.
- Anya B.
- Annmary A.
- Fenway J.
- Irene (Xinyuan) H.
- Alisha A.
- Jasmine H.
- Nima G.
- Yewande S.
- Amira J.
- Aliyah O.
- Bloden C.
Take Action

Together we are building a better future. Join The AAKOMA Project in highlighting and supporting the unique mental health needs of Youth and Young Adults of Color. Our youth are counting on us to see them, to hear them, and to value them.

**Raise Consciousness**

Learn more about mental health in Youth and Young Adults of Color and what to do to support them through our [toolkit](#) and our [full report](#) on the State of Mental Health for Youth of Color 2022.

**Empower Communities**

If you or someone you love identifies as a Person of Color ages 12-30 (in need of mental health support) and is brand new to psychotherapy, encourage them to [sign up for 5 free virtual therapy sessions](#).

Start the conversation about mental health with your family and friends by [joining Team AAKOMA](#) — stay tuned for our new application round in 2024.

**Change the System**

- [Donate](#)
- [Become a Sponsor](#)

Share the Message

Follow, like, forward, share, retweet, and comment on our social channels: @aakomaproject