

Link to Mindfulness x Rich/Collins Community  
Leadership and Impact Fellowship Final Report:  
**Black Mental Health and Wellness Panel and Workshop Series**

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May 21th, 2021

The Rich/Collins Community Leadership and Impact Fellowship has allowed both of us to understand the potential impact and sustainability of Link to Mindfulness (LTM). We started as a thought in June 2020, in hopes of being able to give marginalized communities, specifically Black students proper mental health resources. Proper mental health resources started as trying to explore the typical modes of healing, such as therapy, healing circles, and discussion circles.

To be able to cater to the population we are trying to serve, it was necessary to gather student perspectives. Therefore, we created a survey to understand how supportive are mental health services at institutions such as Boston University, Brandeis University, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Georgia. They were able to anonymously articulate their own experiences and opinions about the mental health services that are offered at their respective institution. Not only did we utilize pre-event surveys but we also reached out to Black student organizations to gather additional testimonials to help hone our search in cultivating the panel and workshops. Those organizations included Tufts University Black student organization, Brandeis Black student organization, and more.

Planning over Winter break was filled with a lot of research and outreach to professionals. In December, this is when we met with our community partner, Dr. Sarah Webb from Colorism Healing where she was able to help guide us in cultivating this series. In addition, we got connected to Ms. Tiveeda Stovall and Ms. Maggie Grove through Campus Compact where we were able to also strategize and outreach through them.

Originally, we wanted to solidify our panelists for our February panel by January, but due to a limited compensation for each panelist, this prevented us from solidifying our panelists in time. Our outreach to panelists included an initial email or message form informing individuals of our initiative, and what we wanted to achieve. The few responses that we received were panelists asking for \$10,000 to \$3,750. Though we could not compensate that amount, we made sure to ensure effective communication and transparency that to which most panelists did not want to even have a conversation about our organization because we were not able to compensate the amount in which they requested. In some cases, we were able to get a hold of professionals who were willing to converse and guide us through the processes, but they were not able to participate

in the panel due to a lack of compensation for their time. After many rejections, we recognized how necessary it was to effectively compensate panelists and workshop leaders for their time and professional advice. On the bright side, we were able to get our website up in January!

Once February came, it got significantly busy. We had solidified our workshop facilitators for March but we were not able to find enough individuals for our panelists by that time due to budget constraints and difficulties. Luckily enough, from the connections that we were able to cultivate prior to the Rich/Collins Fellowship, we reached out to our connections who were open to participating. If we did not have these connections that were created by our team, we believe that our panel at the end of February would not be as successful and cohesive as it was.

The panel itself went very well. We think that the panelists were able to bounce ideas off of each other and were able to connect with the audience. The panelists included Dr. Steven Kniffley - the Racial Trauma Therapy specialist, Ms. Aishe Keita - an African Healing Artist, Mr. Pervis Taylor III - Award-Winning Life Coach, and Ms. Pilar Tucker - a Psychology Doctorate Candidate in Global Mental Health. Each respective panelist not only had one individual specialty but also wore many hats as well.

What we would do differently would include a longer live Question and Answers section to build connections with the participants so that we would increase awareness of each professional and their work. As time progressed, we both felt very relieved that our workshop facilitators were settled prior to the panel because, on top of our full-time student status, we both felt very burnt out.

On every Friday in March, Link to Mindfulness hosted a different professional to facilitate a workshop. Each workshop had a different title and wellness practice associated with it. The Writing Well Workshop (March 5th, 2021) with Dr. Sarah Webb centered journaling, the Haircare Workshop (March 12th, 2021) with Dr. Afiya Mbilishaka centered on hair care and hair history, the Cultivating a Relationship with Your Mind Workshop (March 19th, 2021) with Changa Bell centered on mindful breathing, and the Community Healing with Traditional African Dance Workshop (March 26th, 2021) with Yaa-Adenike Cunningham centered West

African dancing. During each workshop, the participants were encouraged to freely interact with each facilitator and with each other in the chat. This led to communities quickly being formed within the Zoom call. People shared jokes in the chat, affirmed each other's opinions, and encouraged each other while engaging the wellness practices.

We were pleased with the Panel and the Workshops due to our observations during the events and the feedback received afterward. We noticed that there was a huge willingness to participate during every event. People entered the Zoom meeting and were eager to say hello in the chat, use Zoom reactions, raise their hand to ask questions before and during the Q&A section of every meeting. It was clear people left the Zoom call satisfied and refreshed every time. To receive feedback from the participants, every meeting concluded with the participants completing a post-event survey. When asked to rate the panel and panelists on a scale of 1 to 5 - 5 being the best, there was an overwhelming and almost ubiquitous score of 5 for the panel and every single panelist. When asked for improvements people said “more interaction,” “the event was amazing,” or gave suggestions for future events. This shows how needed the panel was for Black students and the excitement for more proves that the work LTM is engaging is very necessary. When asked for feedback for the workshops, many times people had no places for improvement, one person even asked for the sessions to be longer (the panel was 2 hours and the workshops were 1 ½ hours). From both our observations and the feedback from the forms, it is clear that more events related to Black mental health are needed for the Black undergraduate community. Lastly, from the RSVP and event forms, we were able to reach schools such as Stanford University, Babson College, University of Virginia, Fordham University, Georgetown University, Columbia University, and more local schools as well, we even had interest from individual who were not undergraduate students.

To offer pleasant surprises and acts of gratitude to everyone that supported us, we purchased stationery goods from all Black-owned businesses. This included journals from Aya Paper Co. and Folkus, pens from Paper & Stylo, gift wrap from Folkus, shipping boxes from IPC Boxes, and art postcards created by Black undergraduate artists. We intend to send these as care packages while also assisting in the promotion of each business we bought from.

At this moment, we are still working on sending the care packages to each respective participant and attendees. After the feedback from the post-event surveys, we intend to utilize the criticisms and advice to continue having events and discussion circles to destigmatize conversations revolving around mental health. One of our future goals is to connect the Black community to mental health resources, such as therapy, holistic options, and workshops. We plan on continuing this ourselves while we keep in contact with our professionals and attendees to see what the future holds for us, in addition to looking into other grant opportunities. Our allotted budget was \$2771.60 and due to underlying circumstances, we had approximately \$472 leftover. Ideally, we wanted to send each package off to each respective recipient and have one last panel. The need to prepare for a symposium, study for finals, and being able to effectively organize an effective discussion circle, did not allow us to execute our last event. In addition, last-minute costs and concerns arose, such as delay in the gift wrap, individuals not adding their current address for the packages, and students leaving to go home very early by the end of the semester, pushing the latency in the shipping of packages. Overall, we believe the fact that we were able to implement four workshops within a month is a huge accomplishment for us.

Jacob - While implementing the Black Mental Health and Wellness Panel and Workshops Series, I have grown the ability to mobilize resources for my community. This project was the first time I worked to organize an event to this scale, worked with a budget in the thousands, or hired so many professionals. I am very glad that I worked with Annie and the rest of the LTM team to accomplish this task, in addition to guidance from Sam, Katie, and Lucas. I am glad that I can look back and feel confident in my ability to make substantial impacts in my community and tackle the issues around me. I was very glad to also exercise my skills in facilitation through the exclusive facilitation workshop with Dr. Sarah Webb and facilitating a majority of the Panel and Workshop series. I am eager to continue improving my skills in event planning and discussing mental health in marginalized communities so that students can be encouraged and uplifted throughout their undergraduate experience.

Annie - While working with Jacob and the rest of the Link to Mindfulness Team, I realized how important delegation is to ensure that I do not burn out. In addition, since June 2020, I knew that I always wanted to be able to use my privilege to help uplift and mobilize resources to

marginalized communities. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and for the trust that my peers and the professionals have given me throughout this process. I look forward to seeing what Link to Mindfulness will become in the future for all marginalized communities and I hope that we can bring an innovative flair to mental health and raise awareness about more accessible modes of healing.

Taking into consideration the feedback received, LTM has a long list of events that were requested from student participants. This will make event planning much easier as we continue this work because we have already gathered the interests of the community we serve. In addition to event planning, through the R/C CLIF grant, we were able to purchase a website domain. With the different topics that were submitted through the post-event form, we have many different issues and topics that require resources. On our website, our social media, our email listing, we can continue to address these issues and topics and point people towards resources and professionals that do work in these areas. Moving forward, Link to Mindfulness plans on sending regular communications related to Black mental health and wellness and hosting events based on those topics. This will keep the momentum going and will continue to uplift the community. We appreciate how the R/C CLIF grant was able to be a stepping stone to a greater future.