



# **ABPsi: Building Bridges for the Future**

## **A Call to Action**

By

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### **SPOTLIGHT**

**CHN Community Healing Circles**

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**The NAFJ/CARES/ABPsi Mentoring Movement**

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**The Caribbean Psychology Conference**

As you know, an important focus for ABPsi—set forth in the 2011 presidential enstoolment address—was building bridges through collaboration with organizations in the service of African/Black communities. There has been considerable momentum and our efforts are yielding fruit. Notable advances have occurred within three areas: our collaboration with the Community Healing Network (CHN), our youth mentoring partnership with the National Alliance of Faith and Justice (NAFJ) and the national CARES Mentoring Movement, and our support of the inaugural Caribbean Psychology Conference.

### **CHN: Building a Nationwide Network of Community Healing Circles**

In 2010, ABPsi launched a collaborative effort in support of the work of the Community Healing Network (CHN). CHN's mission is to mobilize Black people to overcome the lie of Black inferiority and the emotional legacies of slavery and racism. Their goal is to build a nationwide grassroots network of self-help groups—forging community healing circles focused on emotional emancipation and healing for Black people by 2019, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the forced arrival of Africans in Jamestown Colony—so that, as a people, we will see ourselves in a whole new light by the year 2020.

Since the launch of its healing circles initiative in 2008, people have participated by sponsoring community healing movie nights on the Friday of Community Healing Days; healing conversations (that led to healing book clubs and movie clubs) and community healing walks on Saturdays; and healing services in churches on Sundays. Last year, 2010, CHN added the *Wear Sky Blue* initiative. Dr. Maya Angelou, Chair of their Board of Advisors, issued

a call to people everywhere to wear items of clothing the color of the sky on a bright sunny day during Community Healing Days—as an act of solidarity to show our collective commitment to the movement for emotional emancipation. People in more than 70 cities responded to Dr. Angelou's call last year; and people in more than 130 cities responded this year.

CHN reached out to ABPsi, requesting our expertise in building a nationwide network of healing circles. ABPsi and its members were called upon to provide professional advice, technical support, and hands-on help in refining or revising their vision to bring the healing circles to life in ways that would truly liberate and empower Black people. At the 2011 convention, CHN was an invited guest for an Mbongi to feature its work and the documentary *Dark Girls*. ABPsi members responded enthusiastically and volunteered to help build the network—and, with it, the movement for emotional emancipation. While the initial plan was to pilot at least 10 healing circles, as part of the celebration of Community Healing Days 2011 (October 14, 15, and 16) this was pre-empted by the delayed release of the *Dark Girls* documentary (produced by Bill Duke and directed by Chann Berry). The film was to be a featured component of the healing circles' activities and features commentary by several leaders in the Association. (The documentary will not be theatrically available until the end of the year or the beginning of 2012.)

These pilots will serve as models for establishing other healing circles in communities across the country in the years to come. As articulated by its Executive Director, Enola Aird, CHN's vision for local community healing circles is quite straightforward and compelling.

*"We envision and invite you [ABPsi] to help us create a network of safe spaces, inspired by the AA model, (think of them as EE groups, i.e., emotional emancipation groups), in homes, community centers, and faith communities, where Black people can meet together regularly to watch movies, read books and articles, and talk about the impact of the lie of Black inferiority on our lives-- as individuals, as mothers and fathers, as husbands and wives, as students, as workers--today.*

*We envision creating safe spaces where we can share our stories, detoxify our minds and spirits, and tell ourselves a fresh, liberating, empowering story about who we are as a people and as individuals.*

*We envision watching, grappling with, and discussing a wide range of films from Antwone Fisher to The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow to 500 Years Later, for example.*

*We envision reading and talking about books like Tom Burrell's Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority and Terrie M. Williams' Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We're Not Hurting. Each of these books includes an extensive collection of other books that are on CHN's Community Healing Reading List."*

Under the leadership of its mayor, Omar Neal, the city of Tuskegee, Alabama, launched community circles in October, 2011. Galvanized by the idea and coupled with the synergy it presented with his efforts to revitalize the sense of community in his city, Mayor Neal forged a collaboration with CHN, ABPsi, and the Brainwash Resolution Project to help build the movement for the emotional emancipation of Black people. This new collaboration underscores the fact that the celebration of Community Healing Days is a catalyst for a continuing grassroots movement—not just a once-a-year event.

In an open letter, Tuskegee Mayor Omar Neal is working to make his city the nation's first "community healing model city." He said, "We believe that in order to reverse the negative trends in the Black community, we must turn to the long-delayed struggle for what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called "psychological freedom."

"These new partnerships," said CHN president Enola G. Aird, "are crucial steps on the road to CHN's goal of

*building a nationwide grassroots network of self-help groups focused on emotional emancipation and healing by 2019--so that as a people we will see ourselves in a whole new light by the year 2020."*

In January, 2012, a team from ABPsi will participate in planning meetings with the Office of the Mayor, key leaders in Tuskegee, CHN, and Symphonic Strategies. ABPsi will help define the content and method of the city's healing circles. This is a wonderful opportunity for The Association to develop community based approaches to health and wellness that do not rely on the medical model of psychotherapy but rather uses a prevention/early intervention approach to build community capacity for mental health.

### **The NAFJ/CARES/ABPsi Mentoring Movement**

On March 1, 2010, Susan L. Taylor, editor-in-chief-emeritus of *Essence* magazine and founder and CEO of the National CARES Mentoring Movement (National CARES), requested that Addie Richburg, president of the National Alliance of Faith and Justice (NAFJ), and Cheryl Grills, then president-elect of ABPsi, join her in Chicago, Illinois, to discuss the feasibility and interest in a multi-organization collaboration that would honor and integrate the history and heritage of African Americans into a same-race group mentoring framework that could be studied and replicated nationally. Key affiliate project managers from PEN OR PENCIL™, National CARES Circle leaders, and executive officers of ABPsi from Los Angeles, Atlanta, Washington, DC, and Chicago were among others invited to share in this strategic discussion.

Since March 2010, ABPsi has worked closely with NAFJ and the National CARES to advance culturally-based group mentoring for African American youth. Our focus and determination have yielded significant dividends in the form of a federal multi-state mentoring initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention* (OJJDP). The project is called "**PEN OR PENCIL: Writing A New History.**" This national partnership demonstration uses the history of mass engagement and youth leadership during the Civil Rights Movement as the mentoring approach to mobilize, reach, teach, and inspire our youth who struggle through immense social, environmental, family, and school stressors.

NAFJ serves as the lead organization/federal grantee and is responsible for the mentoring curriculum and program infrastructure and serving as an intermediary for program

and operational resources. National CARES, through its **A New Way Forward** initiative, is responsible for mentor-recruitment and training. ABPsi is responsible for the design and implementation of the research to assess the effectiveness of *PEN OR PENCIL: Writing A New History*. ABPsi will evaluate the youth-centered components of *PEN OR PENCIL: Writing A New History*. Among other things, we will examine whether race-based, group mentoring using history as a motivation for behavior will reduce delinquency and violence and positively impact academic retention and attendance.

PEN or PENCIL will be implemented in twelve diverse geographic areas: Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Los Angeles and Edwards AFB, California; Louisiana Expansion (New Orleans); Pine Bluff/Little Rock, Arkansas; St. Louis, Missouri; Kansas City, Kansas/ Kansas City, Missouri; Washington, DC/Prince George's County, Maryland; North Chicago, Illinois/Naval Center Great Lakes; Eglin AFB/Ft. Walton, Florida, and Seattle, Washington. In either school based or community based settings,

it will be applied to three different types of target populations. These include youth of military families, at-risk and high-risk youth, and foster care youth.

This initiative represents a crucial opportunity to launch an approach to mentoring that is culturally grounded and that can be subjected to research to establish its capacity to be an evidence-based model of mentoring for our youth. Culture is deeply internalized, providing a sense of history and heritage, worldview and continuity. Mentors are an important source for delivering and reinforcing cultural precepts and practices. The shortage of African American mentors has raised the question: Is it possible to match African American youth with African American mentors? Further, does it matter?

If you have an interest in, expertise in, or want to be involved in this initiative, *please* contact Alisa Jackson in the national office today. We are looking for researchers, field data collectors, statistics support, and members interested in writing articles for publication. This is a wonderful opportunity for graduate students and early career professionals who would like access to data sets, who want to be part of publication teams, and who seek greater community involvement.

### **The Caribbean Psychology Conference**

As a Silver Sponsor and presenter, ABPsi was well represented at the first inaugural Caribbean Psychology Conference held in Nassau, The Bahamas (November, 2011). Board members Cheryl Grills, Ph.D. and Lisa

Whitten, Ph.D. and member, Niambi Hall-Campbell, Ph.D. presented a roundtable entitled: *"African/Black Psychology: Theory, Applications, and Conundrums."* This was an historic moment as we witnessed representatives from the major Caribbean nations lay the foundation for the establishment of a regional body to define the parameters and praxis of psychology in the Caribbean. ABPsi participated in the discussion among leaders of the national organizations and extended invitations to our Caribbean colleagues to join ABPsi and attend our 2012 convention. Future discussions and collaborations with the leadership of the various country specific organizations will occur in the near future.

### **Conclusion**

These are truly exciting times for ABPsi. Our 2011 convention theme (**Akoban: Bridging for the Future Through Collaboration and Community Building**) is in full swing. "Akoben" is a call to action. It symbolizes readiness to fearlessly and tirelessly engage in action. It is about the readiness to defend one's own. Truly, the needs are great. Our time is here. Our work is now. Our legacy is before us. Our capacity is what **we** make it.

The Akoben proverb "Ahodaso nye hu" gives us our marching orders.

Literally it translates as "Preparedness has no fears."

There is room for everyone: our theoreticians, practitioners, researchers, students, elders, and affiliates.

Join us and heed the call.

And remember: *Ain't no stopping us now.*

***Please call or email the national office and let us know how you want to be involved.***

