

REPORT:

THE FIRST RISING FROM THE WATER FORUM

December 3, 2007

This is a summary report of the first **Rising from the Water Forum** in New Orleans, LA held December 1, 2007. The purpose of the forum was to provide an educational opportunity to the community regarding behavioral health services. In the aftermath of the Hurricane Season of 2005, it became evident that many individuals and families were suffering from emotional responses. It was not clear that these conditions warranted frank diagnoses of mental illness; but it was clear that at least one sphere of functioning was affected by the abrupt and sudden loss of all things well-established and known. There was clearly a resistance to receiving frank psychiatric treatment and crisis intervention was insufficient to address the ongoing distress, disillusionment and sorrow of a slow and unproductive recovery of social capital, community and state and local infrastructure. All Healers Mental Health Alliance along with members of the ASHE Cultural Arts Center recognized a need to inform the community of the benefits of treatment and possible self-sustaining supports throughout communities that had been victims of stigma and in some cases mistreatment by the mental health system before the storms.

In conjunction with the Children's Defense Fund of Louisiana (CDF-LA) a forum was conducted on December 1, 2007 from 3 to 6 pm. The actual function ran four hours. It included a film by Dr. Annelle Primm of the American Psychiatric Association called *Black and Blue* that addressed neurovegetative signs of depression in African-Americans and barriers to their pursuit of care as well as the issues of religion and substance abuse in cultural context.

The forum was strategically attended by six important community members that included from CDF-LA, Mary Joseph-Executive Director, and Glenda Harris-Program Director for the Regional Leadership Initiative in the Gulf Coast for CDF; Louisiana Spirit of the Louisiana State Office of Mental Health, Gilda Armstrong-Butler, LCSW-Deputy Director, and Almarie Ford, LCSW; ASHE Cultural Arts Center, Gwendolyn Richardson; and from All Healers, Charlotte Hutton, MD and Larry Hayes, LCSW. This was a blend of social welfare, child advocacy, and behavioral health as a convening body to address obstacles to providing emotional support to the community. The movie proved to be groundbreaking in this effort to step through resistance and fear of psychiatric treatment. There was an empowerment of consumerism in this group that recommended expanding the knowledge and discussion through several important venues. These included cable community television, public service announcements, 1-800 numbers for African-Americans to get information about behavioral health, meetings to review the film with women ministers, young male and separately elder male ministers, local chapter of the American Association of Black Social Workers, and grassroots community leaders on an individual basis.

These recommendations constituted a calendar for All Healers Mental Health Alliance – NOLA in the coming 2008 year. In addition, preparation for the Institute of the Black World, Black Psychiatrists of America, and the National Medical Association conferences in New Orleans as well as the third anniversary of the Hurricane Season of 2005. This is in addition to any other local fora, educational programs for the community, and lectures given by All Healers' members as well as service deliverables anticipating telepsychiatry.

Respectfully submitted,

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All Healers Mental Health Alliance - NOLA Chapter